

**Activity 8.4: Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge
Healthy Social Behaviors in the Transformation Zone
Final Report**

Contract #28145

Submitted to the:

North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education

By:

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Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers

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Introduction

Nationally, North Carolina has been a leader in the early care and education field and it is with much appreciation that the North Carolina Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Council works with the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) to advance this system. This report will provide a summary of the accomplishments of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant (RttT-ELC): Activity 8.4 –Healthy Social Behaviors (HSB) in the Transformation Zone (TZ). Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) provided contract and fiscal management for the HSB TZ project, and employs and supervises the HSB Statewide Project Manager who assumed responsibility of project management for the HSB TZ endeavor in addition to project management of the statewide HSB initiative. CCRI contracted with the CCR&R Region 2 Lead Agency, Craven County Partnership for Children, to hire and resource a behavior specialist to increase the availability of programmatic mental health supports in the TZ and to provide direct management for that specialist.

A summary of the accomplishments of this initiative throughout the project has been included in this report, and addresses: subjective information about successes, challenges and lessons learned, and observations and reflections which may have implications across projects for future policy decisions.

Activity 8.4: Healthy Social Behaviors in the Transformation Zone

North Carolina’s Early Learning Challenge Transformation Zone targeted high-intensity supports to build community infrastructure to turn around poor outcomes for young children in four of the state’s highest-need, lowest-resourced counties: Beaufort, Bertie, Chowan and Hyde. Social-emotional competencies for young children in the TZ were identified as a key intervention need based on the plethora of research since 2000 indicating that children who lack these skills are less likely to graduate or become productive members of the community, and more likely to experience incarceration, serious mental health issues, and drug dependence. The goal of the HSB TZ project was to prevent and address the challenging behaviors of children enrolled in licensed child care centers in NC by systematically and intentionally promoting the social-emotional health of these young children.

The HSB TZ Specialist utilized resources from the Center on the Social Emotional Foundation for Early Learning (CSEFEL) to increase the availability of programmatic mental health supports available to selected classrooms at licensed child care centers within the TZ counties. CSEFEL’s Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Development in Infants and Young Children, based on the public health model of promotion, prevention, and intervention, provided the framework for the HSB TZ Specialist to partner with teachers to promote optimal social-emotional development of all children in their care, and to prevent the escalation of behaviors that could lead to future problems. Fidelity implementation of Pyramid Model strategies was measured at the end of the grant period using the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT), a valid and reliable tool designed for this purpose.

According to CSEFEL, 30% of children in group care will likely require intentional teaching strategies and/or individualized interventions to develop the social-emotional competencies needed to be successful in a group setting, and approximately 10-15% of children will display mild to chronic levels of behavior problems.

September 2012 data from DCDEE indicated there were 1,699 children birth-five and 53 child care centers in the TZ counties, including private child care, public pre-k, and Head Start programs. Applying CSEFEL findings to this figure would indicate that approximately:

- 510 children would likely require intentional teaching strategies and/or individualized interventions to develop the social-emotional competencies to be successful in a group setting, and
- 255 children might exhibit early signs of serious mental health problems.

The HSB TZ Behavior Specialist was hired in April 2013 and engaged in local orientation, foundational project training, and Implementation Science review through July 2013. Recruitment of classrooms for project inclusion began in August 2013. Directors and teachers interested in the HSB TZ project applied for classroom selection by the county TZ selection committee to participate in long-term technical assistance and frequent, fee-free, formal learning events with staff from other selected classrooms in that county through September 2015. The learning events were tied to teacher implementation of skills with an overall goal of Pyramid Model implementation to fidelity. Directors were expected to participate in training along with their classroom staff to gain an equal understanding of the Pyramid Model approach, understand how to support their staff's efforts, and extend implementation throughout their facility. These trainings included:

- Training 1 – Challenging Behavior: Pushing Those Buttons
- Training 2 – Building Relationships: Keys to a Nurturing Environment
- Training 3 – How Are You?
- Training 4 – Change Is Hard
- Training 5 – Staying On Track
- Training 6 – Preventing Power Struggles
- Training 7 – Teach Me
- Training 8 – Prevention Strategies
- Training 9 – Partnering with Parents

Collaborating with the Partnerships for Children in each TZ county and working closely with each county's TZ Coach, the TZ Behavior Specialist facilitated six (6) group information sessions with child care administrators about the opportunity provided by the HSB TZ activity and invited interested administrators to submit an application to join the project. These applications were vetted by the HSB TZ Behavior Specialist through classroom observations and interviews with the teachers and directors. The applications were then considered by each county's TZ selection committee for project inclusion and four (4) classrooms from each county were identified for project inclusion. The selection committees considered the following criteria during their selection process for creating a cadre of participating classrooms in their county:

- **Diversity** of program types, star ratings, classroom ages, and teacher education levels;
- **Need** as defined by the classroom's current management strategies, the number of subsidized children enrolled, the classroom crisis level (such as the teacher's expressed frustration with behaviors and the

history of child expulsions), the level of services the classroom was receiving, and a judgement regarding where HSB TZ services might make the most difference;

- **Commitment** to the process based on observations, available anecdotal information regarding the facility's and classroom's history of follow-through with other community services, and expressed director support and teacher buy-in to the project model;
- **Longevity** of both administrator and teacher employment;
- **Sustainability** of the project's impact, based on the center's licensing history, how open the teacher seemed in interviews to change and strategy implementations, and what impact the teacher/director might have on strategies used in other classrooms.

In November 2013, the Beaufort County selection committee reviewed applications from 7 classrooms in 4 facilities (1 part-day preschool and 3 centers) and identified 1 classroom from each facility for project inclusion. The Chowan County selection committee reviewed applications from 8 classrooms in 4 facilities (1 LEA, 2 centers, and 1 center in a residence) and identified 1 classroom from each facility for project inclusion. Technical assistance and county cohort trainings commenced in 7 classrooms in these 2 counties in January 2014.

By April 2014, the Hyde County selection committee selected 4 classrooms in 3 facilities: 1 Local Education Agency (LEA), 1 Head Start, and the child care center on Ocracoke Island. Technical assistance and training in the Ocracoke Island Child Care Center began in May 2014; however, progress in the other 3 identified classrooms was delayed until fall due to summer hiatus of selected programs. Project applications were slim in Bertie County, and the Bertie County selection committee reluctantly agreed to suspend the application process and select the 4 classrooms in the 3 facilities (2 centers and 1 LEA) that had demonstrated interest in participation. Work in the LEA was delayed as the classroom was closed for the summer.

The following tables describe the types of facilities and classrooms selected by county for project inclusion, and the progress of each selected classroom through the activity.

Demographics of Facilities and Classrooms Selected for HSB TZ Project Inclusion

	Program Type					Classroom Type				Star Rating				Ed. Level of Lead Teacher		
	L.E.A.	Center	Ctr/Res	Head Start	Part Day	NC PreK	4's	3's	Mixed 3-4's	3	4	5	GS-110	Cred.	Assoc.	B/A
Beaufort		3			1	1	2		1		2	1	1	2	1	1
Bertie	1	2				1	2	1		1	1	1		2	1	1
Chowan	1	2	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	2		2	1	1
Hyde	1	1		1		2	1		1		2	1		1	1	2
TOTAL	3	8	1	1	1	5	6	2	3	2	6	5	1	7	4	5

