

COLLABORATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

REPORT ON PROGRESS TO THE IGA GOVERNING BOARD

7/1/17-1/31/18

The Collaboration for Early Childhood continued to make significant progress in implementing new programs and strengthening current initiatives in the first half of FY 2018 to further our mission and meet the objectives outlined in our Plan for Progress. This semi-annual report will focus on the new program initiatives while also providing a brief update on on-going programs.

NEW PROGRAM INITIATIVES

Professional Development

The Collaboration launched two new programs in the area of professional development.

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

In November, the Collaboration launched an **Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC)** pilot for 3 of our 4 public preschool programs with a \$7,500 grant from the Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township. ECMHC nurtures the social-emotional development necessary for school readiness and academic success for our most at-risk pre-kindergarten children by educating, training, coaching, and providing on-going support for the early childhood educators at the free public preschool programs in our community – 2 of the 3 Preschool for All programs and Head Start. ECMHC builds the capacity of early childhood providers to provide appropriate behavioral interventions by improving their ability to identify social-emotional issues, equipping them with proven strategies and tools to address these issues, and reducing the stress that hinders their ability to provide a quality learning environment.

Social-emotional well-being -- getting along with others, managing strong feelings, focusing attention, and persisting at challenging tasks -- is a key component of school readiness. However, an estimated 1 in 5 preschoolers has a social-emotional issue that impairs their social adjustment and ability to learn. The public preschool providers in this pilot project struggle to provide the institutional support necessary to manage the challenging behaviors of children with serious behavioral issues. As a result, staff become deeply frustrated, creating a difficult learning environment for children with social emotional challenges and the peers in their classrooms.

The mental health consultant, Kate Goetz, was hired in October. Ms. Goetz is contracted to provide 23 hours of consultation a month on a regular schedule. Ms. Goetz observes and assesses the PFA classrooms and individual children, then guides discussion and reflection with the staff. Together, they determine the next steps to be taken. From November, when she began, through December 31st, Ms. Goetz provided 54.5 hours of consultation for the two classrooms at each of the 3 targeted sites -- ABC Toon Town, Hephzibah, and the Day Nursery.

The preschool staff have been receptive to her presence in their classrooms and Ms. Goetz has been able to develop strong relationships with the PFA and Head Start staff, facilitating the coaching process. The staff report that they feel more empowered as a result of Ms. Goetz's guidance and less

overwhelmed and isolated since her arrival. They report gaining insights into the children's behavior and their personal responses to it. They are beginning to learn to modify the ways in which they structure their classrooms, activities and responses to children's behavior. Most importantly, they have someone to help them process what they are experiencing with the children. A program evaluation will be conducted in March and we expect to have a full report before the summer. It is our intention to continue and possibly expand the program in FY 2019 and several applications to private foundations have been submitted to that end.

Early Math Professional Development Workshops

The Collaboration will conduct a series of free **Early Math Professional Development Workshops** for the early childhood educators at our publicly-funded preschools – the 3 Preschool for All programs and the local Head Start – February 14th to May 16th. The objective of the training series is to **improve the math teaching skills of those who are responsible for preparing our most at-risk children for kindergarten**. The workshops will be led by **Dr. Lisa Ginet, the Assistant Director of Instruction at the Erikson Institute**. The curriculum for the training, designed by **Erikson Institute's Early Math Collaborative**, focuses on "26 Big Ideas", mathematical concepts that lay the foundation for life-long math learning and thinking. The 259 at-risk children currently enrolled in our public preschool programs will benefit immediately and hundreds more will benefit in the years to come from their teachers' newfound confidence and enhanced teaching skills. We will measure the efficacy of the trainings through a pre and post-training survey of the participating teachers, documentation and observation of the incorporation of foundational math concepts into the preschool curricula, and a comparative analysis of the students' GOLD math scores in the school year following the training.

The impetus for the workshop series was the finding, through the Unified Early Childhood Database, that children in Preschool for All and Head Start consistently perform below their peers in math on Teaching Strategies GOLD. This is concerning as math competency is considered to be a more accurate predictor of future academic success than early literacy. The problem seems to be in early childhood math instruction. Surveys of early childhood educators reveal a general aversion to math and ignorance of the math content they should be teaching. While there are opportunities periodically for early childhood math instruction in the Chicago area, they are always one-off sessions that do not offer on-going coaching, mentoring or support for reflective practice. As such, they are not considered an effective method of instruction. The cost of an Erikson Institute training would normally be prohibitive for our public preschools. By offering this training at no cost, we are removing a major obstacle to improving the quality of math instruction in our publicly funded early learning centers.

To date, 12 staff from the 4 public preschool programs have registered for the 15 hours of training, a portion of which will be conducted on-line.

Parent Information and Support

We have initiated three new programs in an effort to build out the Parenting Resource Framework adopted in August 2016.

