



Collaboration for  
Early Childhood  
*Strong Start, Bright Future*

**Report on Contract Implementation Progress  
to the IGA Governing Board  
Period Covered by Report: 9/1/14 – 10/31/15**

**The Collaboration for Early Childhood is pleased and proud to present this update in accordance with our contract with the Village of Oak Park, Oak Park Elementary School District 97, and Oak Park/River Forest School District 200.**

**History**

Founded in 2002 by all six of Oak Park's governing bodies, the Collaboration for Early Childhood is a public/private partnership that uses a collective impact model leveraging the resources of more than 60 local agencies to promote the development of a comprehensive, community-wide system of high-quality programs and services to foster physical, cognitive and social-emotional development during the critical first five years of life.

In April 2013, the Village of Oak Park, Oak Park Elementary School District 97, and Oak Park River Forest High School District 200 approved a contract for services with the Collaboration for Early Childhood to establish a comprehensive, high-quality system of services over a three-year period beginning in July 2013.

**Summary**

The Collaboration for Early Childhood made significant progress toward establishing an integrated early childhood system of high quality services and programs in our community during 2014 -2015. In this Annual Report to the Village of Oak Park, Oak Park District 97 and Oak Park River Forest High School, we discuss our work in five key areas:

- (1) **Incorporating Developmental Screening in Child Care and Health Provider Settings.** We report on a pilot project that has grown to involve 30 organizations, including 27 early learning providers (child care centers, preschools and family child care providers) and 3 medical practices. We also report on the Hearing and Vision Screening program that provided these important services to 1,327 three to five year old children.
- (2) **Providing Information and Support for Families of Infants and Children.** We discuss and summarize the outreach, education, and information sessions that help parents shape and promote children's optimal development and provide an update on the home visiting program programs.
- (3) **Conducting Professional Development for Early Care Providers and Promoting High Quality Public Preschool Programs.** We discuss our training activities around the ExceleRate Quality Rating program, our Annual Symposium, and our other professional development activities and continuing education programs. We describe our engagement with four local preschool programs, helping them to incorporate the new Teaching Strategies GOLD performance measures.

#### **(4) Building and Implementing a Unified Early Childhood Database.**

We provide an update on our work with Chapin Hall to build a Unified Early Childhood Database and use of the Database to guide program action plans and monitor progress.

Finally, we summarize efforts to strengthen the Collaboration's internal operations, and provide an outline of work plans for 2015-2016.

**Our program, policy and evaluation activities are recognized among providers and policymakers locally, regionally, and nationally. We are proud to report that the Collaboration's efforts in Oak Park and River Forest now serve as a model for connecting critical components of early childhood systems.**

#### **(1) Developmental Screening and Referral System**

Early identification of developmental delays, coupled with effective intervention, allows children to maximize their learning potential. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children receive *at least three developmental screenings between birth and age three*. Unfortunately, many families do not have ready information about or access to early childhood screening services. Only 50% of children nationwide receive developmental screening before age five, but in Illinois, the rate is lower, with only around 28% of children in our state receiving a screening before Kindergarten. Many children enter school at age five with previously unidentified special needs that put them at risk for falling behind academically or socially and emotionally. Both medical and early care providers cite the lack of time, the cost of conducting the screening, reimbursement uncertainty, insufficient training, and limited knowledge or availability of referral options for follow-up services as some of the reasons they do not incorporate developmental screening into their programs and practices.

Over the past year, the Collaboration worked with medical providers and early care providers to improve our community's Developmental Screening and Referral System to ensure that more children receive early and periodic screening to assess for developmental delays and social-emotional issues. We also provided 1,327 children with hearing and vision screenings at 36 child care and preschool sites in Oak Park and River Forest.

We launched a pilot project during the summer of 2014 with 20 early learning sites including nine child care centers and preschools, nine family child care providers, one social service agency and one medical practice to participate in a pilot project to implement a formal developmental screening program using the web-based Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3 (ASQ-3) and Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional (ASQ: SE). More than 77 staff members from the 20 sites participated extensive training for implementing a successful screening program, with 30 staff members completing all 15 hours of the training. The Collaboration's Developmental Screening Coordinator provided up to six hours of technical support each month to participating sites to support their successful implementation. The participating programs achieved a 93% completion rate; 1,037 children out of a possible 1,114 children received screenings in all developmental domains.