Progress of Selected Classrooms through HSB TZ Project

Beaufort – 4 classrooms selected from 7 applications in 4 facilities in November 2013					
Classroom	Facility Type	Classroom Type	TPOT Score	Transition to HSB Statewide Services	Comments
Care-O-World	5* Center	NC PreK	98%	Declined	
1 st United Methodist	GS-110 Part-Day	3-4 Mixed	-	Declined	
Totsland	4* Center	4 yr olds	-	Yes	Closed July 2014 ¹
Kingdom Kids	4* Center	4 yr olds	-	No	Closed April 2014 ¹
Bertie – 4 classrooms selected from 4 applications in 3 facilities in April 2014					
Jumpin’ Jacks	3* Center	4 yr olds	88%	Yes	Achieved 5* 2015
Kiddie World #1	4* Center	3 yr olds	75%	Yes	
Kiddie World #2		4 yr olds	87%	Yes	
Colerain Elementary	5* Center (LEA)	NC PreK	-	No	Delayed Start ¹
Chowan - 4 classrooms selected from 8 applications in 4 facilities in November 2013					
White Oak Elementary	5* Center (LEA)	NC PreK	87%	Yes	Inclusion Classroom
C&N Basic Learning	4* Center	3-4 Mixed	-	Yes	Withdrew Dec. 2014 ¹
Linda’s	5* Center/Res	4 yr olds	80%	No	
Edenton Teapot	3* Center	3 yr olds	-	No	Closed June 2014 ¹
Hyde – 4 classrooms selected from 5 applications in 4 facilities in April 2014					
Hyde Head Start	5* Center	4 yr olds	-	No	Delayed Start ¹
Mattamuskeet Elementary #1 & #2	4* Center	NC PreK	-	No	Delayed Start ¹
		NC PreK	-	No	
Ocracoke CDC	4* Center	3-4 Mixed	-	No	Closed May 2015 ¹

¹ Facility moved teacher from 4-year-old to infant classroom and opted to maintain NC Babies First TZ activity. HSB TZ classroom transitioned to HSB statewide project for continued technical assistance.

¹ Facility was issued Summary Suspension and closed by DCDEE.

¹ Changes in Bertie NC PreK programs and summer hiatus delayed identification of this classroom until November 2014; severe weather followed by extended medical leave and eventual resignation of TZ behavior specialist in May 2015 prevented service delivery to this classroom.

¹ Facility declined to participate in cohort trainings as required by agreement; county TZ Team ended services for non-compliance

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¹ Late selection of this classroom by county selection team followed by summer hiatus and additional barriers prevented significant service delivery to this classroom.

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¹ This classroom at the only child care center on Ocracoke Island required a 3-hour 1-way ferry ride to provide services; due to it being the only center on the island, the TZ specialist maintained services to the facility through multiple staff & classroom changes. The facility eventually closed in May 2015.

Successes

In addition to the successful achievement of the performance measures for the HSB TZ activity regarding TA visits, implementation of Pyramid Model strategies by teachers in project classrooms, and reductions in expulsions and suspensions of children from project classrooms (see Outcomes/Outputs table below), HSB TZ specialists reported several other positive outcomes as a result of this activity:

- Cohort trainings targeting specific Pyramid Model strategies paired with technical assistance in the implementation of these strategies enhanced the knowledge teachers were able to gain through technical assistance; specialists observed more rapid implementation and greater sustainability of Pyramid Model strategies when training and technical assistance were paired.
- The regular cohort trainings came to resemble Communities of Practice more than contact hour trainings as participants became more knowledgeable about social-emotional competencies and the Pyramid Model, developed relationships of trust with the TZ behavior specialist and within the cohort, and engaged in discussion of mutual issues and concerns.
- Requiring an administrator to attend the cohort trainings along with the teacher increased the on-site support available to the teacher as she worked to implement strategies, and empowered the administrator to make knowledgeable strategy suggestions to teachers in non-project classrooms.
- One facility credited their work with the HSB TZ project toward its achievement of a 5-star license in December 2015.
- Inclusion of the local education agencies (LEAs) on the county TZ Implementation / Leadership teams improved the tenuous relationship between the HSB TZ project and these LEAs. In fact, in Hyde County, the LEA had strenuously resisted all previous offers of technical assistance, but identified two NC PreK classrooms embedded in an elementary school for project inclusion, drawing the LEA into regular interaction with the HSB TZ specialists and increasing the likelihood of continued interaction once the TZ activities ended.