Parent Engagement and Leadership

It has been an ongoing challenge for the Collaboration and our partners to find and connect to hard-to-reach families, educate them on the importance of early learning and developmental screening, and

persuade them to enroll their children in Home Visiting, Head Start and Preschool for All. To address this challenge, the Collaboration has contracted with **Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)**, a leader in “building the leadership, power, and voice of low-income parents to improve life opportunities for children and families”, to help us train parents to be peer-to-peer ambassadors and reach out to these families. The parents who complete the training program will provide leadership at the Collaboration, using their new skills to help the Collaboration define the pressing issues for our most at-risk families and provide direction on policy and program change.

An orientation and training for parent recruitment was held in October for D97 administrators, and community agency staff and community outreach for potential candidates continued through December. Collaboration staff engaged in rigorous outreach with school administrators and PTOs, public preschool programs, home visiting agencies, the Food Pantry, Friday Night Place and other important service agencies. Ten parents, started the 7-week Phase 1 training, *Self, Family and Team*, which began on January 16th and runs through February 20th. In March, Collaboration staff will attend Phase 2: *Community Outreach and Action/Train-the-Trainer* and another parent cohort will be selected for a second Phase 1 training.

This spring, after training has been completed, the Collaboration will hire 2-4 parents as **Parent Peer Ambassadors** to conduct community outreach 10 hours per week, promoting Home Visiting and PFA and serving as a resource to parents who have questions about developmental screening. Several grant applications are pending to support the expense of the peer advocates' salaries.

Chicago Parent Program

After several months of research and planning, the Collaboration will issue a Request for Proposal in February seeking vendors to implement a 12-week parenting skills training program for Oak Park and River Forest parents. The model we will use, the **Chicago Parent Program**, is an evidence-based parenting program for the parents of young children (2-5 years old) designed to strengthen parenting skills and reduce behavior problems in young children. The CPP uses over 160 video scenes of parents raising children in the real world, managing challenging situations at home and in public, to help guide parent group discussions and problem-solve different ways to handle common parenting problems. The free workshop series will be offered a three times per year beginning July 2018.

Initiation of this program is the next step in building out the continuum of services from providing “light touch” web-based information and resources to offering intensive home visiting programs as contemplated in The Parenting Resource Program Strategic Framework adopted by the Collaboration in September 2016. The framework is designed to ensure that every family has access to information about child development and services they need to support their child. The Chicago Parent Program will fill a gap in services for parents who would benefit from a more focused approach than a single workshop but are not eligible for or do not want to participate in home visiting services. This was also a need identified by early childhood service providers and parents during the needs assessment for the Parenting Resource Program in early 2017.

Coordinated Intake

Last November, the Collaboration formally launched a Coordinated Intake process for the home visiting programs offered by Easterseals (through the Collaboration), Hephzibah and New Moms. Through an

agreement with the Village of Oak Park, a public health nurse is accepting referrals from service providers who believe their clients qualify for and would benefit from home visiting, an evidenced-based intervention for at-risk families with young children. The new intake process was developed by the three home visiting agencies Collaboration staff, and its partner agencies in response to the low number of referrals made to home visiting programs (during a six month period in 2017, no referrals were made to home visiting agencies) despite overwhelming evidence of the need for these services in our community. Establishing a single point of entry has been found to increase referrals to and the caseloads of home visiting organizations in other communities. This ad hoc group developed materials and protocols in response to survey information provided by referral agency staff and with guidance from the home visiting program director at the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. We are off to a slow but solid start, receiving 1-2 referrals each month. Home visiting and Collaboration staff connect with staff from referring agencies each month to keep the program and referral process fresh in the minds of service providers.

Additional Community Initiatives

Early Development Instrument Pilot (EDI)

Oak Park is one of four Illinois communities selected by the Erikson Institute as a site for their Early Development Instrument Pilot Project (EDI). The EDI is a series of questions on such topics as health and well-being, language and cognitive skills, and social-emotional development that District 97 kindergarten teachers completed for their students in January. . The results will illuminatethe areas our community as a whole can focus on to improve school readiness for all of our children before they enter kindergarten, areas that may have policy implications or bring local resources together.

The initiative was widely publicized over the course of the fall through meetings with faculty, PTO leadership, and the Board of Education, at District 97, the Collaboration Board and partners, a community stakeholder meeting and a community conversation facilitated by David Seleb, Executive Director of the Oak Park Public Library at which Geoffrey Nagle, PhD, President and CEO of Erikson Institute shared important information about brain development between birth and three years of age.

A team of community stakeholders (including representatives from the Park District, Library, Village Hall, Success for All Youth, the D97 Diversity Council) is in the process of identifying local assets and data sets to overlay on the maps of EDI findings. The results, which will be available in May 2018, include "heat" maps that show aggregate level results of children's development overlaid with community data and assets by to census tracts. Executive Director Carolyn Newberry Schwartz and District 97 Superintendent Carol Kelley are coordinating the effort.

