

## Mississippi Community Roadmap to Relationships

*A strategic framework aimed at enhancing the quality of early childhood services through collaborative community efforts.*

### Shared Vision

Community teams build relationships between local early childhood programs and organizations to work together, share resources, and remove challenges to improve the quality of local services. Working together leads to the best possible outcomes for young children and their families.

### Forming the Team

Teams include coaches, early educators, infant and toddler teachers, center directors, LEA administrators, early childhood mental health specialists, and family members. Families make up an important piece of the team and help deliver the message.

Consider inviting:

- *Center directors and early educators participating in MECIC coaching and MDHS badging initiatives.*
- *Programs with strong family engagement and community presence.*
- *Invested partners in school districts.*
- *Include therapists who provide services to children in early education environments.*
- *Families who frequently utilize their local MS Lift R&R or who participate in other early childhood systems (child care centers, public pre-k, First Steps).*

### Build Relationships

Relationships take time to build. It is important that every team member is treated as a valued asset who brings information and experiences to the table. Take time to get to know one another and learn about each team members' contributions. Find meaningful ways for each member to share information and resources.

Taking small steps can have a big impact on positive relationships. Make connections:

- *Meet with team members outside of meetings.*
- *Value everyone's experience, knowledge, and suggestions.*
- *Do something extra- share a resource, attend a community event, celebrate successes.*

### Healthy Communication

Teams that communicate effectively and often are more successful. Create opportunities to get input and exchange ideas with community partners.

- *Identify and use preferred ways of connecting (email, phone call, text).*
- *Gather topics from the team.*
- *Gather and consider perspectives to improve outcomes.*
- *Identify parents' needs.*
- *Use plain language.*
- *Discuss actions that have impact on children, early educators, therapists, or administrators.*
- *Be respectful.*
- *Summarize action items so everyone is clear on next steps.*

### Realistic Goals

Teams make the most progress when they can narrow down the goal into actionable parts. Working together to identify a priority and determine small steps can lead to big outcomes for communities. Tips for setting goals:

- *Identify what motivates the team.*
- *Define a priority.*
- *Identify resources in the community.*
- *Address barriers to reaching the goal.*
- *Discover steps that can be made to elevate the community.*

## **A Community Story...The story of how one team came together, built relationships and solved problems!**

The community team began with a small group of individuals who shared a common purpose: to create meaningful change in the field of early childhood and better support the children and families they served. Early childhood teachers, early learning program administrators, coaches, and local school district personnel came together to build a unified team.

First meetings focused on building relationships and creating a space where everyone's experience and insight could be valued. As conversations unfolded, the group identified the most pressing needs in their community. Together, they explored which priority could be moved forward, identifying one that aligned with their collective expertise and felt achievable within the strengths each member brought to the table. Together, they decided to create a cohesive transition from preschool to kindergarten.

The result was lasting relationships and positive outcomes for the community. Visiting preschool classrooms in local child care centers, kindergarten teachers were able to understand the learning environment and expectations that their future students were coming from. Preschool teachers visiting local kindergarten classes discovered skills that were needed to support a smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten. Together, the team created a transition from specific to foundational skills, relationships and social skills, as well as emotional and behavioral support.

Open communication, shared resources, and actionable steps toward an identified goal, elevated the community. Together, the team took steps to ensure children and families were supported in their transition to kindergarten.

As one local center director stated- "The community team's efforts have not only strengthened ties between early childhood providers and school districts but also laid the groundwork for continued success and positive change in the community. It's especially helpful for children with disabilities because we developed something tangible to provide more information about how the child is supported in the learning environment. That information helps make transition to kindergarten more successful for the child, teacher, and family."