

# Sweet Dreamzzz, Inc.

## Innovation 2015

Good sleep is a basic, childhood need. Sadly, disadvantaged children often lack the bedtime routines and nighttime essentials necessary to be well-rested.

Sweet Dreamzzz's Early Childhood Sleep Education Program (ECSEP) is innovative because it takes a team-approach to helping disadvantaged preschoolers get a good night's sleep. It also helps families overcome informational AND financial barriers to being well-rested. The ECSEP provides preschool teachers with the training, lesson plans, and materials necessary to weave sleep education into their curriculum for two weeks. Their low-income students participate in the age-appropriate, engaging, hands-on activities to learn how and why to get a good night's sleep. Meanwhile, preschoolers' parents attend a workshop to gain tips and tools (bedtime routine charts, stickers, etc.) for creating bedtime routines at home. Teachers, preschoolers, and parents form a triangle of support around sleep health. And because the ECSEP targets low-income families, each child receives free bedtime basics (blankets, books, toothbrushes, etc.) that help ensure warmth, comfort, and hygiene at night. With sleep awareness in their minds and practical materials in their homes, disadvantaged children can get the sleep necessary for good health and academic readiness. Sweet Dreamzzz is the ONLY agency in the nation offering these innovative services!

In order for preschoolers (age 3-5) to enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn, they need more and better sleep. Both sleep education and practical bedtime materials are key to helping low-income children to get sleep that is appropriate in quantity and quality. And if teachers, students, and parents can all be involved in the process, the likelihood of bedtime success is greatly improved.

Sweet Dreamzzz has developed a comprehensive sleep program that takes a team approach to addressing both the informational and material needs of the disadvantaged preschoolers and their families: The Early Childhood Sleep Education Program.

The Early Childhood Sleep Education Program (ECSEP) aims to improve the health, well-being, and subsequent academic performance of low-income preschoolers through the provision of sleep education and nighttime essentials. Its three connected target audiences include: 1) Preschool teachers working with disadvantaged populations 2) Preschool students; 3) And parents/guardians of preschoolers.

First, the ECSEP empowers preschool teachers with the information and materials necessary to weave sleep health into the preschool curriculum for a two-week period. Teachers attend an interactive, hour-long workshop with Sweet Dreamzzz's staff. During this session, teachers receive useful information about the importance of sleep, and an overview of the ECSEP and how it teaches preschoolers and their parents about healthy sleep habits. Teachers are provided with a manual that contains all of the program's lesson plans, reproducibles, and curriculum standards. They also receive a large classroom presentation kit filled with all of the teaching materials and equipment necessary to conduct the program's enrichment activities in their own classrooms.

Once teachers are trained, the preschool students participate in the entertaining, hands-on ECSEP lessons conducted by their teachers in their classrooms. Through age-appropriate, interactive activities (e.g. helping a teddy bear get ready for bed, identifying numbers on clocks, sorting healthy versus unhealthy snacks, sequencing nighttime events, charting bedtimes, and reading books about sleep), children learn why sleep is important and how to stick to a bedtime routine.

Parents are the third component of the triangle of support the ECSEP aims to form around healthy sleep habits. Parents/guardians attend an hour-long workshop lead by select preschool staff, who have participated in Sweet Dreamzzz's comprehensive Train-the-Trainer program. Through a mix of lecture/presentation and interactive discussion, parents learn about the benefits of good sleep, the costs of inadequate sleep, how and why to use the bedtime essentials

their children receive (listed below), and how to create and stick to bedtime routines. They also receive helpful take-home tools like bedtime routine charts, stickers, and reminder magnets to help make bedtime a positive team effort each night.

As mentioned earlier, the ECSEP is available to preschool centers/programs that focus on the needs of economically disadvantaged children (e.g. Head Start, Great Start Readiness Program, etc.). At least 75% of the students enrolled must qualify for free/reduced lunch. In order to help participants overcome economic barriers and have a better chance at a good night's sleep, Sweet Dreamzzz provides each family with free bedtime essentials for their preschooler. These include:

- A fleece blanket for warmth and comfort
- A toothbrush and toothpaste for health and hygiene
- A copy of the book "Goodnight Moon" to aid with nighttime relaxation and promote literacy and family bonding
- And a teddy bear (which is also used during the classroom curriculum) to provide bedtime security and help children remember and model important sleep health lessons

With teachers, students, and parents working together to encourage healthy sleep habits, and with families having practical sleep materials in their homes, children are more likely to be well-rested, healthy, and ready to learn. One of the greatest features of the ECSEP is that the educational component is self-sustaining. The classroom teaching materials and lesson plan binder (with all of its reproducible activity sheets) can be used not only to provide sleep education to students now, but also to new students for many years to come. Additionally, select center/school staff members participate in a comprehensive Train-the-Trainer (T3) program to become empowered with the training and all of the materials to be able present the Parent Workshop portion of the ECSEP to incoming parents each year. So by providing funds to help conduct the ECSEP during the 2014-15 school year, RMYF would also be investing in educating thousands more students and families in the years to come. The lessons of the ECSEP would continue at the targeted site in an accurate manner, without need for direct involvement from Sweet Dreamzzz, or funding from additional, outside resources. Teachers and staff would be empowered to make sleep education a lasting part of their preschool and parent education curriculum.

Another wonderful feature of the ECSEP is that it is portable. While Sweet Dreamzzz is located in Michigan, for the purposes of this grant, we will be working with Mary's Center in Washington, D.C -- a non-profit organization providing medical, social, and education services to families in need.

Mary's Center provides health care, family literacy, and social services to 24,000 individuals whose needs often go unmet by the public and private systems. Operating as a Federally Qualified Health Center since 2004, Mary's Center provides access to health care services regardless of participants' ability to pay. 100% of Mary's Center's clients are new or recently immigrated families. Approximately 70% of their clients are Latino, 12% are Black/African American, and 13% are Caucasian/White. Approximately 90% are economically disadvantaged (qualify for free/reduced lunch).

Sweet Dreamzzz will conduct its ECSEP in conjunction with Mary's Center's Family Literacy Program. This program provides parents and their young children with the tools needed to be successful in school and in the workplace. While parents are in class, children attend early childhood classes. These classes prepare children for kindergarten by developing their language, literacy, cognitive, motor, and social skills. The program also offers Parent and Child Together time, or PACT, which offers participants a wonderful opportunity to work cooperatively to enhance their newly acquired skills.

Funding allows Sweet Dreamzzz to provide the ECSEP for the Family Literacy Program (FLP) at Mary's Center in Washington, D.C.

Sweet Dreamzzz will present our Train-the-Trainer program to FLP adult education teachers. These teachers will then provide the ECSEP's parent workshop to the parents of FLP preschool students (ages 3-5). They will also present the parent workshop to the remaining parents attending FLP parenting classes (available for parents with children ages 0-7). Sweet Dreamzzz will also train FLP preschool teachers to conduct the two-week ECSEP curriculum with their

preschoolers. When the 2014-15 project is complete, three adult education teachers will be trained, and will in turn educate 225 parents (50 parents of preschoolers and 175 additional parents). Additionally, four preschool teachers will receive the training/curriculum to provide the ECSEP to 50 preschoolers. All 225 families will receive blankets, books, and toothbrushes/paste. Preschoolers will also take home teddy bears that they use in class. The ECSEP will break informational and economic barriers that prevent disadvantaged youth from getting a regular, good night's sleep!

Fortunately, the educational component of the ECSEP is self-sustaining. Mary's Center will be able to educate students and parents well beyond the 2014-15 school-year!