

**School Readiness Committee**  
**Minutes from October 25<sup>th</sup> 2010 Meeting**  
**Held at Family & Children's Service of Niagara**

In attendance: Lisa Alexander, Diane Bessel, Susan Block, Jean McKeown, Jill Robbins-Jabine, Blythe Merrill, Anne Ryan, Shelley Richards, David Rust, Ken Sass, Becky Schicker, Michael Weiner, members of the Family & Children's Service of Niagara staff.

Michael began the meeting by welcoming participants and calling for introductions. He then reviewed meeting minutes from the September 27<sup>th</sup> meeting. Minutes were accepted. Michael then introduced Ken Sass, President of Family & Children's Service of Niagara.

Ken provided a brief overview of the agency and described their recent move to centralize services at one location; creating the Family & Children's Center of Niagara One Stop Family Center. Family & Children's Service of Niagara focuses their work in four key areas: Early Childhood (available in Niagara and Lockport including the Healthy Families program), Mental Health, Family Violence (including Batterer's and Dating Violence Programming) and Runaway and Homeless Youth (through Casey House and the Safe Place program). Ken indicated that they have consolidated services in order to become a greater community resource and suggested that they may do an addition to the building through a challenge grant. Thanks were offered to Ken for his presentation.

Following this, Michael provided a couple of updates.

First, he mentioned a National Neighborhood Indicators Project article and suggested that this article be posted to the School Readiness Website ([http://www.uwbec.org/content/pages/school\\_readiness](http://www.uwbec.org/content/pages/school_readiness)).

Second, he invited Shelley Richards (EPIC) to share materials collected by her staff on the importance of Family Engagement including several proxy measures and assessment tools. Shelly indicated that EPIC is working alongside other organizations to have a set of National Family Engagement Standards be adopted in partnership with the National PTA. These standards have been officially adopted by 15 states and could be used for Results Statement #4. Shelley will forward data resource to Committee and Diane will have them posted to the School Readiness website.

Diane reviewed a revised agenda which allowed time for participants who needed to leave meeting early to share their thoughts on the draft focus group session plan. Diane also walked through the draft plan which draws heavily on Results-Based Accountability. She went through the various steps of the planned facilitation which will take approximately two hours.

Highlights of presentation and discussion are provided below:

- The document provides an overview of results-based accountability and the various definitions used within this approach – members are asked to remind participants that they have the expertise to analyze these issues and to identify possible indicators to track. Participants are also reminded that there are no “perfect” indicators and there may be a need to develop specific data collections.
- The second page includes an overview of the result statements crafted by the committee and possible indicators identified by the group – participants may come up with different indicators.
- Blythe Merrill wanted to make certain that community indicators would not be distributed to participants prior to focus groups. Committee members agreed that this was critical to insure that indicators were not predetermined.

- Michael assured participants that any additional needed focus group training will be provided by Committee members trained in process (Diane Bessel, Jill Robbins and David Rust). Whenever possible, these individuals will work with new facilitators.
- Michael also assured Committee that a “cheat-sheet” will be created for Committee members to communicate why this exercise is critical and why we need participant input.
- Michael reminded participants that the environmental scan will always be “incomplete” and “changing.” He also suggested that the focus groups are a good opportunity to gather additional data.

Following this, the committee had a long discussion about the nature of the focus groups and how to conduct outreach. The following decisions were made related to this:

- Each focus group must be kept to two-hours and will include 5-8 participants.
- Committee will offer work day and Saturday and/or evening session(s)
- Each participant will identify an area of focus and will work on a specific results statement related to that focus area.
- Goal is to have representation from both Erie and Niagara County – may require separate, multi-session meetings.

As a result of discussion, next steps were identified as follows:

- Diane will draft School Readiness Focus Group invitation letter(s) for survey participants and other local community experts.
- Diane will create a web-based form that people can fill out and identify their availability and focus area.
- Diane will secure contact information from individuals who completed the survey and prepare for focus group mailing (electronic).
- Diane will create an expanded list of potential participants for Committee review and will secure contact information for faculty in local colleges/universities.
- Committee members will provide Diane with list of other potential participants (identifying agency/program and specific staff to include), including non-providers that we want to include.

Michael wrapped up - thanking everyone for their participation and commitment to the effort.

The next committee meeting is scheduled for: November 22, 2010 from 8:30am – 10:00am at the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County.