

# family and children educational services

Brunswick, GA

## Overview

Family and Children Educational Services (FACES) is a group of community-based programs co-located at a complex in an urban, low-income community in Brunswick, Georgia. At FACES, families access a host of prevention and support services to advance the educational and personal achievement of their children. The pre-kindergarten program serves children age 4, Leaps and Bounds serves children ages 3 and 4 with special needs, MELD for Young Dads provides services for fathers with young children, and a lending library provides resources for all types of families.

The FACES philosophy is that:

- Supporting families and children starts with building trust with families
- Services must be preventive, responsive, flexible, family-centered, strengths-based, and comprehensive
- Services must aim to support, not “rescue,” families
- Families are partners, not clients
- Everyone has something to contribute

Through the Success By 6 / Family Connection Glynn collaboration, the organizations that comprise FACES join with Healthy Families, Zero to Three, Head Start, government agencies, and private partners to focus on

## Profile

### Staffing

Family support staff: 10  
Managers / administrators: 5  
Pre-kindergarten teachers: 36  
Non-childcare: 4  
Other: 6

### Children & Families Served

Pre-kindergarten: 260  
Children with special needs: 60  
Total: 320

### Budget

\$1,846,889

### Services Provided On-Site

- Family support services
- Lending libraries
- On-site events
- Parent and child interactive educational series
- Parenting education classes
- Services provided by co-located organizations

early childhood as an entry point for addressing a host of social issues.

## How the Program Builds Protective Factors

Family and Children Educational Services build five key protective factors that reduce child abuse and neglect. Programs, services, and characteristics contributing to each protective factor are listed below:

### Parental Resilience

- Home Visits
- Lending Library
- MELD for Young Dads
- Parenting Education Classes
- Special Events
- Volunteer Opportunities

### Social Connections

- MELD for Young Dads
- Special Events
- Parent and Child Interactive Educational Series
- Parent Meetings
- Parenting Education Classes
- Peer Information Network
- PTA
- Second Steps
- Volunteer Opportunities

### Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Home Visits
- Lending Library
- MELD for Young Dads
- Parent and Child Interactive Educational Series
- Parenting Education Classes

### Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Discretionary Fund
- Family Support Services
- Home Visits
- Leaps and Bounds

### Partners

Bank of America  
Head Start  
Healthy Families  
United Way  
Zero to Three

### Ways of Identifying When Families May Be at Risk

- Teacher observes changes in child's or parent's behavior
- Teacher notices child needs medical or other care
- Child is repeatedly tardy, absent, or late being picked up
- Parents have fallen behind in lunch payments
- Parent is making a job transition
- Changes have been made in who is authorized to pick up the child

### Response Protocol

If a staff member is concerned about a family:

- Staff member contacts resource coordinator
- Resource coordinator reaches out to family and connects them with supports
- If concerns remain, resource coordinator meets with teacher to plan a student support team meeting
- Family is encouraged to invite those they think should be at the meeting
- Student support team meeting is held among: family, FACES staff, and others (school nurses, Healthy Families staff, etc.)
- Support plan for family is developed and carried out

- Parents Helping Parents
- Student Support Team

## Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- Morning Meeting
- Parent and Child Interactive Educational Series
- Second Steps

## Key Program Features

### Family Support Services

- Leaps and Bounds

For families with children in Leaps and Bounds, both a social worker and a disabilities coordinator provide family support services. The disabilities coordinator is an advocate for families and helps parents understand their rights and build their advocacy skills. The message is, “This is your child, and you need to be involved.” Many parents continue to turn to the disabilities coordinator for advice and support after their children have left the program. The disabilities coordinator and the social worker also connect parents to important resources for their children and themselves. These may include transportation, GED preparation, jobs, and social services.

- Pre-Kindergarten Program

For families with children in the pre-kindergarten program, resource coordinators provide family support services. Each coordinator is assigned to a classroom and, along with the classroom teacher, is there to greet children and parents each morning. In this way, parents come to see resource coordinators as part of their daily life, which makes it easier to contact these staff to seek family support services. Classroom teachers and resource coordinators meet weekly to brainstorm on difficult issues and identify children or families who may need extra support. If either the teacher or the coordinator is concerned about a child or parent,

If staff suspect child abuse or neglect:

- They follow a comprehensive, cross-agency, countywide reporting protocol; a school-system protocol; and a protocol for agencies located at FACES.

