



## Nash and Edgecombe counties, NC

▲ Community Example from Chapter 2 of “Lessons for Leaders:”  
*Lessons in Communication*

### Community Background

The Down East Partnership for Children (DEPC) is a nonprofit organization whose early work focused on educational and social supports for young children and families in Nash and Edgecombe counties in eastern North Carolina. When DEPC became the lead agency for the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* (HKHC) grant, it recognized a need for health to become a key priority. Although this required a shift in perspective by some staff members, partners and community members, the change in approach aligned perfectly with DEPC’s mission. The partnership’s strong relationships and reputation in the community also proved instrumental as it adopted a healthy communities frame. This is particularly notable given the community context. Nash and Edgecombe counties are comprised of small towns and rural areas, a large population of minority families, a rapidly growing Latino population and high rates of unemployment and poverty. DEPC’s network included 70 members from 50 different agencies, including community organizations, local government officials, educational institutions and organizations, parents and community residents.

### Community Action

As an early strategy, the HKHC partnership utilized established networks and approaches to introduce ideas about healthy policy and environmental changes. For example, the partnership shared assessment data and educational information about healthy eating and physical activity with the child-care homes and centers with whom it was already partnering around early education and social services. To foster buy-in and implementation of policy changes, the partnership introduced successful evidence-based models for

healthy eating and physical activity policy changes, including the Nutrition and Physical Activity for Child Care (NAP SACC) and Natural Learning Initiative. HKHC partners worked with child-care staff on an ongoing basis to meet the unique needs and goals of each home and center as they implemented changes. Noting that the social learning curve differed across homes and centers, with some adopting policy change more quickly than others, HKHC partners learned to assess readiness for policy change and provide support accordingly. For example, they encouraged staff to start with smaller, incremental changes, such as switching from offering whole milk to 2 percent milk rather than an extreme change to skim milk. Additional education and support in interpreting new policies was also important for successfully shifting their focus to health and sustainable policy approaches.

The Nash and Edgecombe counties’ HKHC partners also utilized their established role as community conveners and facilitators to influence policy makers. When asked to meet with a City of Rocky Mount elected official, DEPC Executive Director Henrietta Zalkind requested that they walk together through downtown Rocky Mount to their meeting site. Along the way, Henrietta identified opportunities for improved pedestrian infrastructure.

HKHC Project Director Jamie Wilson said, “What has worked is... bringing people in...and letting them see how they could take the work and do it in their environments, whether their church, their own backyard, the child-care home, so that you start to really create a movement and a different way of looking at community health.”