

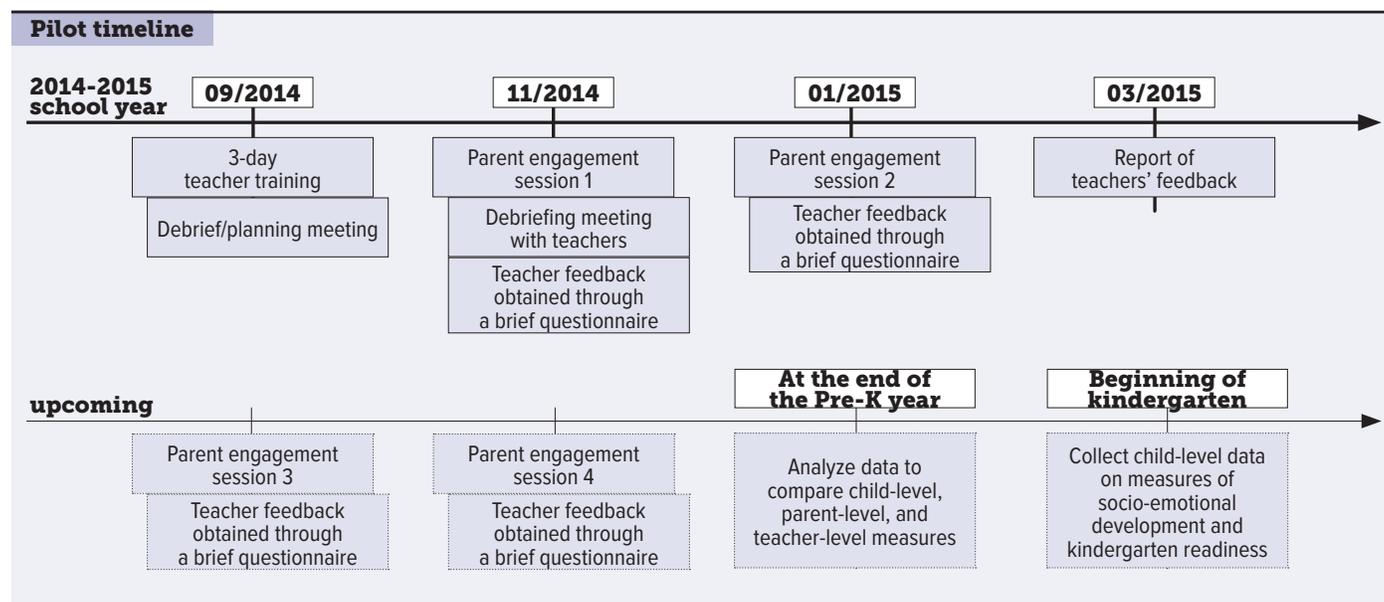
# Nurturing Parenting Program: Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Implementation

Mid-Year Report

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1/5

**The Nurturing Parenting (NP) pilot project is an effort to evaluate the incorporation of intentional positive parenting information in selected Shelby County Schools (SCS) Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) classrooms. This program is designed to instill positive, nurturing child-rearing attitudes, beliefs, and practices among parents.**



## Teacher training

As a part of this pilot program, Pre-K teachers from six selected Pre-K classrooms at six different Pre-K sites in SCS attended a three-day training at the beginning of the school year to become familiar with fundamentals of the NP program. Following training, these teachers agreed on elements of the NP curriculum that were important for the parents of their Pre-K students, and developed four NP-informed units that they would then use during parent engagement sessions throughout the school year. These parent engagement

units do not teach the entire NP curriculum. Rather, they supplement current parent engagement practices with components of the NP program.

These parent engagement units incorporated the following topics:

1. Orientation, introducing and describing the program; identifying nurturing behavior
2. Identifying basic human needs and understanding how those motivate behavior
3. Improving children's self-worth; how to praise children and their behavior

4. Rewarding children's positive behaviors and punishing children's negative behaviors

## Parent engagement sessions

Over the course of the 2014-2015 school year, these teachers are scheduled to independently lead four parent-teacher sessions in which this information would be shared with the parents of their Pre-K students. After the first parent-teacher session, teachers agreed that weekly assignments of simple NP activities with parents would also help

# Nurturing Parenting Program: Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Implementation

Mid-Year Report

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2/5

keep the parents engaged with NP material throughout the year. To help facilitate ongoing program engagement, Nurturing Parent Easy Reader handbooks have been provided to the parents in these classrooms. These handbooks were developed by the publisher of the NP program, and are available in English and in Spanish.

