

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Brazelton Touchpoints Center (BTC) evaluation of Harris County Early REACH program's quality explores descriptions of and associations between the use of child care slots and access to high-quality child care and early education. The BTC evaluation assesses Aims 2 and 3 of Early REACH implementation. This second data memo summarizes findings from ongoing evaluation of coaching and professional development implementation as well as information collected from Early REACH coaches, child care program leadership, teachers, families, and children. The information in this memo was collected between January 2025 and August 2025. The following section is an Executive Summary highlighting key findings and recommendations across all sections of the more extensive data memo.

### **Early REACH Program and Provider Characteristics**

#### **Summary**

- Harris County Early REACH was implemented in 31 child care programs serving families who are diverse in terms of race/ethnicity and culture.
- Early REACH served a total of 1248 children between September 2024 and May 2025.
- Directors and teachers primarily identify as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino.
- Both directors and teachers come to their roles with experience. On average, directors have 21 years of experience working with children and families and have been in their current roles for eight years. Teachers have nine years of experience working with children and families and three years in their current roles, on average.

### **Early REACH Coaches' Characteristics and Consultation and Professional Development for Staff**

#### **Summary**

##### **Coaches' Characteristics**

- Coaches demonstrated mid-to-high levels of child development knowledge and skills, adequate relationship-based practices, and strong leadership skills. These foundational skills are important determinants of individual coach effectiveness.
- Coaches' professional emotional exhaustion was low, on average, which will be important as they continue to support directors and teachers with the demands of their work.
- Coaches most frequently requested support and professional development in fostering children's language (75%) and social emotional development (80%) and working with children with special needs (100%).
- There has been some turnover in coaches, resulting in other coaches stepping in to support with the coaching load for several months. As of September 2025, Early REACH recently hired a new program manager and posted an open coach position, which should help alleviate the workload on current coaches.

### **Coaches' Support: Consultation and Professional Development for Staff**

- Early REACH coaches provided a total of 953 coaching sessions to teachers and directors and spent most of their time observing classrooms and providing consultation.
- Directors and teachers felt they had moderately strong relationships with coaches. Coaches were an invaluable asset and provided helpful advice, strategies, and support to directors and teachers to improve program quality.
- The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) was most frequently discussed during consultation time.
- Directors and teachers were highly satisfied with the three quarterly training sessions provided by coaches, rating them a 9.4 or higher.

### **Recommendations**

- Early REACH leadership should provide focused professional development on foundational child development concepts to continue to support coaches with varying levels of developmental knowledge and skills.
- Early REACH leadership has recently hired an early intervention and behavior services manager to work with programs on early intervention and behavior support services. Coaches will benefit from the support and guidance that a trained early intervention and behavioral health specialist can provide.
- Some coaches requested more feedback from their supervisor, as well as more time for reflective practice. Early REACH should continue to ensure that there is adequate time for supervision and reflective practice to support coaches in their role and increase professional emotional well-being. The recent hiring of the new Early REACH program manager provides an opportunity to strengthen and expand the support available to coaches in their roles.
- Coaches spent little time modeling in coaching sessions overall (*Mean* = 5 minutes). Early REACH coaches may want to consider ways to increase time spent modeling effective practices and strategies in the classroom to improve overall quality of coaching sessions.

### **Early REACH Centers' Structural Quality**

#### **Summary**

#### **Early REACH Centers' Compliance with Early REACH Policies**

- Classrooms met the Early REACH teacher-child ratio for the classroom's respective age group in 96% of classroom visits from the Compliance Support Monitor (CSM). This was a five-percentage point increase from compliance observations between December 2023 and December 2024.
- Classrooms had children with extended absences in 12% of CSM visits, a decrease from 20% between December 2023 and December 2024.
- Policy concerns addressed most frequently during CSM visits were lead teacher requirements related to CDA status (28%) and Texas Child Care Regulations (19%).

#### **Early REACH Directors' and Teachers' Education**

- Twenty-two percent (22%) of directors have an advanced graduate degree, 20% have a bachelor's degree, and 16% of directors have only a high school diploma.
- Fifty-one percent (51%) of teachers have a high school degree and 26% have completed some college or obtained an Associate's.
- Forty-nine percent (49%) of Early REACH teachers have some college education or more, surpassing the educational standards required for licensing in Texas.
- Early REACH policies require lead teachers to hold a CDA or be enrolled in a CDA course within 120 days of hire. Early REACH supports lead teachers with CDA enrollment and completion of CDA coursework through the Harris County Accessible Child Care Training Supports (ACCTS) program. As of August 2025, Early REACH has helped 73 lead teachers complete their CDA requirements, 15 have completed all necessary coursework, and 21 are enrolled in a CDA course.