As the HSB TZ project drew to a close in December 2015, the remaining ten active classrooms were offered the opportunity for assessment using the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT). The TPOT is an in-depth tool for assessing how teachers in early childhood classrooms serving children aged 2-5 are putting the Pyramid Model into practice. The TPOT provides a standardized measure of fidelity to the Pyramid Model, regardless of facility differences or teacher education levels. Five of the six HSB TZ project classrooms which were assessed using the TPOT [2 NC PreK (1 LEA & 1 center), 2 centers, and 1 center in a residence] achieved fidelity of implementation of key practices that promote social-emotional competence. Teachers in these classrooms were awarded special certificates of recognition for their achievement. The sixth classroom scored at 75%, and has requested continued technical assistance from the statewide HSB project. The four classrooms which opted out of TPOT assessment (1 part-day, 1 Head Start, and 2 NCPREK/LEA) received less technical assistance than the other six classrooms that participated in the project until the end of the grant due to delayed selection and/or significant holiday downtime. These classrooms also declined to transition to statewide HSB services.

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Outcomes and Outputs	Year 1 (2013)	Year 2 (2014)	Year 3 (2015)	Final Results
<p>228 on-site technical assistance consultations</p>	<p>WAIVED* 33 TA Visits Occurred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to 6 group information sessions with directors across the TZ, there were 25 individualized recruitment visits with directors in 20 facilities across 3 counties, and 8 TA visits with classrooms selected mid-November 2013. <p><i>*Due to the delays in funding and classroom selection, outputs and outcomes for 2013 were waived.</i></p>	<p>Achieved 355 TA Visits occurred: 217 classroom visits and 138 consultations with directors</p>	<p>Achieved 235 TA Visits occurred: 211 classroom visits and 24 consultations with directors</p>	<p>Achieved While this output was waived for 2013 due to delays in funding and classroom selection, the goal of 228 TA visits was exceeded in both 2014 and 2015</p>
<p>88% / 92% / 95% of participants receiving technical assistance will indicate they have implemented strategies identified by the HSB TZ specialist to increase social-emotional competencies and/or reduce challenging behavior in the classroom.</p>	<p>WAIVED* <i>*Due to the delays in funding and classroom selection, outputs and outcomes for 2013 were waived.</i></p>	<p>Achieved 100% of the 12 classrooms active in the project at year end had implemented strategies identified by the HSB TZ specialist</p>	<p>Achieved 100% of the 10 classrooms active in the project at year-end had implemented strategies identified by the HSB TZ specialist</p>	<p>Achieved 100% of the 10 classrooms active in the project at year-end had implemented strategies identified by the HSB TZ specialist</p> <p>5 of the 6 classrooms that agreed to be assessed for fidelity of implementation to the Pyramid Model achieved fidelity to Key Practices as defined by the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT)</p>
<p>87% / 90% / 92% of children requiring targeted behavior support plans will be able to maintain their child care placements.</p>	<p>WAIVED* <i>*Due to the delays in funding and classroom selection, outputs and outcomes for 2013 were waived.</i></p>	<p>Achieved 0 children required targeted behavior support plans following implementation of Pyramid Model strategies in their classroom and 0 children in project classrooms were suspended or expelled</p>	<p>Achieved 0 children required targeted behavior support plans following implementation of Pyramid Model strategies in their classroom and 0 children in project classrooms were suspended or expelled</p>	<p>Achieved 0 children required targeted behavior support plans following implementation of Pyramid Model strategies in their classroom and 0 children in project classrooms were suspended or expelled</p>