## Teacher feedback

After the six Pre-K teachers participated in the three-day training, they attended a debriefing meeting to discuss what they had learned and how they felt about conveying the NP-informed curriculum to parents. The teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the information they received, and unanimously supported the curricular elements they learned in the training. The teachers emphasized that the concepts they learned would support engagement not only with their students and their students' families, but also with other people in their day-to-day interactions (e.g., spouses, co-workers, and other individuals in the community).

After the six teachers involved in the NP project completed their first parent-teacher session, they were invited to attend another follow-up meeting to discuss what occurred during their session, how parents responded to the session, and what the teachers might change for future

sessions. Four of the six participating teachers attended this follow-up meeting. Overall, the participating teachers indicated that the first session was a positive experience, and expressed optimism for the future sessions.

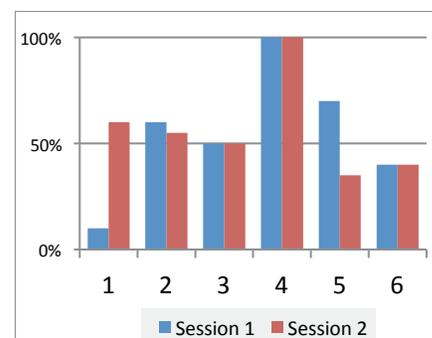
Most of the teachers retained the same level of optimism about the NP program and the value of its content from the beginning of this project, although one teacher did express concern about the extra time required to prepare for the sessions. However, she and the other three teachers present at the debriefing meeting reaffirmed the importance of using the nurturing techniques they have learned in their day-to-day interactions – not just within their classrooms and among those families, but within their own families and the overall community as well. Following each of the two sessions held thus far, a brief questionnaire was sent to each of the six teachers participating in this project. Teachers were queried in order to obtain their perceptions of how the project was progressing, how the material was being received by parents, and to see if any themes were arising from the sessions.

Teachers' feedback will continue to be collected throughout the course of this project to monitor program implementation and to ensure that teachers' input continuously informs the course of this project.

## Parent attendance varied.

For the first session, parent attendance varied greatly, and ranged from two parents (10%) in one class, to twenty parents (100%) in another class. For the second session, parent attendance again varied between classrooms, ranging between four parents (representing 40% of the enrolled class) and 19 parents (100%).

The average attendance rate among the six classes was 56% for the first session and 58% for the second session.



## Teachers felt comfortable conveying the curriculum.

Almost all of the teachers (five of six) felt comfortable conveying the NP-informed curriculum to parents at the first session. While one of the six teachers expressed that she felt uncomfortable conveying the first lesson, she expressed optimism for the future sessions, as they will focus on concepts that she could more easily translate into classroom practices. At the second session, four of the six teachers



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# Nurturing Parenting Program: Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Implementation

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3/5

noted that they were still comfortable presenting the material to parents (including the one teacher who did not feel comfortable presenting the material in the first session). One teacher responded that she does not feel confident that she knows the material well enough to say that she was completely comfortable presenting the unit. The other teacher remarked that presenting some of the curriculum can "get a bit awkward."

### Parents were receptive.

Almost all of the teachers (five of six) also felt that attending parents were receptive and engaged at the first session. These were the same five teachers who felt comfortable leading the first parent-teacher sessions. Each of these five teachers noted that attending parents were willing to participate and enjoyed the discussion. One of these teachers even noted a shift in the nonverbal communication of parents who were initially unengaged: By the end of the meeting, those parents were receptive to the content and engaged in the discussion. These teachers noted that attending parents were willing to share and discuss nurturing moments from their childhoods. Each of these five teachers found this willingness and openness to be particularly meaningful. However, one teacher noted resistance about sharing among

most of the attending parents at the first session, but expressed optimism for the next sessions as she becomes more comfortable with the content. At the second session, all of the teachers remarked that the curriculum was well-received by the parents. Five of the six teachers indicated that parents were receptive, engaged, and willing to participate (including the one teacher who indicated some resistance from parents at the first session). However, one teacher noted that she perceived the parents as less responsive, less receptive, and less active than from the first session. She remarked that she feels this may have been because she had scheduled her second session in the evening, and her first session was in the daytime. This teacher also noted that holding her session in the evening meant that many of the attending parents needed to bring their children, which proved distracting. She observed that the parents "seemed like they were tired and just wanted to go home."

### Teachers remain excited.

Following the first session, five of the six teachers expressed excitement to hold the second session, including the teacher who did not feel comfortable during her first session. These same five teachers expressed excitement to hold the third session following the second session.