### **Early REACH Teacher and Director Retention**

- Teacher retention was 78% on average across programs between March 2025 and August 2025, an improvement from 74% between September 2024 and February 2025. However, there was considerable variability in teacher retention across Early REACH programs (*Range* = 20% - 100%).
- Director retention was strong (95%), with only two directors leaving their programs during this six-month period.
- Of the teachers who left their programs during this six-month period, about half (52%) of teachers left because of personal circumstances. However, a third of teachers left for career advancement reasons, including accepting another job with higher pay.

### **Early REACH Centers' Staffing**

- A larger number of programs reported being fully staffed in Winter 2025 (55%) compared to Spring 2024 (43%). More directors (90%) reported being able to fill positions within a month in Winter 2025 than in Spring 2024 (77%). However, 41% of directors indicated that toddler staff positions are particularly difficult to fill, highlighting a potential area for future exploration to better understand why this is the case as there is no evidence of a national trend that toddler staff positions are harder to fill.

### **Early REACH Program Benefits**

- Early REACH teachers expressed positive perceptions about various aspects of their jobs, such as opportunities for professional growth and job security. In contrast, they had fewer positive feelings regarding their level of pay.
- Close to half (45%) of programs provided the same salary for both Early REACH and non-Early REACH teachers.

### **Recommendations**

- Early REACH should continue to provide professional development and coaching that address the diverse needs of all teachers. This includes tailoring content and approaches based on teachers' varying levels of experience and education, combining both universal and focused skills-based support to maintain and improve quality.

- Early REACH should continue to provide support for directors and teachers who hold a high school diploma as their highest level of education to increase their educational attainment through CDA credentialing or college-level coursework to increase the overall structural quality of programs.
- Early REACH should continue to provide additional support for programs in which teacher retention is lower than the national average (70%) as teacher turnover is associated with lower program quality.
- Some teachers still view their salaries as inadequate given the demands of the work. Early REACH should continue to offer additional benefits, such as paid vacation, paid holidays, assistance paying for child care, and paid sick days. Additionally, professional development, career growth opportunities and provision of resources to minimize feelings of professional emotional exhaustion are critically important for supporting retention beyond salary levels.

## **Early REACH Centers' Process Quality**

### **Summary**

#### **Early REACH Directors' and Teachers' Professional Emotional Well-Being**

- Overall, directors and teachers reported low feelings of professional emotional exhaustion and high feelings of personal accomplishment. Three Early REACH programs had directors who reported higher than average emotional exhaustion, while one Early REACH program had teachers who reported lower than average personal accomplishment.
- Directors' feelings of personal accomplishment significantly increased between Summer 2024 and Winter 2025.

#### **Early REACH Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Relationship-Based Practices with Families**

- Teachers had moderately strong feelings of self-efficacy in their teaching and classroom practices including their ability to have a positive influence on the cognitive development of children.
- Directors and teachers demonstrated moderate-to-strong relationship-based practices with families.
- Directors reported stronger practices in identifying and building on family strengths and skills, demonstrating sensitivity and responsiveness to parents' cultural backgrounds and beliefs, and facilitating parents' relationships with other parents and community members in Winter 2025 compared to Summer 2024.

#### **Program Climate**

- Directors and teachers on average reported their program had an overall positive climate (*Director Mean* = 3.8 out of 4.0, *Teacher Mean* = 3.7 out of 4.0).
- Teachers who had positive views of their program's climate had lower levels of emotional exhaustion and higher levels of personal accomplishment.

