School Empowerment Network
LEAD THE CHANGE

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Aligning Early Childhood Programming to the Science of Early Learning



01

SECTION

Who We Are

About SEN, our theory of change, and why districts partner with us

01 · WHO WE ARE

About SEN

Founded in 2015, SEN partners with districts, networks, and state agencies to build the conditions where rigorous instruction, strong leadership, and clear strategy meet. Strong leaders. Aligned systems. Lasting change.

100K+
students impacted

500+
leaders developed

200+
schools strengthened

40+
districts across 8 states

FOUR WAYS WE PARTNER

woven together by a focus on leadership

Develop Leaders

Building the leadership pipeline that drives better instruction and stronger schools.

Teach to Lead
Aspiring Leaders
Leader-Driven School Improvement

THIS SERVICE

Design Schools

Helping leaders create new, better school models and strong early-childhood programs.

School Design and Redesign
Early Childhood

Strengthen Teaching

Coaching teachers directly to lift the quality of daily instruction.

ENACT HQIM
Special Education Coaching

Evaluate & Plan

Diagnosing where a school or system stands, then setting the priorities and strategy to move it forward.

School Quality Reviews
Executive Coaching
Special Education Audit

01 · THEORY OF CHANGE

By age five, 90% of a child's brain is already developed, making high-quality early childhood education essential for building the literacy skills that drive reading proficiency by third grade and unlock long-term academic success, personal development, and social mobility.

IF WE...

- Support districts in aligning early childhood programming to research-based best practices
- Provide best-in-class professional development to early childhood practitioners
- Make resources available to early childhood practitioners

THEN WE WILL SEE...

- More effective early childhood classrooms grounded in the Science of Early Learning
- Improved kindergarten readiness

WHICH WILL LEAD TO...

- Stronger student outcomes across K-12
- Greater retention of the early childhood workforce
- A strengthened early childhood community of practice within a District



We Believe...

We believe that Early childhood educators who are given a broad understanding of how young children's brains develop and learn have greater impact on student outcomes. Our approach pairs knowledge of the science of early learning with concrete instructional strategies teachers can use immediately in their classrooms.

We partner with districts over multiple years to build this expertise and capacity. Over the course of our engagement, we work alongside educators and leaders to strengthen their knowledge of brain-based early childhood pedagogy and the instructional moves that bring it to life. In addition, we coach teachers on using qualitative and quantitative data for self-assessment and continuous improvement, while training district leaders to sustain this work independently.

This approach creates educators equipped to meet every child's needs, teachers who stay in the early childhood space, and systems that continue to improve long after our partnership ends.

> *“If we are going to teach, we need to understand what it means to learn.”*
>
> **– Jim Heal, How Teaching Happens**

Why Partner with SEN:



We understand 3- and 4-year-old brain development

Helping your educators apply that knowledge to create meaningful, effective learning experiences.



Proven track record with large urban, midsized, and small rural districts

Adding capacity to local teams while building sustainable early childhood systems that work within your unique constraints and resources.



We use real-time data to personalize every partnership

Continuously adjusting our approach based on what's working in your classrooms and what your educators need most.



We build your internal capacity to sustain quality

Developing your leaders and educators with tools, systems, and expertise that continue delivering results long after our partnership ends.

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02

SECTION

Our Approach

How we partner with districts to transform early learning

Intentional, Sustainable Early Childhood Transformation

1 Design and launch

Design and strengthen PreK and early childhood programs aligned to the Science of Early Learning, whether launching new models or elevating existing programs to research-based best practices.

2 Support teachers and leaders

Support teachers and leaders to deliver play-based, knowledge and literacy-rich, PreK and early childhood programs grounded in cognitive science and translated into instructional practice.

3 Drive lasting impact

Build capacity through in-person coaching, professional development, and data-informed reflections that pair the science of early learning with concrete instructional strategies educators can use immediately.

Our Proven Approach

1. ASSESS

- Conduct comprehensive needs assessment to determine educator and leader learning priorities
- Audit current programming and materials for alignment to research-based practices

2. GROW

- Facilitate 4-week coaching cycles blending in-person support with virtual follow-up
- Provide research-based professional development on the Science of Early Learning
- Coach campus leaders on observation, feedback, and instructional support skills
- Support educators in adapting instruction for diverse learners, including students with disabilities

3. SUSTAIN

- Codify your early childhood model aligned to cognitive science and best practices
- Develop sustainable onboarding and training materials for future use
- Create monitoring systems and continuous improvement cycles to maintain beyond our partnership

These tools and systems continue delivering results long after our partnership ends.

