

## The HealthyCHILD Partnership

How a Community University collaboration thrives



### Partnership

#### Community Collaborators

**Sally Rushford** | Principal, PPS  
Beechwood Elementary

**Deborah Gallagher** | Director,  
COTRAIC Early Head Start

**Carol Barone-Martin** | Executive  
Director, Pittsburgh Public Schools  
Early Childhood Program

#### Office of Child Development

**Tracy Larson** | Director,  
HealthyCHILD,  
Early Childhood  
Partnerships

**Stacy Cullinan** | Coordinator,  
Developmental  
Healthcare  
Consultant (DHC)

**Audra Redick** | DHC

**Molly Matsik** | DHC

**Denise Esposto** | DHC

**Tomasina Boyd** | DHC

**Rachel LePage** | DHC

**Heather Roesinger** | Paid Intern

**Jackie Micklege** | Paid Intern

**Amy Palikaras** | Project Assistant

**Laura Campbell** | School  
Psychologist

### About HealthyCHILD

HealthyCHILD is a community university partnership between the University of Pittsburgh and multiple early childhood programs that aims to help teachers develop skills to address child behaviors in the classroom that often result from trauma, mental health challenges, and racial discrimination. In the past, suspensions and expulsions were more common in early childhood classrooms, and this partnership aims to decrease that practice and help teachers to keep children in the classroom and engaged in learning. Our partners are involved in the design, implementation and study of the partnerships work and activities. We use a collaborative consultation and problem-solving model, along with an improvement science framework, to identify problems of practice and implement small tests of change based on the research literature and the unique contexts we are working in.

We are constantly focused on working together to disrupt the “status quo” to eliminate inequities. We regularly exchange, explore, and apply knowledge, information, and resources with our partners to:

- Demonstrate that community-university partnerships can engage in research and practice to create innovative interagency and interdisciplinary collaborations that are co-created and mutually beneficial
- Build the capacity of systems and adults to promote social emotional competence in young children (birth to 8 years old);
- Identify and document evidence-based “best practices” in early education
- Build capacity to ensure long-term success
- Encourage systems integration and interdisciplinary teaming; and demonstrate the feasibility, value and sustainability of community-university partnerships for augmenting the resources and quality of early education

## Partnership Strength

HealthCHILD has strengthened the university's relationship with Pittsburgh Public Schools and local Head Start providers, and has expanded the university's community outreach to Philadelphia. This partnership has also brought in funding to support one of the five divisions in the Office of Child Development HealthyCHILD and contributes to one of its main areas of expertise, allowing the office to engage with the community and apply for state and federal early childhood mental health grants and contracts.

The partnership has enhanced the services and supports provided by early education programs, reaching 20,000 local children since 2015. Addressing early childhood trauma, mental health, and racial discrimination is a priority for our community partners. Having both the access to university expertise and the opportunity to work together to challenge and adapt accepted practices has facilitated the growth of research and evidence-based practices.

The long-term future of the HealthyCHILD partnership is built on collaboration. It teams university experts in identifying and organizing best practices around trauma informed care, tiered social and emotional learning and supports and mental health with teachers, staff, and education leaders, who can serve as context experts to ensure recommendations fit their school's unique needs. The partnership exudes trust, reciprocity and mutual benefit because we share common goals including, attacking the school-to-prison pipeline where it starts and disrupting inequities in education and mental health access. Each of our partners are worried about these areas and turn to us year after year for support. In addition, we are also committed to addressing the pervasive national problem of teacher stress and burnout together. And because of our trusted work in the Birth to preschool range, a principal reached out to us to extend HealthyCHILD into older grades. Her school has many immigrants/refugees and she is turning to us to partner with her to support these children who are facing unprecedented stress and trauma with family deportations. This expansion of HealthyCHILD into K-2nd grade is groundbreaking and shows that our partners trust us enough to go into uncharted territory.

"HealthyCHILD is an essential partner for Pittsburgh Beechwood PreK-5. Together we are doing groundbreaking work in addressing the social and emotional issues facing our young elementary school children."

Sally Rushford, Community Collaborator

## HealthyCHILD Impact

The impact of the partnership can be seen in four key areas:

**1. Educators:** Significant teacher skill gains were apparent in practices promoting social emotional competence with particular impacts on strategies to build positive relationships, create supportive environments, teach social emotional skills, develop individualized intervention and use of evidence-based practices.

**2. Parents:** Positive parenting practices improved significantly during HealthyCHILD mentoring. Significant parent skill gains were apparent in parent-child interactions with particular impacts on responsiveness and teaching.

**3. Children:** Measurable improvements were observed in social skills with the greatest improvement observed in Social Interaction. Measurable improvements were also observed in self-control skills with the greatest improvement observed with internalizing behaviors.

**4. System:** The partners collaborate to identify problems of practice, create innovative strategies and programs, and field-validate the "real world" efficacy of these strategies and programs to support the needs of early childhood education.

## Contact

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HEALTHY CHILD

