

LEADERS' *Cagniappe*



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EARLY LEARNING
CENTER.**



Lindsey Fontenot is the director for the South Cameron Early Learning Center, one of the many hats she wears in a small parish with 193 children under five. As Lead Agency coordinator and K-12 math supervisor for Cameron Parish School System, Lindsey has focused intently with her teachers on targeted lesson planning. Lindsey works side-by-side with teachers to figure out how to weave together high quality curriculum with excellent child interactions.

South Cameron Early Learning Center opened in 2017 as a “center within a school” and the first Type III center in south Cameron because there were no early learning centers in this rural area serving three year olds and faculty wanted young children to have some classroom experience before starting Prekindergarten (Pre-K). Louisiana Department of Education Lead Agency Director, Kaye Eichler says, **“The leadership in south Cameron truly stepped up to provide a community need, exemplifying the role of lead agencies.”**

As the center began its work teaching three year olds, the rest of the parish carefully watched to see if it would succeed. As a CLASS™ observer, Lindsey knew that their success hinged on effective teaching. “It was important to us to teach with a CLASS™ lens, every day, not just when we are being observed. Because it is how children learn.”



Lindsey Fontenot
**DIRECTOR,
SOUTH CAMERON
EARLY LEARNING CENTER**

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In the first year, Lindsey, her classroom teacher, Lauren Baccigalopi, and paraprofessional, Jessica Richard, spent hours planning lessons during evenings and weekends. “It was a collaborative effort, and there were a lot of moments of frustration as we tried to figure out how to implement curriculum, engage with children, and ensure lessons were age appropriate.” They decided to plan mornings in 20 minute cycles, working only in small groups, and eventually created a planning tool to guide them. Using a Tier I curriculum, they targeted indicators of high quality engagement in each lesson. For example: **To prepare for a reading of *The Three Little Pigs*, the teacher would map concept development, listing out what is being compared and the advanced language that is being introduced.** Using CLASS™ as a teaching tool ensures that children are engaged deeply in the quality curriculum through high levels of instructional support.

“It is my belief that proper planning is vital to the success of our early learning center. The development of the planning tool has been such an important instrument for us.” Visits from Picard and CLASS observers validate their approach to curriculum. They knew they were onto something after the first visit because of their high CLASS™ scores. Families have also taken notice of great things happening at the center, and how lively, engaged and thoughtful their children are.

By the end of the year, Lindsey’s investment of time had paid off. The teacher and para were mapping interactions that align with curriculum on their own. The team had struggled together, and now CLASS™ is a seamless part of how they use curriculum every day. **“Taking on the threes, we didn’t know what was age appropriate. Together we learned how deeply they can analyze a situation, and solve problems. It is such a benefit to have them. We learn so much from each other.”**

And the collaborative process they used that first year hasn’t ended—it’s just changed. New ways of engaging with children has led to new questions. But Lindsey and her team have a track record of success and they plan to continue building on it.

In case you missed it, Lindsey, Lauren, and Jessica shared their interaction planning tool at the Teacher Leader Summit in June.

