



Montgomery Early Learning Centers - Norristown

Contact Information

CACFP Sponsor	Diane Gross
Child Care Facility Name	Montgomery Early Learning Centers- Norristown
Child Care Provider Contact Person Name	Kira Marcy
Contact Person E-mail	Kmarcy@melc.org
Contact Person Phone Number	610-275-2640

Description

Montgomery Early Learning Centers (MELC) were founded in 1963 as the Day Care Association of Montgomery County, Inc. to address unmet needs for child care locally, especially those of low-income and "working poor" families. The MELC-Norristown site is located in the heart of the county's most impoverished neighborhoods. As a large child care facility, we offer care to 100 children between the ages of six weeks and five years. The bulk of our children walk to school with a family member, giving us a community feeling.

Keystone STARS Level 4

Category

Nutrition or Physical Activity Education (through curriculum or other resource) – N8 Nutrition Education for Staff, Children, and Parents; PA3 Supporting Physical Activity; PA4 Physical Activity Education for Staff, Children, and Parents

Goal

Our goal is to improve the nutrition and physical activity practices of our children, staff, and children's families while at the center and at home.

Promising Practice

Montgomery Early Learning Centers (MELC)-Norristown is Moving and Grooving for a healthier lifestyle. Utilizing the Hatch Early Learning "Fit4You" classroom kit, we have been able to improve nutrition and physical activity practices at the center and at the children's homes. Fit4You activities are engaging, developmentally appropriate, based on research, and correlate with NAEYC and Head Start standards. The program not only promotes fitness, but gives teachers the tools to encourage growth across all developmental areas. Each kit includes book collections, activity guides for teachers, a poster set, fitness manipulatives such as a dumbbell, water bottle, gym bag, soccer ball, basketball, jump rope, numbers ball, exercise dice, healthy play food, fruit counters, and games. The kit also includes music and movement CDs, exercise cards, home activities, and a checklist for families to use. Using these materials, teachers incorporated nutrition and physical activity education into weekly lesson plans. The teachers also used the new materials, particularly the fitness manipulatives, to encourage dramatic play and create discussion about the importance of physical activity.

Once teachers put up the posters and put out the books, manipulatives, and games into the classroom environment, the children were drawn to the materials and curious to try them out. The Teacher Learning Guides are divided into three categories – Fitness and Nutrition Inside the Classroom, Fitness and Nutrition

Outside the Classroom, and Fitness and Nutrition at Home. The Teacher Learning Guides provide clear instructions and ideas for implementing the materials throughout the child care center. They also include assessments and ideas for extension activities. Teachers and assistants used the guides to become familiar with using the content and were able to implement the new materials successfully.

To increase nutrition and physical activity education in the home, a lending library was created. Small back packs were used. Each backpack contains a book and materials for parents and children to complete an activity together. Families may borrow back packs and complete activities at home. When the family returns the back pack, consumable materials are replenished before the pack is returned to the lending library.

Action Steps

- Place posters throughout the center environment and along with pictures of healthy food.
- Make healthy eating books available in the library centers and reinforce these messages during large and small group activities.
- Meet with parents to share ideas and plans for improving nutrition and physical activity.
- Purchase games like Healthy Helpings MyPlate Game, Healthy Me! Magnetic Sorting Board Game, and the Shop and Match Healthy Food Game.
- Add the games in the Science Center and the Dramatic Play Center, along with plastic healthy food items and baskets.
- Implement the Fit4You Classroom Kit. Through these items, children learn what fruits and vegetables are and how to construct a healthy plate of food.
- Inside common areas, place posters and pictures and display books that promote nutrition and physical activity for families to borrow for home use.
- Survey families about nutrition and physical activity in the home.
- Based on survey results, select materials to share with the parents through weekly and monthly newsletters and handouts. We selected materials from Hatch Early Learning, a nutrition specialist, and internet resources. The materials and information were also shared during family activities.

Materials

Item Purchased	Cost of Item
Fit 4 You Program	\$365.35
Healthy Eating Book Set	\$58.39
Healthy Helpings My Plate Game	\$16.99
Healthy Me! Magnetic Sorting Board	\$29.95
Shop and Match Healthy Food Game	\$19.95

Advice

All Teachers and Assistants need to become familiar with the materials before implementing a new program. Have a Parent Meeting before implementation to give parents an idea of what is happening at the center and get them on board so the program can easily transfer to the home. Get parents' buy in from the beginning! Most importantly, have fun!

Evidence of Success

Sixty "At Home" checklists were sent home, and 48 came back filled out and the family activity section implemented. Materials, books, and CDs are on classroom shelves and are utilized by the children. There has been a significant increase in the Nutrition and Physical Activity section of our lending library.