All Hands on Deck: Leveraging Resources, Aligning Efforts to Establish High-Quality Early Childhood Education

Summer 2013 Meeting
Oak Park, Illinois
Who We Are

• Initiated in 2002: Impetus came from Oak Park Elementary School District

• Driving Issue: Ensuring that ALL Oak Park children have access to high-quality early care and learning experiences

• Established in 2003 as a nonprofit organization, the Collaboration became a public/private partnership in which all of the local governmental agencies contribute financially and participate through staff and/or board involvement

• More than 60 active partners:
  – Village, Elementary and High School Districts, Township, Park District, Library
  – Community College, Universities
  – Health care providers, developmental service providers, Early Intervention
  – Child care centers, preschools, home child care providers
A Snapshot of Oak Park and River Forest
Children Birth Through Age 5

- There are 5,400 children in Oak Park and River Forest under kindergarten age.
- 800 children are at-risk due to family income, special needs, or other factors.
- 70% of children under kindergarten age live in families with all parents working.
- There is a lack of services for infants, toddlers, and their families.
- 95% of families use some form of nonparental care; many families use a patchwork of care.
- Parents at all income levels report feelings of isolation and stress when seeking to locate early childhood services.
Vision: Children arrive at kindergarten safe, healthy, ready to succeed and eager to learn

Every child has access to high-quality early care and education

All parents have the information and support they need in their role as a child’s first and most important teacher

The most at-risk children and their families receive intensive services to ensure healthy development and school readiness
Collaboration Council
Reviews and advises on:
- budget and finances
- policy and program direction
- board members

Collaboration Board
- Supervises Executive Director
- Promulgates policy, sets direction
- Provides financial oversight and adopts budget

Jurisdictional Oversight Board
- Reviews annual budget and audit
- Reviews program services and outcomes

Early Detection Screenings
- Establish system to assure all children birth to five receive periodic developmental screening
- Conduct vision and hearing screenings at preschools
- Implement follow-up processes to ensure all children needing assessments and services receive them
- Maintain accurate, up-to-date inventory of services and disseminate to all providers and families

Parent Information and Support
- Provide information about child development and services to every parent
- Offer every at-risk family intensive parent education/support
- Make available group support and periodic visits to all families
- Publish Early Childhood Resource Directory bi-annually

Professional Development
- Provide training programs in best practice and career development advice to preschool and child care staff
- Coach centers on quality improvement and qualify them for state recognition and financial incentives
- Provide leadership coaching to center directors
- Develop loan/scholarship program for college credit and training programs
- Offer annual symposium on critical early childhood issues

Public Preschool Coordination
- Coordinate outreach for, and referral to, all programs for at-risk children
- Lead curriculum planning, instructional improvement, and unified assessment by programs to ensure high quality
- Work with all early education providers to establish community expectations for incoming kindergarteners

Voluntary Database
Includes all children birth to five to monitor program participation, service usage and program impact
Includes staff of early care and education programs to monitor staff qualifications, professional development activities and participation in Illinois State quality enhancement programs to monitor impact of programs
Benchmarks for Success

- **Child Outcomes:** Every child arrives at kindergarten safe, healthy, ready to succeed and eager to learn.

- **Service Delivery Outcomes:** Parents and children receive the early childhood care and education and parenting education and support services they need.

- **System Outcomes:** Oak Park has a high-quality, coordinated early childhood system, that aligns with K-12 districts and state programs and strategies.
Funding Environment

- At Adoption of the Strategic Plan – State budget collapsed

- Foundation and grant funding redirected to shore up state policy, systems alignment, and quality improvement work

- Oak Park’s diversity is a strength and presents special challenges – number of at-risk children is not great enough to qualify for targeted funding available from the state and many foundations

- Oak Park has little control over the braiding and blending of federal and state programs, does not receive Head Start funds or have input into the contracts; it does not control child development block grant funding in the municipality. The effort is one that needs to work with all parties – weaving efforts together.
Local Solution

• Three largest jurisdictions in Oak Park – Village, Elementary and High School Districts agreed on the vital importance of high-quality early childhood services to their missions... “a stake in the ground issue.”

• Established an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to purchase services from the Collaboration for Early Childhood to establish an integrated system of high-quality programs. The contract for services defines services to be provided and incorporates the community supported benchmarks to monitor progress on implementation and measure impact at the three levels described earlier – child, services delivery and system integration.

• Value on the IGA after 3-year ramp period is $1.2 M
Key Components of the IGA

• Recitals provide historical, statutory, and research-based rationale
• Establishes a governance structure for overseeing and directing the operations contemplated in the IGA and for reviewing and making recommendations to the Collaboration regarding the contract for services
• Establishes an administrative structure to administer all legal and fiscal activities
• Specifies financial obligations of each party and provides for a clearly defined process and calendar for each party to terminate participation in the IGA
Steps Taken to Achieve Agreement

• Tied effort to core values of Oak Park and mission of three jurisdictions
• Strong support of key leaders, Village President David Pope and Oak Park Elementary School District Board President Peter Barber and Board Members
• Established a core working group of representatives and CEO of the three jurisdictions to guide the effort, share concerns of each body and ensure they are addressed
• Strong public information campaign
• Identified simple funding formula that each jurisdiction could support
Returns to a Unit Dollar Invested

- Programs targeted towards the earliest years
- Preschool programs
- Schooling
- Job training

Source: Heckman (2008)
What the Collaboration Can Provide

- Copies of the Intergovernmental Agreement and Contract for Services
- Key Talking Points
- Collaboration By-Laws
- Connections to key policy makers in Oak Park to gain their perspectives

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