Preschool for All Renewal

The Collaboration provided assistance to the three Preschool for All (PFA) Programs in Oak Park -- Pre-Kindergarten Partnership at D97, ABC Toon Town, and the Day Nursery -- in completing the state's PFA renewal application. The PFA program provides free preschool for the most at-risk children in the Village: children who live in low-income families, have disabilities, are born to teen parents, or live in single parent households, among other high risk factors. The application process is highly competitive and points are awarded based on a number of factors including community need and the quality of the programming. The state has reoriented eligibility criteria weighting to favor communities with very high

levels of poverty or “deep need.” In fact, the Illinois State Board of Education created “risk scores” for communities based on poverty, employment and education levels. A total of 200 PFA slots between the 3 providers are in play as a result of this realignment. Collaboration staff wrote parts or entire sections of the complicated and lengthy application for our PFA partners, including the sections on program need, population to be served, screening process and community collaboration. The programs expect to receive a decision from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) in April.

ONGOING PROGRAM UPDATES

Developmental Screening

- 30 sites (17 child care centers and preschools, 7 family child care providers, 1 social service agency, 3 medical practices and 2 community partner sites) are participating in the developmental screening program.
- 1,374 children received a developmental screening, either global or social-emotional
- More than 700 children have received a hearing or vision screening at 15 of the 36 participating child care and preschool sites.

Participating sites continue to increase referrals for additional assessments or services when indicated after a developmental screening and in recording their actions in the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) database. A total of 53 children were referred for additional assessments. In addition, **90% of participating sites now record their follow up activities.**

The developmental screening coordinator is working to provide workshops on how to support children with diverse learning support needs in the classroom and additional support around communicating with families about developmental concerns during the spring of FY 2018. With the new subscription to an online learning management system the developmental screening coordinator is in the process of creating online access to several of the introductory ASQ Online developmental screening training topics. This will assist new program staff in becoming proficient with the screening program as they begin the work rather than waiting for a training series to begin.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Training

This fall, we began Year Two of **Project Social Emotional**, a provider training series funded, in part, through a 2-year Community Grant from the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation. Targeted for family and center child care providers, these workshops teach providers how to promote social-emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom and integrate Illinois’ Social Emotional Early Learning Guidelines Standards into their curricula and lesson plans using the Learning Studies and Project Approach Component of The Creative Curriculum. A total of 57 providers have participated in the Gateways-approved trainings which began on October 2nd and will continue until June 14th. The project includes 3 hours a month of ongoing coaching and mentoring (for a total of 30 hours) for staff who attended trainings at 13 centers and homes to facilitate implementation.

Early Childhood Resource Fair

The Collaboration sponsored our very first Early Childhood Resource Fair to promote early childhood resources and programs in the community on October 28th, from 9am-12pm, at the Oak Park Public Library. Twenty-six organizations that provide care or services for children from birth through 5 years of age manned a table and 51 parents and 62 children attended the fair. Attendance incentives -- \$1,500 in

prizes collected by our Parenting Resource Program Coordinator -- were distributed to the families through a raffle.

Child Care Meet and Greet

Approximately 40 families attended the Collaboration's first Child Care Meet and Greet at Wonder Works Children's Museum on January 28th from 3pm – 5pm. Fourteen child care centers and family child care providers from Oak Park and River Forest participated in the event and our Early Childhood Consultant was on site to answer questions about ExceleRate, the state's quality rating system for early learning programs, and the importance of high quality programming to child development. We also provided a tip sheet on how to find a quality early childhood program. The event was free and families with a Meet and Greet flyer received free entry to the museum that afternoon.

Unified Early Childhood Database

A grant from the Grand Victoria Foundation (GVF) has allowed us to do a deeper dive into the data the public funds have provided over time, resulting in a richer understanding of the experiences of young children prior to kindergarten entry. For instance, via our data research partner, Chapin Hall, deeper analyses will help us understand what socio economic factors and early learning experiences are impacting their development and kindergarten readiness. The GVF grant also enables us to share our framework with other interested communities. Our ongoing, longitudinal analysis of the 11 contract indicators had its fourth data point this year and this important work continues to inform our feedback loop of program activities, data analysis, program committee review of data analysis, and program improvement. We have also expanded our internal capacity for data analysis with visualization and query tools.

Board Activities

One hundred fifty-one individuals have contributed \$83,606 toward our goal of \$85,000. We should easily exceed our goal with a spring appeal.

The Board held its planning retreat in January and focused on identifying goals, strategies and procedures to increase its fundraising capacity and strengthen governance processes. The Board is energized by this work and is already acting on the ideas generated by these discussions.