Two resource coordinators who once worked for the Georgia Department of Children and Family Services serve as informed advocates for families about whom reports must be made to the department.

### What People Say

“I hug the parents just as much as I do the kids—we have parents who are just as withdrawn as their kids.”  
—Classroom staff member

“FACES is not an island. Resource coordinators help to make the connection to the community.”  
—Classroom staff member

“A good many of the parents at this site have had very bad experiences with schools. ... We work really hard to build relationships with them. ... If you do it right, [the home visit] is an important part of building relationships.”  
—Home visitor

“Three teachers who worked with my child each wrote me a letter describing my child’s strengths.”  
—Leaps and Bounds parent

“The teacher helped me realize my son could tie his own shoes and feed himself.”  
—Leaps and Bounds parent

the resource coordinator makes contact by greeting and talking with the parent at pick up or drop-off, holding a meeting with the parent, or offering a home visit.

If staff have concerns about a child, they may discuss the child at one of the monthly student support team meetings. These meetings bring together classroom teachers, resource coordinators, and other staff and partners. The parent is invited to the meeting and can invite members of his or her extended network. If needed, spoken-language or sign-language interpreters participate. The resource coordinator or disabilities coordinator serves as an advocate for the parent and child, building on previous meetings with the parent.

Personality and ability to relate to families weigh heavily in the qualifications of resource and disability coordinators. They tend to be high-level peer advocates, rather than licensed social workers. The work of resource and disability coordinators is valuable to classroom teachers, who know they can count on these staff to bring up challenging issues with parents. These coordinators also provide both parents and teachers with a wealth of information on services and resources available in the community.

### **Help for Families in Crisis**

A discretionary fund of about \$2,000 is available each year to support families in crisis; it is intended to help families pay for birth certificates, head lice treatment, and other small but significant resources. These funds are raised through school picture fees, soda machines, and PTA fundraisers. The Leadership Council, with input from the PTA, decides how the funds are allocated. Staff link families with other community resources first and use the discretionary fund as a last resort.

In addition, through the Parents Helping Parents project, parents bring food, toys, and other needed items to create a communal resource bank that is available to families in crisis, particularly around holidays.

### **Home Visits**

Classroom staff visit families' homes before the beginning of each school year to introduce parents to FACES and to review educational goals. During the visit, the staff member has the opportunity to observe the home environment and make note of conditions that may indicate a need for support—which may be as practical as a need for transportation or air conditioning.

Supplementary home visits are conducted by the resource coordinator to support families in times of crisis and to prevent future crises through education and support services. There is no limit to the number of visits. They do not have a standardized format; staff simply provide whatever families need.

### **Leaps and Bounds**

Leaps and Bounds is an early care and education program for children ages three and four who have disabilities and / or developmental delays. Children participating in Leaps and Bounds also take part in the state's standard pre-kindergarten program, also offered at FACES, through special activities or part-day enrollment. This partnership is very important to parents because it allows them to send their children into a mainstream setting with the confidence that special resources and supports are right around the corner. Leaps and Bounds teachers work with parents to help them understand their children's capabilities and accurately identify the tasks their children can carry out themselves.

### **Morning Meeting**

Every day, in each classroom, the teacher calls together the children for a Morning Meeting that consists of four parts: greeting, sharing, group activity,

and news and announcements. These components provide opportunities for children to practice the skills of greeting each other, listening and responding, solving problems as a group, noticing, and anticipating. In leading the meetings, teachers

demonstrate their belief in children's capacity to take care of themselves and each other as they internalize values such as respect and responsibility.

### **1-2-3 Magic**

1-2-3 Magic is a disciplinary technique that builds on the concept of "time-outs." The technique is used in all FACES pre-kindergarten classrooms, and parents are introduced to it at parent meetings and encouraged to use it at home, creating continuity between children's experiences at school and home.

