

# Early childhood intervention shows promise for Spanish-speaking families

**Evaluation highlights positive experiences and opportunities for improvements, need for language appropriate tools, and suggests further study for cultural adaptations**

*As designed, the Kansas ABC Early Childhood Initiative included four parent coaches who delivered the program in Spanish. The initiative reflects the changing demographics in Kansas and highlights how the home-visiting program can reach more families with positive results.*

screening for toxic stress, training more providers in the ABC intervention, and evaluating the effectiveness of integrating an evidence-based intervention into the array of early childhood programs through five sites across the state.

## BACKGROUND

A program developed by Dr. Mary Dozier at the University of Delaware, called Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC), is a practical application of findings based on years of research about the interactions between early childhood experiences, brain development, and behavior. ABC is a 10-week evidence-based parenting intervention for caregivers of infants and toddlers who have experienced early adversity.

The home visiting program provides a buffer from the harmful effects of toxic stress and helps restore normal early childhood development. It has shown measurable, long-term positive impacts lasting into middle childhood.

ABC focuses on building healthy families through the development of secure attachment, nurturance and positive regard — supporting parenting competencies that promote positive child outcomes, including strong social emotional skills, coping and resilience from stressors, and school readiness.

## KANSAS ABC EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE

Five philanthropic organizations brought ABC to Kansas through the Kansas ABC Early Childhood Initiative. The first phase of the initiative ran from May 2017 through April 2020.

The initiative aimed to expand the capacity of early childhood providers by promoting widespread

## KANSAS OVERALL EVALUATION FINDINGS

The University of Kansas School of Social Welfare conducted the evaluation of the Kansas ABC Early Childhood Initiative. Overall, the findings are positive. Over three years, the initiative impacted 682 caregivers and 907 children. After completing ABC:

- Caregiver concerns regarding child social emotional functioning decreased.
- Children's cortisol levels, an indicator of stress, became more normalized. (Footnote: Though cortisol level patterns became more normalized, the change was not statistically significant for the entire sample.)
- Parent coaches rated children's overall wellbeing as more positive.
- Caregivers' knowledge and beliefs in their caregiving abilities increased.
- In interactions with their children, caregiver intrusiveness went down, while sensitivity and delight went up.
- Caregiver capabilities significantly improved.

## EVALUATION FINDINGS FOR ABC DELIVERY IN SPANISH

The overall findings were similar for families who received ABC in Spanish as those who received it in English. Interviews with a sample of parent coaches

in Kansas and New York who delivered ABC in Spanish show positive experiences, as well as an opportunity for more to be done for families from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Approximately 41% of families served were Hispanic or Latinx, and 22% primarily spoke Spanish in the home.

Interviews with the bilingual parent coaches show **positive experiences** providing ABC to Spanish-speaking families within two broad categories:

- **Cultural relevance of the program**

*“The Hispanic culture is very based on wanting to make sure that their relationship with their children is there. ... I think that this ABC program builds on that and helps ... to find different ways to help them see that ... playing with your child ... reading a book is important.”*

- **Having a parent coach who spoke Spanish and was Latinx**

*“I think it helps because, in a way, the Hispanic families seem to, I guess, find more comfort because they know that ‘oh you know how things are!’”*

The bilingual parent coaches discussed four **primary challenges**:

- **Lack of translated ABC materials**

*“What I tend to do is read the English manual and then take all of the main points and then translate how I would say it to the family...the direct English to Spanish translation of ABC isn’t very effective, because I feel things get lost in translation...you have to be able to cater to different dialects.”*

- **Varied cultural definitions of intervention concepts**

*“The families, when I tell them you have to be nurturing to your child ... I think that even though we tell them, they have a different understanding of what nurturing is than what we’re explaining to them.”*

- **Limited technical support when working with Spanish speaking families**

*“When it comes to the Spanish model, there is a language barrier .... It would be very beneficial to have ... one bilingual supervisor that can understand the materials.”*

- **Managing the timeframe required with ABC**

*“Especially with the Spanish-speaking families, they are very open and they love dialogue ... at times it becomes difficult to reel them back in to the focus of what we’re talking about.”*

## FURTHER RESEARCH NEEDED TO ENSURE EQUITY IN DELIVERY

These interviews reveal important information about cultural adaptations of an evidence-based intervention. The focus on family appears to be a good fit among Spanish-speaking populations, particularly when the program is delivered by a parent coach with a similar identity.

There are challenges with translating materials or content around nurturance, which is a core ABC component. More exploration is needed regarding how ABC is translated, especially on the ground, to gauge the impact on fidelity and intervention outcomes.

More research with respect to ABC’s core principles and components is warranted to assess their transferability in specific cultural contexts and to better understand impacts on engagement and retention.

### FUNDING PARTNERS:



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