

# PA NAP SACC Innovative Practices

## Child Care Center

Lancaster Early Education Center

## Contact Person

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## Do you participate in Keystone Stars?

Yes, Level 4

## What is your early childhood education center like?

We are a center located in Lancaster City. We serve a diverse clientele in an urban setting. We have been in continuous operation in our location for over 100 years. Our mission is to service low income, working families and has not changed since we opened our doors. The majority of our families qualify for state subsidies, and we offer scholarship programs to help those on the waiting list for subsidy programs. We currently serve 102 children in our facility between our infant/toddler program and two PA Pre-K Counts classrooms.

## Where did you make an Innovative Policy change?

Nutrition Policy – Nutrition Education and Professional Development; Foods Provided

## What was the objective of your Innovative Policy?

Our first goal was to educate staff on the importance of nutrition for both themselves and the children we serve in our program. We took a holistic approach to the professional development, looking at physical activity and nutrition education for staff.

Our second goal was not an original goal, but an amazing outcome; we were able to provide the children at Lancaster Early Education Center with locally sources, organic produce.

## Describe you Innovative Policy.

For goal one, we have educated staff persons on current best practice research surrounding nutrition for young children. While we have found we were excellent at serving nutritional foods, we learned we had work to do surrounding education of staff persons around meal time environments. We decided to look into educating staff on incorporating children into meal times and best practices like not using food as a reward or punishment, increasing children's involvement in meal times, not pushing children to eat or drink foods they do not like, continuously offering foods and encouraging children to try different things. The associate director met with a Child Care Health Consultant who provided a variety of research-based articles to share with staff. New policies and expectations were shared with staff and implemented with children. The head chef showed support for the policies and modeled practices at mealtimes.

Although goal two was not one of our original goals at the beginning of the project, throughout the grant we looked for different ways to improve the quality of our program for children in staff in the areas of health and wellness. In this process, we determined a partnership with a local co-op would be beneficial to our program. They provide us with fresh, locally grown produce for wholesale prices! While our program previously served fresh fruits and vegetable at every meal, this option has allowed us to improve quality even further by supplementing the majority of our produce with locally grown, organic produce that is even higher quality. We can offer children fresh produce that is in season and change our menus seasonally depending on the produce that is available to us.

### **What action steps did you take to reach your goal?**

For goal one, we started by introducing the concepts and research behind them to our staff persons and began implementing the changes immediately. For goal two, I reached out to the local co-op through their website. I found a contact, and we discussed our goals. Together we worked out a plan for sourcing and delivering the produce to our location.

### **How did you measure success?**

For goal one -

For goal two, we are receiving fresh, organic, locally sourced produce to serve to our children. We are also supporting a local business.

### **What advice would you offer to other child care programs that want to try your Innovative Policy?**

For goal one, professional development for staff, ensure you engage them in the process to encourage them to support the

changes in the program. We found that there are a great deal of personal biases around food and the proper way to handle meal time with children, so we wanted to break down the barriers and encourage staff to examine research that supports best practices around meal time.

For goal two, it is simple. Find a local partner and reach out to them. We found that the co-op was extremely supportive of our center, goals and mission and was excited to partner with us. We are able to help support a local business who in turn thanks us for our service to the community and helps us by offering the produce at affordable, wholesale prices.