### Incentives to encourage parent attendance.

When asked if they would change anything for the next session, most of the teachers (four of six) noted they would be more proactive to increase parent attendance for the second and subsequent sessions. Some teachers noted that they would offer incentives to encourage parents to come (e.g., a drawing for a small door prize). One teacher expressed that her first session went well enough that she would not do anything differently for the next session (this teacher also had 100% attendance at her first session). Following the second session, most teachers indicated that they would mostly continue current practices, modifying details such as which snacks and/or incentives they would provide. The teacher who noted that parents were not as receptive for the second session noted that she would try holding her next meeting in the daytime as she did for the first session. She further commented that holding the session with children present was very difficult, and that she would prefer that future sessions be for parents only. The teacher who did not indicate excitement for the third session expressed some exasperation toward her relatively low attendance rate (she reported 40% parent attendance for each of the two sessions). She lamented that she did



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# Nurturing Parenting Program: Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Implementation

Mid-Year Report

Pathways to Success Partnership | Shelby County Schools | The Urban Child Institute

4/5

not know how to get more parents to attend, and remarked that if parents are required to attend meetings, there needs to be more support to follow up with parents if that requirement is consistently not being met.

## Teachers felt supported.

Most teachers (four of six) affirmed that they felt their efforts were adequately supported. One teacher noted that she could use more Spanish-language support during her sessions. Another teacher reaffirmed her concern that no follow-up or consequences are available for parents who do not attend mandatory parent-teacher meetings. This teacher further commented that this training is more appropriately aligned to the services provided by, for example, Porter Leath family service workers. Additionally, she feels that Pre-K teachers have enough pressure on them to prepare lessons for and teach the young children, and therefore should not have to prepare and present parenting lessons to parents.

## Ongoing improvements

### Trained NP specialists to support teachers

Given the extra effort that is required in implementing material that is additional to the existing curriculum, continuing support is available to the teachers via the Early Success Coalition (ESC), one of the key partners in this project. Several ESC staff are trained as Nurturing Parenting Specialists, and are trained to provide continuing support to implementers of the NP program. As a part of this project, these specialists are available to offer continued support to the participating teachers. Teachers were invited to utilize this continuing support by ESC staff at the debriefing meeting following the first parent-teacher session, and ESC staff reached out to the teachers prior to the second session. None of the teachers responded to this invitation prior to their first and second sessions. However, to ensure that teachers are aware of the types of support the NP specialists offer, NP specialists will be visiting each of the six teachers to present information on the types of support that they offer prior to their third session. Information concerning teachers' utilization of continuing support (e.g., type and frequency) will be collected throughout the course of this project.

### Providing resources to improve parent attendance

Teachers and project collaborators have discussed methods to improve parent attendance. Teachers have been supplied with resources to purchase food for the sessions, and teachers are also providing incentives to parents who attend (e.g., "goody bags" with supplies and assorted educational materials the parents can use with their children).

### Continue to monitor the challenges in scheduling

One teacher noted that scheduling can be a challenge to get all of the parents together at once, and that spending one-on-one time with parents who cannot attend has been necessary. Some teachers have noted that daytime sessions work best to accommodate the most parents, whereas other teachers feel that evening sessions work better for them. Other considerations, including parents' child care needs and work schedules, have been cited as barriers for parental attendance and involvement in this project. Information concerning parent attendance has and will continue to be gathered during the course of this project to account for differences in program uptake. The input provided by these teachers helps to inform the implementation of this pilot program within these Pre-K classes.



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# Nurturing Parenting Program: Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Implementation

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5/5

## Upcoming steps

### Evaluate outcomes at the end of the Pre-K year

This program will ultimately be evaluated using child-level, parent-level, and teacher-level measures at the end of the Pre-K year.

### Track children into kindergarten

Moreover, these children will also be tracked into the beginning of kindergarten, where measures of socio-emotional development and kindergarten readiness will be compared.

These results will inform whether this implementation of positive parenting curricula within current Pre-Kindergarten parent engagement practices will help to support children's early development, parent attitudes and beliefs toward child-rearing, and teacher-child interactions within the classroom. Teacher input obtained throughout the course of this school year will not only provide valuable insight regarding implementation, but will help to contextualize the results obtained from the overall study.

This work was made possible via a collaborative effort between the Pathways to Success Partnership, the PeopleFirst Initiative, and the Early Success Coalition. This is one of several projects currently underway by the Pathways to Success Partnership, a research collaboration between the Department of Research, Planning, & Improvement at Shelby County Schools and the Urban Child Institute that has spent the past several years researching factors associated with children's positive early development, school readiness, and later academic achievement.



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