

Early Childhood Development Collaboration meeting 6/2/14

Conference call with Randi Hewit, Chemung County Community Foundation; notes (thanks, Laura B!)

Coordinating role of the Community Foundation

- **Data.** In 2006 the plan for a Chemung County School Readiness program was begun, and in 2007 the initiative was really started, by examining DIBELS (pre-literacy) data showed that 40% of children were not ready for kindergarten. Further examination showed 40% scoring below grade level at kindergarten, and that this set a trend for individual students that was reflected in their 4th grade and secondary test scores.
- **Convening.** We got everyone who has a touch point with kids under 5 years old into a room. (We involved the Childcare Council; CIDS (Comprehensive Interdisciplinary Development Services); people working on any kind of disability, speech delay, etc.), and people in pediatrics, libraries, school districts, mental health.
- **Assessing & Planning.** We looked at holes in the system and how much we spend: \$15,000,000/year on 0-5 year olds. We wanted everyone to have their eye on the same goal. That goal was to cut the number of kids unprepared for kindergarten in half. This would involve increases in home visits, trainings, and tactics.
- **Funding.** What we needed to get only a small amount of money to get over the finish line. That amounted to \$2,000,000 spent over 8 years, or \$400/per birth a year. We needed a couple of extra nurses, books in homes, etc. We worked out a way to address this: Who has money, and who needs it? We created a way that everyone puts money into some pot, and we scotch money out of one place and into another where it's needed.
- **Refining Data.** Indicators we considered: We had DIBELS Data, but it was lacking. E.g., we wanted to assess whether a child has emotional control and cognitive readiness, versus reading fluently but having no emotional control. We worked with Rochester to create an assessment with 4 cognitive areas (Initiative, Music and Movement, Language, Literature and Science) as well as 4 non-cognitive areas: (Task orientation, Behavior Control, Assertiveness, and Peer Social Skills). Then we turned those 8 indicators over to Columbia University and found that only 47% of kids were school ready. (DIBELS data was masking a lot).
- **Other assessments:** looking at early childhood environment for children 2-5--(Childcare, family, daycare, infant care) because these are all school-readiness incubators; not TV. Family Daycare providers have the most kids; we worked on tools to evaluate interactions with children and that unlocked more training for providers. We used Master Observers to see programs, using standard tools. We had six Master Observers, some who were retired, who visited 5-25 Family Daycares. Eckert CLASS??
- **Coordinating w/ Stakeholders.** We did a lot with the scores to capture the hearts of kindergarten teachers, to do non-cognitive evaluation of kids and to see what the value is to them as teachers. We make all the instruments friendly to teachers, kids and parents. We turned information around really fast, on the child, the classroom and school, within weeks. So the teacher gets information quickly—benefitting them!
- **Engaging Parents.** Parents' involvement—if parents have low literacy levels, the school nurses administer it. It's been shocking to see the amount of parent backlash to Common Core testing (in other counties) because we involved the parents here right up front. The benefits to parents—they never got a score from the teacher unless they requested that. The kinds of questions asked helped them learn what kids needed from them: e.g., “Does the child have a regular bedtime?” “What are her favorite foods?” “Has your child ever been to a library?”
- **Evaluation.** Child Observational Record (COR), PACE—Parent Appraisal of Children's Experiences), TCRS -- Teacher Child Rating Scale. Columbia Teachers College/SUNY-Albany
- **Ongoing funding.** The Community Foundation paid \$30,000 for the whole county, and now only pays \$17,000. That is sustained through BOCES co-ser agreement/state funding reimbursement

Reflections: Nuts and Bolts.

When you want an entire community change, it's not easy. The Steering Committee needs to get along. We learned the importance of the relationships, of trusting and liking each other. Don't fight over turf, money, and recognize that each person is an expert at what they do. We used homegrown experts in Chemung County.

We expressed the message to a young mother: "Be the expert on being Finn's mom. Finn will teach you how." No one knows Chemung County like we know it. Respect the amount of institutional knowledge among the people on the Steering Committee. Love, collaboration. What they needed was a lot of money!

It really helps to have a Community Foundation. We draw boundaries around getting kids ready. We can deliver them to school. But we did not take on getting the schools ready. We need K-12 reform efforts, but School Readiness Project has ONE goal. Individuals among us have other goals as well. But, there are 1,000 babies being born every year, and there are always new kids and new parents.

So, our training investment is paying off. But just as some who is a provider gets solid, they might decide to become a teacher! Also, we're delivering parents who are better advocates for their kids, and that is changing the schools.

After Set-Up:

Now that providers have this as part of their day-to-day work, there is less need for Coordinators and Steering Committee time. At the beginning, 1-2 years, well over 40% of Randi's time was dedicated to this, and 5-6 other people were dedicated ¼ time. We use people within the organizations to put the time in; we needed decision-makers at the table to be able to say "Yes, we can do this."

We learned that the State no longer funded.... Don't build on anything but Local funding. Nobody can take care of you but yourself. We have local experts and local money.

Q & A:

Among providers who became teachers, did family income go up? We don't track that but the Childcare Council tracks that through their other databases.

School Readiness is correlated to income, but wealthy families were not hitting it out of the park!

Inclusion? We include ALL children. We know that 10-12% will shake out into developmental disabilities, and may not be ready for kindergarten.

Improvements? Any kid can be a learner, and be a fantastic student. We work with every kid and turn on other levels of resources where needed.

Demographics of the network? 60% female, 40% male split in the Steering Committee. The Childcare Council is predominantly female (or all female?).

Degree of Business Sector involvement? Not super-involved. The Steering Committee reports to the Readiness Council.

School Districts involved? The Superintendents were critical. We ran into contract issues; in one district, every teacher got an extra day off and an extra support person while teachers did assessments. We met with the unions and emphasized that there was no intent to turn this into a teacher assessment process.

You have universal pre-k? We have universal pre-k which can be accessed through a call-in line. SRP can place you in pre-k in other districts. A high-quality pre-k experience can make up for a lot in readiness. School-based pre-k and Head Start, are the majority, and we have fewer community-based. It's important to get our school districts on board. We created new pre-k spots even in districts... the local school board might put in some money.

Assessments are given before kindergarten. We have a universal assessment now.

Other places—doing something similar: Broome County and Rochester.