The Science of Early Learning

Our work is grounded in five research-based principles

Connecting the Dots

Help learners make connections between new and existing knowledge.

Managing the Learning Load

Learning can be impeded if students are confronted with too much information at once. Break content into manageable chunks and prioritize essential ideas.

Deepening Meaning & Learning

We want students to remember what information means and why it is important, so they should think about meaning when they encounter key ideas.

Creating a Motivating Environment

Students will be motivated to learn in environments where they feel valued and believe they can improve.

Practice and Feedback

Practice must be intentional, structured, and aligned with the skills or knowledge being developed. Students must receive timely and actionable feedback.

Partnering with Districts

PROJECT GOALS

Increase the percentage of early learners demonstrating kindergarten readiness in math and literacy and increase early childhood educator effectiveness in each partner district.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- Collaborate with district and school-based stakeholders to inventory and refine their early childhood model, setting goals to better align their practices with the science of early learning.
- Coach campus and district staff to implement that model effectively.
- Collect and analyze data to inform real-time adjustments, celebrate successes, and utilize learnings to ensure sustainable district practices.
- Share findings to scale high-quality PK programs statewide.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

SCIENCE OF EARLY LEARNING

Increase teachers' and leaders' knowledge of the Science of Early Learning

TEACHER RETENTION

Increase the retention rate of partner districts' early childhood educators

KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Increase students' kindergarten-readiness rates

SCHOOL QUALITY RATING

Improve the overall quality rating of the school/center

Professional Development for Teachers & School Leaders

OUR APPROACH

We deliver professional development that pairs the science of early learning with practical teacher actions and leader look-fors. Through monthly 60-minute modules, half day, or full day professional development offerings, educators explore human cognitive architecture and its implications for early childhood instruction. Leaders learn what high-quality instruction looks like for young children and how to support their teams in delivering it.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- Provide research-based professional development on the Science of Early Learning
- Guide school leaders through four-week feedback cycles focused on specific instructional practices
- Coach leaders to observe, assess, and support teacher growth using aligned observation tools
- Equip educators with concrete instructional strategies they can apply immediately in their classrooms

DELIVERABLES

What Educators Receive: Following each session, participants receive:

- Observation look-fors aligned to the month's focus that leaders use during coaching cycles
- Instructional resources and planning tools for immediate classroom application
- Self-assessment protocols to monitor their own growth and implementation

02 · STRATEGY

What Systems Gain:

At the end of partnership, districts will have:

A codified early childhood model aligned to the Science of Early Learning, including instructional materials, practices, and leadership systems

Trained educators and leaders equipped with the knowledge and skills to deliver high-quality PreK instruction

Sustainable systems including train-the-trainer materials, observation tools, and coaching protocols to independently onboard and develop future teachers





03

OPTIONAL ADD-ON

Funding + Seats Strategy

Offered in select partnerships

03 · OPTIONAL ADD-ON

Early Childhood Funding + Seats Strategy

In select partnerships, we also work with districts and LEAs to build a roadmap for their community's early childhood needs, from opening seats for children ages 0–3 to creating financially sustainable models.

1. ASSESS

- Survey families of young children on care needs, ages, and ability to pay tuition
- Analyze family data and enrollment targets to size demand for infant, toddler, and PreK3 seats

2. DESIGN

- Recommend the right mix of seats, such as PreK3 classrooms and district-run infant and toddler rooms
- Plan outreach that helps families enroll and apply for child care scholarships
- Map licensing, operations, and quality steps toward a Texas Rising Star rating
- Sequence the work into a multi-year roadmap, from launch to a sustainable early childhood hub

3. FUND

- Braid state PreK funding, childcare scholarships, and tuition to cover full classroom costs
- Model year-by-year costs and revenue, including sliding-scale tuition and bridge scholarships
- Identify added revenue, such as Texas Rising Star rates, Workforce Board grants, and summer ADSY funding

Example: In Marfa ISD, this work produced a three-year roadmap to open a PreK3 classroom and two on-campus childcare rooms for children ages 1–3.