### **Parent Education**

A number of parent education activities take place at FACES:

- **Lending Library**

The library offers audio, visual, and print materials as well as computers with internet access, safety equipment, and educational toys. Materials are available to all parents in the community as well as home-based childcare providers; a childcare resource and referral agency is on-site at FACES. The FACES complex is large, so library resources are available in three places: at the media center, which is fairly far from the main doors, and at both entrances to the complex, to ensure access for families coming pick up or drop off their children.

- **MELD for Young Dads**

Based on MELD, a national, research-based curriculum, this program provides child development information and a support group for fathers ages 15 to 25 with children up to age 5. Fathers can attend for up to two years. The group addresses underlying causes of violence, parent

knowledge of child development, substance abuse, and other issues. MELD programs are also available through other community-based organizations in the neighborhoods served by FACES.

- Parent and Child Interactive Educational Series

Each event in this series covers a given theme in health and child development. Parents and their children move from room to room, participating in fun activities that increase their awareness and provide them with information.

- Parent Meetings

These are held monthly. The first two meetings of each year are for parents only. Subsequent meetings promote family involvement, and all children, even those who are not students in FACES programs, are welcome. The meetings increase parents' interaction and communication with their children through activities.

- Parenting Education Classes

These occur each week and are called Terrific Tuesdays. Participants may be parents of children involved in FACES programs, home childcare providers, or other parents in the neighborhood. Topics range from early childhood development to parenting skills. Community-based providers of physical, mental, emotional, and social services serve as guest speakers. They share information and link families with services.

- Small-Group Topical Discussions

Held twice each month, these provide opportunities for parents to learn about issues and interact with each other.

- Videotape Observation

Leaps and Bounds staff regularly videotape children in the classroom or eating lunch and share the videotapes with parents. These observations enable

parents to see their children exhibiting desirable behaviors and provide staff with an opportunity to suggest parenting strategies.

### **Peer Information Network**

This program provides peer support, violence prevention, and violence intervention to middle school and high school age youths. It provides training, a peer support hotline, referrals, a web site, and community outreach.

### **Second Step**

Second Step, a violence prevention curriculum, is used in all FACES preschool classes. It builds three essential social competencies in children:

- Empathy
- Impulse control / problem solving
- Anger management

Second Step teaches children how to deal with emotions, resist impulsive behavior, resolve conflict, solve problems, and understand the consequences of their actions. Children learn how to recognize and talk about their feelings, understand issues that lead to conflicts, and use problem-solving strategies to resolve and avoid conflict. They learn by seeing these strategies in action, through practice, and through reinforcement.

Children have the opportunity to practice violence prevention-related skills in their classrooms, on the playground, and at lunch. And because family involvement greatly enhances children's social and emotional learning, the curriculum includes family components that strengthen the link between school and home and encourage children to use their skills in their daily lives.

Parents notice the impact of these activities on their children, themselves, and their relationships with their children. The family activities provide parents with a set of tools for working with their children on issues of

anger. Parents become more conscious of their children's feelings and how their own behavior affects them.

### **Special Events**

FACES hosts special events that develop families' social connections. Twice each month, small- and large-group facilitated discussions are held; time is allowed for informal socializing. Other events include a fall festival, Spring Fling, sing-along, and pizza-pajama

party for parents and children. Informal breakfast get-togethers—Donuts for Dads and Muffins for Moms—are held regularly.

### **Success By 6 / Family Connection Glynn**

Through its participation in this community-wide early childhood initiative, FACES receives:

- Funding for school nurses
- Staffing for MELD for Young Dads and the on-site childcare resource and referral agency
- Matched funding for the four resource coordinator positions
- Leadership and financial support (such as grants and Medicaid billing)

The initiative also provided funds from local businesses to create the new media center at FACES.

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

Each parent whose child is involved in a program at FACES spends at least one hour per month volunteering there—though some spend much more time. Volunteer opportunities include:

- Being a "room parent"
- Presenting at a career day
- Participating in the PTA
- Being on programming leadership committees
- Participating in Terrific Tuesdays