

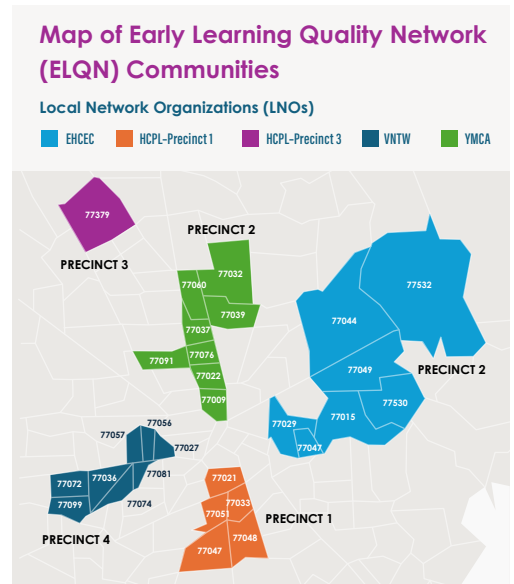
LAUNCHING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY-CENTERED SYSTEM IN HARRIS COUNTY

Early Learning Quality Network Year 2 Highlights



Harris County's Early Learning Quality Network (ELQN) Pilot is a community-centered, 3-year initiative designed to strengthen early learning and child care across the county. The work, supported by the Harris County Department of Economic Equity and Opportunity (DEEO) and CHILDREN AT RISK (the Network Support Hub [NSH] organization), is guided by community input and local data to ensure that child care quality improvements are responsive to the needs of families and providers.

The ELQN, now operating for 2 years, is still focused on five communities identified as child care deserts. Local Network Organizations (LNOs), which are trusted community-based organizations with deep local ties, lead efforts in each of these five communities. LNOs also support vendors contracted by the NSH to implement initiatives selected during Year 1 of the initiative. This document summarizes experiences during the launch and implementation process in Year 2 of the ELQN.



OVERVIEW OF LAUNCH AND IMPLEMENTATION

At the end of Year 1, the ELQN finalized the seven initiatives and began the request for proposal (RFP) process for selecting vendors to support implementation of the initiatives. A vendor was selected for each of the initiatives, and all contracts were executed by July 2025.

Training and Professional Development – The Rupani Foundation	Provides training and coaching to enhance the skills and knowledge of families, regulated child care providers, and Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) providers.	517 caregivers served 32% of target goal met as of Sept 2025
Facility, Safety and Security – Collaborative for Children	Supports facility updates and enhances safety by providing developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor materials and equipment that meet specific needs, as well as improvements that promote the security and well-being of both children and staff at regulated child care providers.	NA <i>Data for this initiative was not available at the time this report was written.</i>
Emergency and Temporary Care – WorkTexas! and Neighborhood Schools	Supports regulated child care providers in serving families with children ages 0–8 who are facing financial hardships, emergencies, or are on the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) waitlist by providing funding for child care and ensuring quick, easy access to support for the families served.	37 programs/classrooms served 148% of target goal met as of Sept 2025
Curriculum Development and Implementation – Frog Street	Provides families, regulated child care providers, and FFN providers with high-quality, developmentally appropriate curricula and learning materials aligned with Texas Early Learning Guidelines, including bilingual support and direct consultation.	13 programs/classrooms served 7% of target goal met as of Sept 2025

Early Learning Kits and Materials – National Literacy Institute	Provides families and FFN providers with high-quality learning materials tailored to young children’s ages and language needs. Participants receive kits filled with books, toys, and activities designed to support early learning and development.	53 caregivers served 46% of target goal met as of Sept 2025
Technology for Households – Easter Seals of Greater Houston	Provides families with developmentally appropriate technological learning tools and training related to the use of technology with young children.	27 caregivers served 29% of target goal met as of Sept 2025
Technology for Child Care Centers – Collaborative for Children	Connects regulated child care providers with improved technological resources aimed at enhancing early childhood development and improving the efficiency of business operations.	10 programs/classrooms served 40% of target goal met as of Sept 2025



1,860
applications received



740
caregivers served



3,064
children benefiting from the initiatives so far



4,500+
community members involved in the outreach



ELQN PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

A Foundation for Success

The trust and collaboration cultivated between LNOs and the community during the planning phase for the ELQN carried over into Year 2 and contributed to a successful launch and implementation. Furthermore, the variety of initiatives launched allowed early care providers to anticipate multiple ways of supporting their community members. Moving forward, a deeper level of trust will need to be established between vendors and the community for implementation to be successful.

Recommendations for Continued Success:

- The ELQN team should maintain and leverage open lines of communication to reinforce the trust established in the communities.
- LNOs could consider a strategic shift in focus to emphasizing quality over quantity in engagements with the community.
- The ELQN team and LNOs could support vendors in continuing to build trust with ELQN communities.

“ A lot of my dreams are coming true. Because I grew up in this community and it means a lot to me to give back to these children ... some things I wish I could have had as a child ... and so I love to help the families. We want them to be proud of where they attend ... We just want to make a good learning experience and to boost our quality. ”

– CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Learning Along the Way

LNOs and vendors experienced a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities that contributed to inefficiency and frustration. Both LNOs and vendors desire more opportunities to resolve these issues and learn from each other. Additionally, ELQN initiatives are supporting several community needs, but there are opportunities to ensure that the ELQN remains a community-centered effort as implementation continues, particularly by considering the cultural and linguistic needs of community members and by supporting caregivers of children with special needs.



“ Just not really knowing exactly how they're outreaching, especially because we are very boots on the ground, and that's how we have gotten the participation that we have up to this point. Just kind of adjusting to them having to be in control of that, and then also figuring out how far do we step in and help, and then also when are we supposed to step back and allow them to do what they're supposed to do on their end? It's been a struggle for [us]. ”

– LNO STAFF

Recommendations for Continued Success:

- The ELQN team should facilitate more clarity in roles between LNOs and vendors, and create more flexibility in established processes to help meet the needs of LNOs and vendors.
- The ELQN team should provide opportunities for LNOs and vendors to share knowledge and problem solve with each other.
- The ELQN team should explore ways to help maintain a community-centered focus, particularly by centering families' cultural and linguistic needs, and supporting children with special needs and their caregivers.

Planning for the Future

Looking ahead, access to high-quality child care remains a top concern for ELQN communities, and participants hope future efforts will prioritize this need. In addition, ELQN team members are already thinking about the end of the ELQN funding and hope to begin or continue conversations about how to continue the impact of the ELQN.

Recommendations for Continued Success:

- The ELQN team should welcome opportunities to continue building partnerships, integrate knowledge and skills, and extend the impact of the ELQN initiatives.
- ELQN team should continue documenting the story of the ELQN to help bring attention to the needs of their communities and the ongoing need for resources and support.

“ I’m hopeful that families in the zip code can get some relief on child care costs. It’s so expensive. It’s so expensive. And again, our fee is very reasonable, but even our reasonable fee can be a burden on people. We tend to serve a low-income demographic. ”

– CHILD CARE PROVIDER

NEXT STEPS

Implementation for the ELQN pilot is ongoing, with initiatives concluding in either December 2025 or August 2026.

DEEO and the NSH will focus on supporting future planning efforts across ELQN communities.

Additional evaluation activities, including a community survey and additional site visits, will take place throughout 2026.

