Press Release

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Escambia County Adopts LENA Technology to Close the Word Gap in Pensacola Childcare Centers

Early Learning Coalition Pilots New LENA Grow™ Model to Improve the Language Environment at Early Learning Centers

Boulder, Colo., 10/31/16. The Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County, Fla. (ELC) and the LENA Research Foundation have announced the launch of LENA Grow™, a program that helps childcare providers and teachers close the word gap. LENA Grow measures the amount of talk going on in a classroom, giving feedback that motivates teachers to talk more with children.

Research indicates that early talk (birth to three) builds babies' brains, but that children of high-need families tend to experience millions fewer words and conversations than children from more affluent families. During this period, babies' brains grow to 80% of their adult size, so this is the critical window to prevent achievement gaps. Since many children spend much of the day in childcare, increasing interactive talk in early childhood classrooms is essential to making a difference in cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

The core of LENA Grow is the LENA System™, a patented "talk pedometer" that records language throughout a child's day, then translates the recording into data about talk, provided in easy-to-read, actionable reports. The audio is then deleted for privacy.

Data for teachers focuses primarily on conversational turns, a strong measure of interactive talk. Hourly breakouts indicate which times during the day activities were most effective at increasing talk. At the individual level, data builds a record of each child's language development over time and helps to identify children who may benefit from more individual attention.

In creating LENA Grow for childcare providers, LENA expands offerings that have traditionally focused on the home environment. This new model factors years of experience using LENA technologies to help parents increase talk with their children in programs like LENA Start in five cities across the country, Providence Talks in Providence, Rhode Island, and the Thirty Million Words® Initiative in Chicago.

"We've had extremely successful results increasing home language with our parent programs," said Dr. Stephen Hannon, president of LENA. "LENA Grow is an efficient way to bring the same kind of awareness to childcare teachers so they can help their kids even more effectively. Pre-K programs help close gaps, but that age is often too late for many disadvantaged kids, so we're happy to establish a solution that can make a real difference at the earlier ages."

Beginning in November, LENA Grow will be piloted with two providers in Escambia County. The pilot is a collaboration with ELC, and feedback will help to refine implementation and integrate appropriate training and professional development resources. Expansion to several additional providers is planned for early 2017.

"LENA Grow honors the critical role that early childhood education plays in a child's development," said Bruce Watson, Executive Director of the Early Learning Coalition. "Our collaboration with the LENA Foundation is a data-driven way to improve outcomes across our classrooms."

For information on bringing LENA Grow to your community, contact Jess Simmons at 303-441-9048, or email jsimmons@lenafoundation.org.

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About the LENA Research Foundation

The LENA Research Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity based in Boulder, Colorado. Its mission is to accelerate language development to improve the cognitive, social, and emotional health of children birth to five and close achievement gaps. Used by researchers and clinicians all over the world, the LENA System™ measures a child's language environment and provides vital feedback to parents and professionals in programs dedicated to close the language, learning, and opportunity gap for children. For more information on the foundation, please visit lena.org.

About Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

The Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County is a 501 (c)(3) agency whose mission is to identify and meet the needs of children and families to lay the foundation of lifetime success by: maximizing each child's potential, preparing children to enter school ready to learn, and helping families achieve economic self-sufficiency. For more information, please visit www.earlylearningescambia.org