In July 2015, the program expanded to 10 additional sites including two medical practices, six child care centers/preschools and two family child care providers. Staff from these sites are receiving the same level of training and support provided to participants during the 2014-2015 fiscal year. Since this past September 1, 1,006 out of a possible of 1,489 children have received a developmental screening: 971 have received the ASQ -3 Screen and 888 children received the ASQ: SE/SE-2. Eight hundred and fifty-four (854) children have received both screenings.

The Collaboration also hosted three educational meetings with pediatricians' practices to provide information and resources about the many benefits of breast feeding on children's development, and on ways in which the physicians can partner with parents, preschools and child care programs around children's challenging behaviors, strategies for addressing the behaviors during office visits, and knowing when to refer a child for additional assessments. The Collaboration has produced and distributed a directory of referral procedures and available local early intervention services for physicians and child care centers, to support them in screening and to help families obtain interventions early, when they will make the biggest difference in the lives of the children they serve.

## **(2) Parent Information and Support Programs**

An integral component of the Collaboration's work is providing information, resources and supports to parents, so that they can make the best decisions about quality early care and services for their children.

The Collaboration's staff worked closely with Parenthesis Family Center to expand home visiting and parenting support programs. As of October 31, 2015, 59 families were actively engaged in the *Parents as Teachers Program*, a research-based and evidence-informed home visiting program for families with children age prenatal to three years, who confront multiple risks. In addition, Parenthesis reported more than 1,400 contacts with parents of very young children through an array of activities including workshops on child development and parenting issues, facilitated playgroups, parent coaching, discussion groups, print and electronic information about parenting and child development and welcome baby visits.

When Parenthesis encountered difficulties with the data collection, the Collaboration secured technical assistance for the agency. The Collaboration also arranged for staff from the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development to meet bimonthly with Parenthesis's program leadership and the Collaboration's executive director to help improve data collection. The Ounce of Prevention Fund also provided technical support to the Parenthesis Family Center program supervisor on the Collaboration's contract in this effort. In addition, the UIC Center for Prevention Research and Development helped Parenthesis with data collection processes and quality improvement activities to increase data accuracy and completeness.

Despite the program growth and improvements obtained through the extensive supports described above from Collaboration staff and from third parties, the Collaboration determined in June 2015 that it needed to explore options for a different vendor due to Parenthesis's ongoing operational and financial issues. On June 6, 2015, Parenthesis notified the Collaboration that Parenthesis would end its 2014-2015 fiscal year with grave financial difficulties. After careful review the Collaboration's Board determined that it was no longer confident that Parenthesis would be able to reliably provide the infrastructure and support needed for a contract and program that was a foundational aspect of the system development incorporated into the Collaboration's contract under the IGA. In July, the Collaboration notified Parenthesis and the IGA Governing Board of its concerns and that it was actively seeking a new vendor. The Collaboration terminated its contract with Parenthesis Family Center effective December 31, 2015.

The work of identifying a new vendor for these services and of providing a solid transition for the program began in July, and the Collaboration enthusiastically entered into a contract on October 19, 2015, with Easter Seals of Metropolitan Chicago to serve the families being served

under the Collaboration's terminated contract with Parenthesis and to further expand service levels to reach 80-90 families in its *Partnering With Parents* home-visiting program. Easter Seals is in the midst of hiring program staff and the Collaboration will support their efforts to establish referral relationships over the next two months so that they are ready to engage families starting in January 2016.

Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago currently serves more than 38,000 children, adults and families through an array of child development programs and family support services. It is one of 74 affiliates in a national network of programs, which collectively serve more than one million people annually and has operated a wide range of programs in Oak Park since 1968, including medical rehabilitation, workforce development and military and veteran services. Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago's Head Start/Early Head Start services, based in Oak Park, will complement the addition of the *Partnering with Parents* program.

On November 4, 2015, Parenthesis notified the Collaboration that it had obtained significant private funding and intends to continue serving the 59 families they had engaged in home visiting services under our contract. As of the writing of this report, Parenthesis has not shared information about the amount and duration of the private funding it has secured. Additionally, Hephzibah Children's Association entered into a contract with Children's Home + Aid to provide Early Head Start Service to 12 children. The transition to Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago and the ways in which the Collaboration plans to move forward in this new environment of expanded home visiting services with a new partner is described in the section titled Plans for 2015-2016.