A

APPENDIX

Curriculum Detail

Professional learning modules grounded in the Science of Early Learning

APPENDIX · CURRICULUM DETAIL

Early Learning Summer Institute

“Welcome to the Speech Community”

The Summer Institute serves as the launching point for the year, grounding educators in the Science of Learning and providing practical tools for classroom setup and planning.

- Educators identify the five core principles of the Science of Learning and explore how each serves the acquisition of knowledge. They review how limitations in working memory have instructional implications — reinforcing the importance of explicit instruction and simplifying the learning environment.
- The Institute emphasizes the importance of the early childhood classroom in building a vocabulary-rich Speech Community, affirming that literacy development is enfranchisement.
- Participants analyze how routines, systems, and procedures can be improved to optimize attention and cognitive load.
- Teachers develop a 3-week “strong start” plan, including: classroom set-up to optimize attention, and plans for rolling out habits, routines, and procedures aligned with the Science of Learning.
- The environment is explored in terms of how it both looks and feels, with attention to building spaces that are motivating, predictable, and cognitively efficient.



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APPENDIX · CURRICULUM DETAIL

Managing the Learning Load

Learning can be impeded if students are confronted with too much information at once.

This strand emphasizes how educators can reduce cognitive overload and support student learning by structuring instruction intentionally.

- Understand the cognitive architecture of the mind, particularly how working memory is limited and learning requires building long-term memory.
- Modeling and guided practice are emphasized to help children remember important content while avoiding overwhelm.
- Teachers are supported to identify and implement “I Do,” “We Do,” “You Do” structures that make thinking visible.
- Teachers will learn to draw attention to the most meaningful content using three key actions: ensuring the lesson has a clear and grade-level appropriate learning goal, aligning lesson activities to that goal, and engaging all learners, not just a subset, in thinking about the meaning of content.
- Educators also learn that what students attend to is what they will learn, and they explore how to curate instructional experiences to direct attention strategically.



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APPENDIX · CURRICULUM DETAIL

Connecting Dots

“Students learn new ideas by reference to ideas they already know.”

This principle supports educators in helping students make meaningful connections that anchor new knowledge to prior understanding.

- Teachers learn to develop “mental velcro” — instructional moves that help ideas stick.
- The Simple View of Reading is introduced, highlighting the dual importance of language comprehension and word recognition.
- Educators review their early-year themes to find opportunities for thematic coherence and to build a shared “speech community.”
- Lessons are framed to activate prior knowledge and prompt children to make links between past and new learning experiences.
- Teachers practice three key actions that support this work and learn how language-rich lessons also contribute to the development of executive functions.



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APPENDIX · CURRICULUM DETAIL

Deepening Meaning & Learning

We want students to remember what information means and why it is important, so they should think about meaning when they encounter to-be-remembered material.

This strand pushes teachers to support effortful thinking — helping students reflect not just on what they're learning but why it matters.

- Teachers explore why "memory is the residue of thought" and how the quality of student thinking affects retention.
- Educators identify and practice teacher actions that prompt effortful thinking, ensuring that students are mentally engaging with content in ways that foster long-term memory.
- They also design and implement participation routines that ensure all learners are actively attending to key ideas.
- Emphasis is placed on building routines and expectations so that all students — not just a few — are prompted to think deeply about content aligned to learning goals.



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APPENDIX · CURRICULUM DETAIL

Practice & Feedback

Practice is essential to learning new facts, but not all practice is equivalent.

This final principle centers on how students internalize learning through repetition, feedback, and meaningful engagement over time.

- Teachers examine effective learning strategies, including: distributed practice (spreading practice over time) and spaced retrieval (recalling content at intervals).
- Instruction is aligned with what cognitive science tells us about how facts are retained and skills are built over time.
- In math, educators focus on embedding counting and arithmetic in daily meetings, play, and lessons.
- Teachers explore how the classroom environment can include dynamic math manipulatives and support daily routines that promote math fluency.
- Educators also reflect on national trends, acknowledging that PK classrooms often underemphasize math, and are challenged to rethink how instructional time is allocated to foundational numeracy.



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