

Childhood Readiness and Success Team Notes – October 13, 2010



Team Goal: In Carroll County, all children are ready for Kindergarten and achieve at or above grade level success by the end of third grade.

Attendance: Howard Cunningham, Nancy Coville, Jay McIntire, David Rudewick, Carol DeLaurier, Cyndi Paulin

Guest speakers on conference call: Irma Brooks (Decatur/Macon County, IL), and Lydi Davidson, Susan Smith and Kim Owens (Shelby County, IN)

The team conducted a conference call with two other county-wide education efforts in order to gather information to inform our own efforts.

Similarities between other efforts and Carroll County

- Several independent school districts across the county
- Mix of more urban and rural areas (Decatur more urban than Carroll County) as well as variation in how different towns are doing across the county (ie: some that are really struggling and others that are doing pretty well.)
- Mostly half-day Kindergarten, very little full day Kindergarten. Kindergarten attendance not compulsory by law.
- County-wide approach is new to both areas.
- Schools were not using any common readiness assessments prior to their efforts.

Highlights from call:

- Identifying what current readiness looked like and communicating that with the community was a strong motivator for the community to get involved; the information was a call to action – “community was shocked and embraced the idea that we need to do something”. In Decatur’s case, 34% of children were “ready” for Kindergarten in year 1 and they have increased that to 65% in year 3. Their goal is 71% for year 4.
- Community decided that focusing on the pre-Kindergarten age was critical - waiting until grade 1 was “too late” even though school attendance is not compulsory until age 7.
- Both groups started with the immediate timeframe before children come to Kindergarten (summer before) but have been pairing that with a focus on earlier years over time.
- Our data isn’t pretty, we come together to talk about it together, we don’t want to remain in this place.
- Common matrix – both using Brigance as the assessment tools. They both have concerns because it doesn’t assess social and emotional but it is the best they have right now, good standard tool.
- Supporting/working with pre-schools and licensed and unlicensed childcare providers is key. What do they need so community can reach goal of increased success for it’s children? Review with them the ‘gaps’ that are identified through the assessments and they will know best what they need for professional development or other resources in order to improve.
 - Important partners – caution that they feel as valued as school personnel in the process.
- Reach out to elected leaders and show link to economic development. (Lydi – their self-sufficiency conversations in the community constantly loop back to the need for solid education and the need to have kids on a solid path as early as possible.)
- Open communication and shared values critical (community and schools)

- County-wide approach is necessary to gain more results but takes a lot of work; must reach out regularly to all schools around the county and all communities around the county. Important to work closely with local school & community leaders since they know their schools and communities best. The local school staff should be the point of contact for teachers, children and parents since those connections work better than with an 'outsider'.
- Shelby's county wide Jump Start program (3 weeks prior to Kindergarten starting) cost \$45k for whole county. Kids were ready to go on first day of Kindergarten, 'the first day was a learning day', a big help the social emotional adjustment.
- Participation will wax and wane depending on particular actions group is working on. A lot of different people will come together at different times.
- Great power in roundtables, visiting Rotary Clubs, town meetings, etc. Need for engagement and building momentum.
- Effort is broad, but this is what the community has chosen to do and feel a commitment to follow through.
- Keep at it and don't give up. The results are worth it.

Wrap up discussion

- The team liked the Shelby comprehensive definition of "Kindergarten readiness" which includes ready kids, ready schools, ready families and ready communities. It is clear, friendly language and brief.
- The group was amazed by how similar the paths and the issues of the other two counties are to Carroll County. The call was encouraging and inspiring. It was very helpful to hear from others grappling with the same issues.

Other discussion

Assessment/screening – Carol DeLaurier reported back to the team on what she learned about the Watch Me Grow screening tool. This is something that is being implemented state-wide and was piloted in Conway by Children's Unlimited. The team would like to hear more detail about the Watch Me Grow and what might be needed in Carroll County in order to reach more children. Carol DeLaurier will reach out and invite Barbara to the next meeting.

School survey's – group will push forward to get as much data back as they can in the next couple of weeks and then start with what they have. Knowing the current landscape is important in order to figure out effective next steps and to engage the community. The community will be more engaged when they can better understand the specific issues and the solution will be more focused rather than asking people to commit simply because it is a good idea.

Using Social Media such as a blog, twitter and facebook are tools others are using. Could do an "Ask a teacher" – what are you worried about for your child. Carol shared that most of the struggling families she used to work with had a cell phone. HUB family resource center is using text messages very effectively. (I followed up with the HUB and they have been signing their families up for a free service called text4baby for expecting and new parents that sends 1 informational text per week timed to their child's age. <http://text4baby.org/index.html>. It could be something the team might wish to promote.

Next Meetings: Wednesdays, November 17 and December 15 at 6:00 pm at Bearcamp Valley School.