Parenthesis' decision to continue serving the families in the *Parents as Teachers Program* was unexpected. However, we are pleased that new funding is being committed to early childhood programs in Oak Park and River Forest. We celebrate Parenthesis' new success, and we will encourage them to voluntarily provide data from their programs in order to contribute to the measurement of our progress in implementing an integrated system of high quality programs. Collaboration partners freely share data as part of their commitment to work toward developing this coordinated system of early childhood supports and measuring its impact.

Furthermore, this development potentially allows the community to offer home visiting services beyond the originally planned level of 150 families to better meet the existing need. Over the next year, we will work with Easter Seals to find at-risk families that are currently not receiving home visiting but could greatly benefit from it.

During spring 2015, the Collaboration began to revamp its website and expand its use of social media to make a vibrant and useful resource for parents and the community of early learning and care providers. A soft launch of the website occurred in the early fall and we plan to broadly promote the new website as the local resource for early childhood information during late fall and early winter. This past year, the Collaboration once again hosted *Saturday Morning Fever*, a popular family dance party to promote awareness of the Collaboration and the resources available through participating agencies and our website. We will also continue to publish the paper copy of the Resource Directory, currently being updated for release next month.

### **(3) Professional Development and Public Preschool Coordination**

In 2013, Illinois launched ExceleRate, its system for measuring quality and supporting continuous quality improvement in programs run by childcare facilities, Head Start, and School Districts. The Collaboration worked hard over the past twelve months to help providers and

programs in our community understand, apply, and benefit from the State's new quality improvement vehicle. Specifically, the Collaboration offered a series of eight trainings on ExceleRate, the Illinois Quality Rating System, the Illinois Early Learning Guidelines and the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards for providers. Ninety-eight people from 34 early learning programs (including 31 family childcare providers from 15 homes) participated in these trainings. The Collaboration provided mentoring and coaching to 19 programs to support their engagement in the ExceleRate and help them publicize the quality ratings of their early learning programs.

Since July 1, 2015 seven additional trainings have been provided to support the staff requirements for increasing quality rating scores for centers, preschools and family child care providers in ExceleRate. A total of 91 people (78 child care center and preschool staff and 13 family child care providers) have participated in the 19 hour series that will provide each participant with one credential point. As part of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, Illinois has created a credentialing system to promote educational achievement and professional development activity as a way to recognize highly trained early learning providers.

At our Annual Symposium, "The Dance of Diversity: Meeting the Unique Needs of Every Child," held on February 21, 2015, the Collaboration hosted 360 early childhood teachers, developmental therapists, teaching assistants, directors and early elementary school teachers. At 26 workshops, we provided a variety of innovative methods and information on supporting every child's learning needs and understanding of the full range of diversity in our community. Nine play stations offered attendees hands-on activities that they could take back to their own programs. Kelly Matthews, a leader in education and human services with a specialty in early childhood, delivered the keynote. Attendees earned up to five professional development credits for the day.

Throughout the year, the Collaboration held Roundtables for childcare directors (16 regular participants) and family childcare providers (13 regular participants). These bimonthly meetings provided two hours of professional development credit. In addition to our work with early learning professionals, we provided an in-service for 166 police officers in the Oak Park Police Department on the work of the Collaboration and their role in identifying and referring children for programs and services. We also trained twenty-four District 97 faculty members in a program titled Math through Literacy.

The Collaboration also provided staff development and workshops to the faculty at four publicly-funded preschools to inform classroom observations, teacher assessments, staff development and mentoring. We promoted and supported use of a performance and growth report from Teaching Strategies GOLD that enabled teachers to observe incremental growth in individual children. We provided site-specific training and supported staff in efforts to use assessments and tailor instruction to meet individual children's needs. In response to research by the University of Chicago Consortium that shows a high correlation between chronic absenteeism and tardiness in the preschool years with chronic absenteeism and learning loss in elementary school years, the Collaboration helped preschools implement a protocol for monitoring absences and tardiness.

