REACH GOALS

REACH brings special training in positive guidance strategies and supporting children’s social-emotional development to teachers and directors across Arkansas. REACH seeks to help fill the gap in high quality in-service opportunities for child care providers who have found training ‘hard to reach.’ REACH targets child care center directors and teachers who may be geographically distant from the major educational centers in the state and/or who work for agencies that have difficulty releasing them for training. REACH is supported by the Arkansas Department of Human Services/Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education.

THE OVERALL GOAL OF THE REACH PROGRAM IS TO INCREASE THE CAPACITY OF TEACHERS TO SUPPORT SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN.

REACH COMPONENTS

REACH consists of a series of trainings for directors and teachers as well as a variety of additional supports designed to give teachers the tools they need to practice their new skills in the classroom. Trainings are offered on-site at hours most convenient for staff (naptime, evening) and are repeated as needed so that the whole center can participate.

### Director Trainings

- Creating a Plan to Support Children’s Social-Emotional Development
- Nurturing Staff to Nurture Children

### Teacher Trainings: 1 per month

- A Nurturing Relationship with Every Child: Laying the Groundwork for Good Behavior
- Routines, Schedules, & Rituals: Tools for Effective Behavior Guidance
- Guided Talk: What to Do When Children Fight
- Positive Attention: How to Use It Effectively to Increase Good Behavior
- Choices: Giving Children the Power to “Be Good”
- Advanced Strategies: What to Do When a Child Needs Extra Help
**Toolkit Items**
- Books, CDs, posters, puppets, & other teaching tools to support classroom practice of new skills.

**Calendar Cards**
- Daily visual reminders to practice new skills.

**Parent Pages**
- Helps expose parents to the same concepts teachers are learning.

**Classroom Coaching Visit**
- Support for practicing new skills after each training.

**Action Plans**
- Teacher commits to try two new skills per training - shared with coach.

**Coaching emails/texts**
- Support between trainings.

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**Daily Practice Plan**
- Fun Engaging Action Plan to practice new skills at home.
- Send daily practice plan via email to teachers.
- Teacher sends daily email to trainee.
- Teacher sends daily reminder to practice new skills.
- Teacher sends monthly reminder to review action plan.
- Teacher sends quarterly reminder to review progress.

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**Parent Pages**
- How Can You Practice Social Emotional Skills with Your Child at Home?
- Encourage daily opportunities to practice new skills.
- Provide consistent practice to reinforce new skills.
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REACH coaches travel around the state to communities that may be underserved with training opportunities. They also travel to centers whose staff cannot take advantage of the opportunities that are available due to lack of time off, substitutes, or other barriers.

Half (51%) of those trained since program inception have been in the ECE profession at least 6 years. Most staff in attendance worked directly with children as teachers or assistant teachers (71%). As expected given our target population, less than a quarter of staff had their Child Development Associates degree (23%) or other certification (20%). One-third (33%) of training participants had an Associate’s degree or higher. Teachers varied in the barriers that made training ‘hard to reach.’

Figure 1. Before REACH: Teacher-Reported Barriers to Training (N=315)
REACH EVALUATION PLAN

The evaluation component of REACH was designed to assess change over time in the classroom environment, child behavior, and teacher knowledge and practices. The design is two-fold: 1) to conduct independent observations of the classroom using trained research assistants, and 2) to allow staff to reflect on each training and those strategies, assessing their own knowledge and implementation along the way through use of workshop feedback forms. Thus, we were able to evaluate teacher capacity to support children’s social-emotional development as evidenced by:

- Teacher perception of changes in his/her own behavior and implementation of REACH strategies
- Classroom observations by trained data collectors to determine observed changes in teacher behavior, use of materials and classroom tone.
- Teacher and director satisfaction with REACH through pre and post surveys.

TEACHER PERCEPTION OF CHANGE IN THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR

Each training includes a self-assessment tool, allowing the teacher to reflect on his/her current behaviors in the classroom and set attainable goals for the future. These are repeated a month later so that we can examine change in teachers’ perception of their own behavior. The figure below summarizes areas where teacher reported significant increases:
At the closure of REACH, we again asked teachers to indicate how much they agree that they now utilize key REACH strategies. These results are summarized below.
OBSERVED CHANGES IN CLASSROOMS

Independent classroom observations by trained research staff include ratings of teacher-child interactions and the classroom environment collected at the beginning and end of the training series. The classroom observation includes a revised version of the Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale and a Social-Emotional Classroom Quick Screen. In this section, we report on the impact of REACH coaching and training on classroom outcomes, as observed by trained research staff.

Figure 2. Teacher Self-Reported Use of Key REACH Strategies (N=191)

Increases in Supportive Classroom Environment

- **Almost tripled** the number of classrooms with visuals for teaching emotions.
- **Doubled** the number using daily schedules in recommended ways (see chart below).
- **Significant** increase in the number of classrooms with social-emotional books available for children.
Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale. The Arnett is an observational rating scale of teacher interactions with children in the classroom completed by trained research staff. It consists of items that assess the teacher’s sensitivity, punitiveness, detachment, and permissiveness with regard to engaging and disciplining children. Significant improvements were seen on the total Arnett Caregiver Interaction score over time for 177 REACH teachers, with teacher warmth and responsiveness increasing the most from baseline to follow-up. Specifically, based on observations prior to REACH and at the end of REACH, we noticed the following improvements in teacher-child interactions:
Classrooms also demonstrated significant improvement in:

- Positive child/child and child/staff interactions.
- Teachers’ helping children label and express their feelings.
- Teachers’ use of transitions to help children move smoothly between activities.
- Teachers using opportunities to build both language skills and relationships through talking.

**TEACHER & DIRECTOR SATISFACTION**

Post-training survey results of both teachers and directors suggest that most are satisfied with the REACH training.
Teachers were asked to rate the helpfulness of specific REACH components beyond the training itself. The figure below summarizes their feedback.
Teachers:

The most important benefit from REACH has been the many ways of tweaking my classroom to help the children’s behavior. The fidget bag, emotions poster, and the calm down techniques have all been a great help.

[I benefitted from] learning about my own emotions and how to relate to children better. Never give up on a child whether he has problems or not. There is always a solution.

Directors:

[I have noticed] positive changes in the classroom environment. Structure and ease during transition of classroom activities and moving throughout the facility. Promoting and encouraging choice. Most of the classrooms have picture schedules, resulting in maintaining classroom structure and consistency. Staff are encouraging children to express feelings by talking to children, not at children. Hearing and seeing more positive interactions with children. Follow-up in the classroom made the training personal and applicable to specific situations. Staff have an understanding of the hierarchy of children’s needs, and meeting those needs first promotes learning.

SUMMARY

This evaluation provides strong evidence that the REACH program is meeting its goal to increase the capacity of ‘hard to reach’ teachers to support children’s social and emotional development. REACH has successfully engaged teachers in diverse centers in a range of Arkansas communities. REACH evaluation results based on both teacher reports and independent observations show positive impacts on nurturing teacher-child interactions and the use of strategies to support children’s social and emotional skill development.