Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Strengthening the Home Visiting Workforce Through Individualized Coaching

Statement of Problem

Research demonstrates that high-quality early childhood home visiting programs are powerful platforms for providing caregivers with needed information and guidance as they support their children's social, emotional and academic learning. This, in turn, helps children enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed academically throughout their school years. Much of the success of these programs rests on employing and retaining high-quality staff.

Strengthening the home visiting workforce is recognized as a priority area for research and practice, and many local implementing agencies have strategies for professional development and practice-based training. There has also been increasing attention on the role that mental health and well-being play in a home visitor's job satisfaction, burnout and retention. Locally, Creating Collaborative Communities (C3), led by the Health Federation of Philadelphia (HFP), is one example of an initiative that aims to strengthen workforce capacity by offering Philadelphia home visiting programs access to relevant, quality professional development, organizational technical assistance and peer support.

The C3 initiative has illuminated additional needs for and gaps in professional development opportunities for the home visiting community. One of these gaps, strongly supported in the literature, is the need for individualized coaching for home visitors. Coaching is a widely recognized component of professional development in early childhood fields to encourage practitioner growth and improve client outcomes. While research on coaching home visitors is still in the early stages, experts posit that these benefits hold true for the field of home visiting as well. There is a need to empirically examine the primary components of coaching home visitors in order to advance research and practice.

Description

The Early Childhood Home Visiting Coaching Pilot in collaboration with HFP, seeks to improve home visitor recruitment and retention, enhance knowledge and skill-building (particularly around capacity to work with families struggling with substance abuse, child maltreatment, mental health and interpersonal violence), and attend to home visitor well-being.

We will work closely with HFP over the next 2 years to develop an individualized professional coaching program for home visitors in Philadelphia and evaluate its success. Our mixed-methods evaluation will characterize the implementation of the coaching pilot and assess outcomes experienced by home visitors and coaches.

In collaboration with HFP and an advisory group of home visitors, program administrators, and professional coaches, we will first use a consensus-building technique (modified Delphi process) to identify the key components of the coaching model to be tested. In this process, we will iteratively collect input from an expert

panel of home visiting and coaching professionals to reach consensus on intervention priorities, characteristics and delivery logistics. This approach affords us the opportunity to ensure the pilot reflects best practices in the field, is responsive to the needs of home visitors and is implemented feasibly across local home visiting sites.

During implementation of the coaching program, we will use a multi-method approach to assess program delivery and perceived impact. Semi-structured interviews with home visitor participants and coaches will allow us to describe intervention fidelity, understand factors influencing engagement in the intervention, and identify short- and medium-term impact of home visitors' participation. We will also administer longitudinal surveys to assess expectations for coaching participation, anticipated outcomes, goal attainment, and measures of home visitor well-being, knowledge and skills.

A strength of this pilot is the implementation of the intervention across multiple home visiting agencies and models, which will allow us to assess the generalizability and robustness of the coaching process given the diversity of contexts, professional backgrounds and training requirements, and organizational cultures that exist across home visiting agencies. Moreover, the plan to develop a coaching workforce that is inter-organizational encourages collaboration, professional networking and broad-reaching skill advancement across the home visiting community in Philadelphia.

Next Steps

We are in the process of recruiting Delphi expert panel participants and plan to launch the first survey in Fall 2023. Delphi findings will be used to inform intervention design, refinement of the evaluation plan and development of a coaching checklist to aid in ensuring the coaching model is implemented as intended.

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