#### **(4) Unified Early Childhood Database**

The Collaboration contracted with Chapin Hall to build a Unified Early Childhood Database. We presented the first full report on this work to the Intergovernmental Agreement Governing Board at its meeting on May 6, 2015, attached to this report. The report details our work developing the database, collecting and loading the data and establishing the first baseline measures. The

Collaboration also developed and launched an online survey in an effort to obtain a more complete picture of the qualifications and professional development activities of the early childhood workforce in Oak Park and River Forest, modified an existing database in use by Chicago Public Schools to capture the data related to the Parenting Resource Program, and also revised the data forms for the database used for the Publicly-Funded Preschools in an effort to improve the ease and efficiency of data entry. The Collaboration worked to build a culture among our early childhood partners that supports data collection through dedicated staff time and use of data for continuous quality improvement and progress/impact monitoring.

During the summer months, the Collaboration committee members worked with the data produced by the Unified Early Childhood Database to articulate program-related action plans to make progress on the measures, identify methods to improve data collection and quality, obtain data from the State of Illinois and alternative data measures, and make recommendations about refining or revising measures to improve the way in which they captured the work and progress of the Collaboration. This report was delivered to the IGA Governing Board on September 30, 2015.

#### **(5) The Collaboration's Organizational Growth and Increased Visibility**

The Collaboration's growing scope of work and programming in 2014-2015 resulted in significant budget increases. To help offset the cost of operations, the Collaboration's Board of Directors expanded the annual board appeal and generated gifts that exceeded the individual income projection for the year. The Collaboration also established two standing committees, one to focus on development and the other to focus on governance. We developed a donor development plan, which we implemented in the spring of 2015. We also began to revise our website to make it more accessible to a wide audience, including potential donors.

As our work gains recognition, the Collaboration is increasingly involved with state and regional efforts to improve early childhood systems. The Illinois Early Learning Council asked the Collaboration to join its Community Systems and Alignment Committee to help develop and improve the communication and referral processes between early learning programs, physicians, Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education. The Collaboration is also helping to pilot the new Illinois Family Child Care provider credential, created by a state committee chaired by Diana Rosenbrock, our Professional Development Coordinator. We presented our work on Developmental Screenings to the Illinois Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD); we also participated in two workshops on childhood mental health sponsored by OECD, the Illinois Children's Mental Health Project, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Voices for Illinois Children and the Irving Harris Foundation.

### **PLANS FOR 2015-2016**

#### **Developmental Screening**

Over the next year we plan to focus our efforts on deepening the establishment of the Developmental Screening Program in the following ways:

1. Continue to support the expanded developmental screening program at 30 sites and evaluate it for areas of improvement. Continue to provide technical support and consultation to the 20 sites already participating in the project. Coordinate outreach and information to families to increase understanding of the importance of developmental screening. Prepare for additional expansion during 2016-2017.
2. Continue to host breakfast seminars for area pediatricians.

3. Continue to work with Early Intervention, Early Childhood Special Education, and school districts to align programs and smooth transitions for families so that needed services are provided.

### **Parent Information and Support**

Significant change is occurring in the home-visiting landscape in Oak Park and River Forest that will greatly expand home visiting services to families with children birth to three. Hephzibah Children's Association now offers Early Head Start for up to 12 children. Parenthesis has announced that it has secured funding that will increase its capacity to serve families and that it intends to serve the 59 families currently engaged via jurisdictional funding. The Collaboration's contract with Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago supports home visiting services for up to 80 families.

The long-term stability of a research-based and evidence-informed visiting program is crucial to the success of the jurisdictions' groundbreaking investment in a comprehensive coordinated system of early childhood supports. The Collaboration plans to focus its effort related to home visiting over the next 18-24 months as described below:

1. Work with Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago, Parenthesis Family Center, and Hephzibah Children's Association to develop a coordinated outreach and intake process through the work of the Home Visiting Task Force to ensure that families meeting risk criteria are placed in the program that best meets their needs. Working collaboratively to set up efficient referral systems and effective communication between the three organizations will be an important program effort over the next couple of years. Coordinated intake is a strategy that other communities have utilized effectively to ensure engagement of families most in need of home visiting supports receive them and that they are enrolled in the most appropriate programs to address their needs.
2. Continue to work with local, regional and state partners to identify methods for identifying families with children under kindergarten age and strategies that promote voluntary provision of this information to the Collaboration. Finding newborns and infants continues to be the biggest challenge. The Collaboration intends to explore and possibly implement a community organizing approach to support these three agencies' efforts to find and engage families meeting criteria for their programs.
3. Work toward a successful conclusion of the contractual relationship with Parenthesis Family Center that will include the return of unspent funds, computer equipment and program materials purchased with contract funds, program files and information related to service provision. This includes a safe and secure transfer of data related to all clients served by Parenthesis so that program impact can continue to be measured.
4. Work with Parenthesis to ensure that data sharing for the Unified Early Childhood Database related to the families they serve occurs under the same conditions as those in use with other partners that share information. The Collaboration's partners voluntarily share information without compensation as part of their contribution to the project of developing an integrated system of high quality services and an affirmation their commitment to measuring progress in this area.
5. Work with Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago to expand the number of families actively engaged in the home visiting program, working with all home visiting providers to coordinate intake and ensure that programs funded through other local and federal sources are prioritized for enrollment so that the Contract funds are used to expand upon existing programs. We will closely monitor the implementation of the Partnering with Parents to ensure (a) fidelity to the Parents as Teachers model; (b) success in meeting performance benchmarks, (c) planned

implementation of the measures associated with performance benchmarks; and (d) accurate and complete data collection.

The Parenting Resource Program will undergo a review and the Collaboration plans to more deeply engage all of its partners in this activity rather than relying on a single agency to offer parenting support and information to all families with children under age five. In order to achieve this, the Collaboration plans to engage its partners, including Parenthesis, in a thorough review of parental needs for children birth to five through a community scan including focus groups with parents and interviews with providers. We will review program activities that had been offered through the Parenting Resource Program by Parenthesis to assess their relevance in light of identified needs. We then plan to develop program services and delivery strategies that are shared by Collaboration partners and engages them more fully in implementation of these services.

### **Professional Development and Publicly Funded Preschool Coordination**

The Professional Development and Publicly Funded Preschool components of the early childhood system are functioning well and align with recent state efforts to significantly increase the quality of all early learning programs. We will continue to align our efforts with the state activities to maximize our impact in the following ways:

1. Work to ensure that all local providers are informed about the new program quality standards and professional development requirements developed as part of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant. Complete the 19-hour training series to provide focus on Creative Curriculum. Tailor training, coaching and mentoring to ensure engagement in the new rating systems and progress in meeting new credentialing standards.
2. Promote and support the participation of up to 35 family child care providers and child care and preschool staff in the Illinois Credential Program.
3. Offer a symposium, “Turning Obstacles into Opportunities: Navigating the Tough Stuff” on February 27, 2016.
4. Identify additional strategies to find and enroll children eligible for Head Start and Preschool for All. Explore implementing a community-organizing approach to outreach and determine if it is a viable method for finding children under age five and engaging families who are not yet connected in a meaningful way to the Oak Park/River Forest community and not yet receiving services they need.
5. Continue to work with Preschool for All and Head Start sites to promote use of GOLD assessment data to inform instruction tailored to meet individual children’s developmental needs.

### **Unified Early Childhood Database**

1. Issue a second report on benchmarks in January 2016 and use the data to inform program strategies and practice.
2. Develop a user-friendly front-end interface for use by Collaboration staff.
3. Continue to transfer and link data across multiple data sources.
4. Continue to work to obtain needed information sharing agreements with the State of Illinois through Chapin Hall to be able to establish benchmark measures.
5. Continue to identify data sources, modify data collection strategies and identify possible new tools in order to improve accuracy and completeness of data collection.



## **Organization Capacity**

1. Continue board development to enable members to meet the funding needs of the organization, and to provide professional expertise and guidance to operations when appropriate.
2. Engage in robust grant-seeking.
3. Review the organizational infrastructure and identify best practices for staffing and practices to ensure adequate human resources to meet the demands of the growing early childhood system in Oak Park and River Forest.
4. Expand communications efforts to increase understanding of the Collaboration's work, the importance of early learning and the innovative approach Oak Park has taken to address shortages and inequities in early childhood.