Challenges and Lessons Learned

One of the greatest challenges facing HSB TZ project implementation was in building relationships within the small, tight knit child care communities in each TZ county and convincing administrators and teachers to submit applications to commit to and participate in this long-term activity. Numerous site visits and extended conversations were required, and facility visits were co-scheduled with the local TZ Coach and Implementation Team members to leverage the endorsement of these familiar community members. In Beaufort and Chowan counties, the recruitment period lasted four months and project services were not fully implemented until January 2014, but in Bertie and Hyde counties recruitment wasn't completed until October 2014. Even with the extended recruitment period, only 15 of the 54 licensed child care centers in the TZ (27%) eventually submitted applications for project participation. Inquiry into the reasons behind the lack of applications included:

- Lack of relationship with the TZ behavior specialist
- 2-year participation commitment to TA and training
- Required commitment of facility administrator to attend regular training sessions with teaching staff
- Lack of monetary incentives to participation
- Plethora of TZ activities available for participation

Unusual severe weather conditions plagued the TZ over the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 winter seasons. These conditions caused extended and multiple facility closures, preventing the TZ behavior specialist from maintaining scheduled TA visits and cohort trainings, and hampered progress toward goals in all classrooms. Severe weather particularly impacted services to Ocracoke Island Child Care Center. Travel between the mainland and Ocracoke Island must be accomplished by a 3-hour ferry ride (1-way). Ferry schedules are limited and subject to weather restrictions, which severely limited the time the TZ behavior specialist was able to serve this facility. Summer schedules in each of the cohorts also presented significant challenges to progress, especially in Chowan and Hyde counties whose cohorts included NC PreK classrooms in elementary schools and a Head Start center, where facilities were closed from mid-May through August. Teacher/director vacations, temporary changes in teacher staffing schedules in some centers due to the influx of school aged children during these summer months, and the extreme travel and caseload requirements for a single specialist made cohort trainings difficult to schedule and keep as planned, and prevented the flexibility needed by facilities in both training and technical assistance.

The TZ behavior specialist experienced severe personal health issues in January 2015 which required her to be on extended medical leave from mid-January through March, returning to light duty work in April. The Specialist submitted her resignation in mid-April due to her continuing medical condition preventing the satisfactory performance of her duties. The 0.78 FTE Region 1 and Region 2 behavior specialists and their respective agencies agreed to transition the additional 0.22 FTE of each specialist to completion of HSB TZ project activities beginning June 1, 2015. These specialists assumed responsibility for successful completion of additional TA, cohort training, and TPOT assessment for the HSB TZ project classrooms, and also worked to transition active TZ project classrooms to their statewide HSB caseloads for continued services in January 2016.

Observations and Reflections

There were a plethora of TZ projects competing for participation in a small group of 53 facilities that already had access to multiple quality improvement projects. This competition for participants led to concerns among the entire early childhood community in each county. TZ specialists expressed concerns that there would not be sufficient classrooms to participate in all projects. Facility staff worried that they would be overwhelmed by multiple TZ specialists providing technical assistance in their classrooms. Building positive relationships among these individuals and negotiating effective solutions to their concerns was a long-term, time-consuming process that detracted from time needed to implement every project.

The HSB TZ project model was based on fidelity implementation of classroom strategies that support social-emotional development, and required a long-term commitment to technical assistance and training by both facility administrators and teachers interested in project participation. The intentional pairing of professional development with technical assistance and the focus on strategy implementation and social-emotional development combined to support sustainable change. Classroom staff were committed to fidelity implementation of Pyramid Model strategies. Administrators were able to support changes among all classrooms in their facility. Financial support for multiple Pyramid Model strategies enhanced the change experience for project teachers and allowed for implementation of strategies which most facilities could not otherwise afford.

Requiring an administrator to attend the cohort trainings along with their teacher increased the on-site support available to the teacher as she worked to implement strategies, and empowered the administrator to make knowledgeable strategy suggestions to other teachers. Fidelity implementation of Pyramid Model strategies was reduced in facilities where administrators did not regularly attend training with their staff. This administrator gap was particularly noticeable in NC PreK classrooms housed in elementary schools.

