BUILDING A COMMUNITY-CENTERED SYSTEM IN HARRIS COUNTY



Early Learning Quality Network Year One Highlights

Harris County's Early Learning Quality Network (ELQN) is a community-centered initiative designed to strengthen early learning and child care across the county. This three-year effort, supported through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars by the Harris County Department of Economic Equity and Opportunity, is guided by community input and local data to ensure that quality care improvements are responsive to the needs of families and providers. Local Network Organizations (LNOs), chosen for their strong ties to these areas, lead efforts to engage child care providers, families, and community members in identifying challenges, priorities, and improvement strategies related to early learning and care. CHILDREN AT RISK, serving as the Network Support Hub (NSH), provides LNOs with technical assistance and oversees funding for community-identified quality-enhancing initiatives.



The goal of ELQN is to improve child care quality through community-led planning and community-directed funding. By working alongside providers, families, and other stakeholders, ELQN supports initiatives that build on the unique strengths of each community, addressing barriers to quality care and expanding access to high-quality learning environments for young children.

The information in this summary is part of an ongoing evaluation that seeks to understand the planning, implementation, and community impact of ELQN over three years. Using diverse data sources—including community storytelling, focus groups, and photovoice—the evaluation will help enhance Harris County's ability to serve young children and their families effectively.

ELQN Initiatives

ELQN aims to address key challenges in early childhood education by implementing targeted initiatives that emerged from extensive community engagement efforts, including surveys and town halls conducted by the LNOs, as well as community Advisory Committees made up of families, child care providers, and other community stakeholders. Final initiatives balance community-driven priorities with feasibility and compliance.

- There is a willingness for everyone to work together. They really want this to succeed at every level, whether it's Harris County or the NSH or each of the LNOs.
 - ELQN PARTNER

| LNO | ELQN INITIATIVES |
|---|--|
| the | Training and Professional Development • Facility, Safety and Security • Emergency and Temporary Care • Technology for Child Care Providers • Technology for Households |
| East Harris County Empowerment Council | Training and Professional Development • Facility, Safety and Security • Emergency and Temporary Care |
| HARRISCOUNTY PUBLICLIBRARY your pathway to knowledge Sunnyside/South Park | Training and Professional Development • Facility, Safety and Security • Technology for Child Care Providers • Technology for Households |
| HARRISCOUNTY PUBLICLIBRARY your pathway to knowledge Klein | Training and Professional Development • Facility, Safety and Security • Emergency and Temporary Care • Curriculum • Learning Materials |
| | Training and Professional Development • Facility, Safety and Security • Emergency and Temporary Care |

COLLABORATION

The ELQN initiative was fueled by strong, trusting partnerships across Harris County, the Network Support Hub (NSH), and Local Network Organizations (LNOs). Participants shared a deep commitment to ELQN's community-driven goals and embraced flexibility through the pilot phase. LNOs created safe spaces for diverse voices, while NSH support through communities of practice and individual meetings strengthened collaboration. Despite early challenges, stakeholders stayed connected, open, and resilient.

Recommendations to Enhance Collaboration:

- Clearly define roles and communication channels to foster effective teamwork.
- Build in ongoing opportunities for cross-role collaboration and shared learning.

Potential Action Items:

- Allocate time for LNOs to collaborate and share best practices.
- Continue gathering and incorporating community voices to build trust.

COMMUNICATION

Clear, consistent communication was critical to building partnerships, but participants noted challenges early on. Initial guidance around outreach and eligibility was often vague, leading to confusion. Over time, regular meetings, one-on-one check-ins, and a commitment to transparency improved communication. Participants valued the NSH's responsiveness and emphasized the need for timely, proactive communication as the work evolves.

Recommendations to Enhance Communication:

- Provide clear, timely guidance, especially when priorities shift.
- Maintain open communication loops and create spaces for feedback.

Potential Action Items:

- Develop a central resource hub for shared materials and updates.
- Schedule regular check-ins to anticipate and address needs.

44 A crash course on child care in Texas would've helped to frame what we're doing. ***

- ELQN PARTNER

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

LNOs valued the tailored technical assistance (TA) provided by the NSH, including individualized support and quarterly
Communities of Practice. These efforts helped LNOs address specific needs and build skills.
However, early TA gaps around outreach strategies and survey development indicated the need for more structured support.
Ongoing TA and professional development were seen as key to sustaining momentum.

Recommendations to Enhance Technical Assistance:

- Offer early, structured TA that builds foundational skills.
- Continue providing individualized, flexible TA to meet emerging needs.

Potential Action Items:

- Provide training on community engagement, data collection, and project planning.
- Maintain regular TA through Communities of Practice and one-on-one support.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR ELQN

Full-scale implementation of initiatives

Continued community engagement and input

Ongoing data collection for impact measurement