#### **Teacher-Child Interaction Quality**

- Teacher-child interaction quality was assessed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), an early care and education program observation instrument that is designed to identify strengths and challenges in teachers’ practices and to support their skill development. The CLASS is available in different versions based on the ages of the children within a classroom.
- Infant Classroom Quality
  - Early REACH infant classrooms reached the high mid-range for quality, as measured by the CLASS. Relational Climate and Teacher Sensitivity were areas of strength, while Facilitated Exploration and Early Language Support emerged as areas for targeted coaching.
  - Exploring scores from Fall 2024 to Spring 2025, infant classrooms demonstrated growth in quality practices across the dimensions that define Infant Quality and Responsive Caregiving.
- Toddler Classroom Quality
  - Early REACH toddler classrooms were in the high mid-range for the Emotional and Behavioral Support (EBS) domain and the mid-range for the Engaged Support for Learning (ESL) domain. Within the EBS domain, Positive Climate and Teacher Sensitivity were areas of strength, while Regard for Child Perspective was an area for growth. Within the ESL domain, Facilitation of Learning and Development was a strength, while Quality of Feedback was a consistent challenge, averaging in the low-quality range.
  - Classrooms showed growth in Behavioral Guidance and Quality of Feedback, but a downward slide in Regard for Child Perspective between Fall 2024 and Summer 2025.
- Preschool Classroom Quality
  - Early REACH preschool classrooms averaged in the high range for the Emotional Support domain, the mid-high-quality range for the Classroom Organization domain, and in the low range for the Instructional Support domain.
  - Tenured preschool classrooms observed across both time points demonstrated growth in Positive Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, and Quality of Feedback, though Instructional Learning Formats experienced a downward slide.

## Recommendations

- Centers where directors have higher emotional exhaustion and teachers have lower personal accomplishment may be in particular need of extra support from Early REACH to prevent continued emotional exhaustion and improve their well-being.
- Early REACH leadership may want to consider offering professional development related to emotional support and self-care for all staff.
- Early REACH should offer additional resources and strategies to teachers working with children who exhibit challenging behaviors. This support will enhance teachers’ confidence in managing these behaviors and improve their overall teaching practices.
- Early REACH coaches should continue to help teachers maintain their use of family engagement practices. Furthermore, Early REACH can provide family-facing resource

lists and help programs organize community events to foster relationships across the community.

- Teachers' perception of having sufficient resources to do their job well was lower compared to other components of program climate. Early REACH could consider supporting program directors in identifying gaps in program resources and working with them to allocate their budgets to address these gaps.
- Early REACH should continue to provide professional development and coaching related to both program climate and well-being to support the process quality of programs.

### **Teacher-Child Classroom Quality**

- In general, Early REACH programs demonstrated promising growth in classroom quality from Fall 2024 to Summer 2025 across all age groups, which may be due to Early REACH supports, such as professional development and needs-based coaching. As Early REACH progresses, additional analyses will be conducted to further explore associations between Early REACH programming and classroom quality.
- Across all age groups, positive and sensitive teacher-child interactions were areas of strength, with many classrooms exhibiting high-quality practices. Coaching should continue to support this positive environment and focus on maintaining high levels of quality.
- Coaches should consider focusing supports related to Facilitated Exploration and Early Language Support dimensions within Infant classrooms. For Toddler classrooms, additional focus for coaching and professional development should be placed on the dimensions of Regard for the Child Perspective and Quality of Feedback.
- Persistent challenges across all age groups were related to Instructional and language-focused support (e.g., Quality of Feedback, Language Modeling, Early Language Support). As such, coaching should provide focused support related to these quality dimensions. Professional development should consider emphasizing practices and strategies for promoting language development and quality language interactions.

## **Early REACH Families' Characteristics and Outcomes**

### **Summary**

#### **Early REACH Families' Characteristics**

- More than half (58%) of parents identify as African American and 35% identify as Hispanic.
- Many parents (74%) primarily speak English at home and about a quarter (23%) speak Spanish. The remaining three percent (3%) of parents speak African American Vernacular English, Urdu, Dari, Yoruba, Ukrainian, Garifuna, and Tigrigna.
- Ninety-three percent (93%) of parents have a high school degree or higher.
- Sixty percent (60%) of parents are employed, 6% are in school or in training, and 12% are both employed and in school/training. The remaining 22% of parents are neither employed nor in school.

#### **Families' Challenges, Risks, and Request for Resources**

- Early REACH families experienced risks of poverty, with 67% of parents reporting being single and 23% indicating they are unemployed.
- Half of families (51%) experienced adversity related to food insecurity. Families most frequently requested resources related to basic needs, including housing and food, as well as how to support young children’s learning at home.

### Parents’ Parenting Practices

- Families reported consistently low levels of emotional stress (*Mean* = 2.0 out of 5.0) and anxiety over parenting demands (*Mean* = 2.0 out of 5.0), on average, between Fall 2024 and Spring 2025.
- Parents demonstrated high self-efficacy in their parenting role (*Mean* = 4.4 out of 5.0), suggesting that they feel confident in their ability to successfully raise their children.