Implications for the Statewide HSB Project

The start-up process for the HSB TZ project took significantly longer than expected to progress to the stage of classroom selection due to the utilization of implementation science. Moreover, the HSB TZ grant was written as an adaptation of the statewide project which has been funded since 2005, making it difficult to restrict our activity to the early stages of implementation science. It was also challenging to be held responsible for annual outputs/outcomes that did not anticipate the extended start-up period dictated by implementation science.

The statewide HSB project model currently includes provision of both technical assistance and training similar to that provided in the HSB TZ project model. The primary differences between the two project models are:

1. the long-term commitment required of teachers/administrators in the HSB TZ project classrooms;
2. the intentional pairing of targeted trainings with technical assistance;
3. the expectation that administrators participate in training along with their classroom staff; and
4. the funding level of the HSB TZ project that provided for purchase of learning tools to support social-emotional development and Pyramid Model strategies.

Each of these factors contributed to teachers' implementation of Pyramid Model strategies, to children in project classrooms maintaining their placement, and to the ultimate success of those classrooms that achieved Pyramid Model fidelity implementation.

1. Long-term commitment – Technical assistance services in the statewide HSB project are not time limited. Behavior specialists may craft action plans and provide services which span the entirety of key practices in the Pyramid Model *as long as the teachers/administrators are actively engaged and showing progress toward goal achievement*. However, access to statewide services is generally motivated by the challenging behavior of a particular child; once that behavior has been addressed, teachers typically lose interest in continued services. Although most regions are unable to immediately meet the demand for services utilizing the current statewide project model and must utilize a waiting list, application experience in the TZ suggests that successful transition to a fidelity implementation project model would require a driver in law/rule.
2. Pairing trainings with technical assistance – The HSB project maintains a standardized menu of professional development modules from which the targeted trainings utilized in the HSB TZ project were drawn. The statewide project model requires delivery of training hours (and statewide specialists often recommend particular trainings to staff participating in technical assistance), but does not require pairing of training and technical assistance services. Furthermore, the TZ project was funded at a level such that cohort trainings could be provided at no cost to participants, while there is a modest fee for trainings provided as part of the statewide project to cover registration and training costs. Statewide specialists have shown some interest in the concept of creating regional fidelity implementation cohorts for technical assistance paired with targeted professional development; however, this would be challenging to provide given the current demand for services and staffing resources available in the statewide HSB project.
3. Administrator participation in training – While all child care staff are welcome at HSB trainings, it is unusual for administrators to attend trainings with their staff. Administrators frequently recommend implementation of Pyramid Model strategies discussed during HSB technical assistance visits to teachers throughout their facility, but seem to view trainings as more relevant to teaching staff. Behavior specialists are considering technical assistance approaches with administrators which might help close this gap.
4. Addressing the need for classroom tools to support social emotional development – There are many classroom tools which support social-emotional development; some can be inexpensively crafted by teachers or specialists; others require a commercial purchase. Teachers and facilities struggle to budget funds for these tools, and funding in the statewide HSB project no longer supports significant assistance with tool development or purchase of materials.

Project Success Story

A private facility NC PreK teacher working with the HSB TZ Specialist was supported by her facility director to extend implementation of Pyramid Model strategies into all of the facility's preschool classrooms while on summer hiatus. The teacher reported that the most difficult task was convincing her colleagues to participate; this barrier was overcome by the support of the facility director. By summer's end, the teachers who had originally been reluctant to implement Pyramid Model strategies recognized the impact of these social-emotional supports on the behaviors in their classrooms and clamored for additional strategies! The facility director reported a significant reduction in challenging behaviors in all of the preschool classrooms, as well as increased job satisfaction among his preschool staff.

The NC PreK teacher in the HSB TZ project classroom declined continuing HSB TZ project services upon her return from summer vacation; the final technical assistance visit to this classroom occurred in May, 2015. In December, 2015, this classroom was assessed for fidelity of implementation of Pyramid Model strategies and scored an astounding 98% fidelity rating.