### Families’ Prior Child Care Experiences

- Almost half of children (45%) were not in care prior to enrolling in Early REACH. Most parents (76%) were seeking child care to obtain employment. Early REACH has been successful in supporting families who are seeking employment by providing free child care services: 76% of parents who were not previously employed/enrolled in school were working or in school after joining Early REACH.
- Out of 329 families who had a child care arrangement prior to Early REACH, 97 families were spending over 40% of their income on child care. After joining Early REACH, only 27 families were in this high-spending group.

### Families’ Experience with their Early REACH Centers

- Families were very satisfied with their children’s Early REACH centers, rating them an 8.9 out of 10 on average. Families were most satisfied with the affordability of programs and languages spoken by staff.
- Parents felt that their child’s early care providers had moderately strong use of relationship-based practices, including knowledge of and sensitivity to family’s needs and sensitivity and responsiveness to families’ cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Fewer families reported being highly satisfied with staff communication and providers’ ability to facilitate parents’ relationships with other parents and community members.
- About 10% of families left Early REACH between December 2024 and May 2025. Families left Early REACH because they had children who aged out of the program (25%), or the center was not near their home or work (15%). Among families that left Early REACH during the 2024-2025 academic year, the average length of participation was 7.2 months.

### Recommendations

- Early REACH should continue its efforts to recruit and enroll families into free, high-quality child care slots as these initiatives have been successful in providing accessible child care options and supporting families as they transition to employment.

- Families expressed a continued request for more specific and diverse resources. To continue supporting families, Early REACH should compile a list of free and low-cost resources that meet their diverse needs.
- Parents in some centers have higher than average emotional stress and anxiety over parenting demands. These programs may need additional mental health supports and resources from Early REACH to reduce distress and promote well-being.
- To promote teacher-parent relationships and enhance providers' relationship-supportive behaviors, Early REACH should continue to offer professional development and coaching focused on increasing the use of family engagement strategies.

## Early REACH Children's Social-Emotional Behaviors

### Summary

- Stability and growth in children's social and emotional skills were assessed using the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA), a standardized developmental measure of children's social and emotional protective factors in three areas: initiative, attachment/relationships, and self-regulation. The protective factors scale provides an overall indication of a child's social and emotional strengths. The preschool DECA form includes an additional domain on behavioral concerns.
- Infants', toddlers', and preschool children's *social-emotional protective factors* were in the typical range, on average, at all three timepoints in the 2024-2025 academic year.
- Preschool children presented with *behavioral concerns* in the typical range, on average, at all three timepoints in the 2024-2025 academic year.
- The percentage of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers falling in an *area of need* for *social-emotional protective factors* remained generally consistent over the 2024-2025 academic year. In Spring 2025, 15% of infants, 26% of toddlers, and 22% of preschoolers fell in an *area of need*.
- Toddlers in Early REACH veteran programs had higher *social-emotional protective factors* compared to toddlers in new Early REACH programs, suggesting that stable and consistent quality child care is especially important for this age group.

### Recommendations

- Continued support is essential for Early REACH teachers to develop a strong understanding of early childhood social emotional development. Doing so will continue to enable them to effectively use the DECA to assess children's development and apply their knowledge to create and implement individualized supports for each child within the classroom, thereby ensuring high-quality implementation.
- Given that some teachers are entering DECA assessments for both Early REACH and Collaborative for Children Centers of Excellence, and with the onboarding of new teachers, added supports may continue to be necessary to ensure all teachers are comfortable with data entry processes and usage of this information.
- Directors and teachers continue to express a need for professional development and support to manage children's challenging behaviors. Some centers have preschoolers with *behavioral concerns* falling into an *area of need*. Early REACH should continue to support

providers through coaching and professional development, equipping them with strategies and classroom practices to effectively manage challenging behaviors. The United Way of Greater Houston (UWGH) should continue to incorporate the DECA as a tool to help teachers individualize strategies and understand what a child's challenging behavior is communicating. Additionally, using the DECA can help providers identify profiles for each child that provide a deeper look at each child's social emotional development.

- The addition of a behavioral specialist to the Early REACH staff will further help teachers in understanding and responding to children's challenging behaviors.
- Early REACH should provide focused support to preschool teachers whose students are preparing for the critical transition to kindergarten to ensure they develop the social and emotional skills essential for school readiness