

**School Readiness Committee
Community Indicators Project
Minutes from April 26th 2010 Meeting**

Present: Becki Schicker, Dennis Walczyk, Susan Block, Michelle Simpson-McKinnon, Jean McKeown, Nicole Bycina, Blythe Merrill, Helene Kramer, Jane Ogilvie, Lisa Alexander, Shelley Richards, Betty Evans, Michael Weiner, and Diane Bessel

Invited: Donna Brown (City of Buffalo; follow-up call scheduled), Al Hammonds (County of Erie; leaving position and will identify replacement), Bob Bennett, Carol Houwart-Diez

Michael began the meeting by providing background on the project.

In October 2009, Michael called together a group of representatives from local foundations, coalition-based organizations, and city and county government. His goal was to work with the group to identify and prioritize a set of community indicators to be tracked over a five to ten year period. The group also discussed developing strategies to improve identified community conditions. During these conversations, participants expressed an interest in focusing on one area (school readiness) and working together to advance efforts over a period of time. This was in keeping with a recommendation made by the authors of the Vital Signs project in Long Island during a recent phone call. The Vital Signs group worked on a community-wide report card over the course of two years – initially identifying 150 possible indicators before settling on 28 indicators to track related to social health.

While it is Michael's intention to continue to pursue a full community indicator report based on interest from various groups including Business First and the UB Regional Institute, a School Readiness Committee was formed and its work is intended to last from six months to a year. The committee met one other time (March 30th 2010) and identified a number of possible participants – many of whom were in the room. The School Readiness Committee is charged with preparing a prioritized list of community-level indicators and securing resources necessary to support research efforts. These efforts will include secondary data analysis of national, city, and county data, and possible use of focus groups in the initial stages of the project followed by identification of national best practices and program performance measurement tracking. The group's pursuits are based on the Results Accountability model developed by Mark Friedman. The approach focuses on the identification of an end result which can be tracked using community-level indicators. Results Accountability also emphasizes program performance through the identification of best practices and through regular internal measurement.

It is the hope of the group that open conversations with various stakeholders will yield greater consensus and collaboration in addition to increased capacity building and leveraging of resources. Michael cautioned the group about the problems associated with running after the money and likened the effort to the overhaul of the children's mental health system. Several members discussed the possibility of securing additional federal funds through this process. Others discussed opportunities to work with Karen Finn from the Result Leadership Group and drawing on her experience with child readiness efforts in the Baltimore area as well as the Project Strive project in Cincinnati. Discussions on results accountability and Project Strive are currently underway in the local community.

Prior to the last School Readiness Committee meeting, Diane crafted a draft mission statement and concept paper for the group's review. Following their suggestions, she modified the materials and included a vision statement and values. These materials were shared with the current membership for comment. In writing these materials, Diane attempted to respond to three basic questions: 1.) What is School Readiness? 2.) What have we committed to as a group? 3.) What is currently being done locally? She also engaged in a brief review of the literature on school readiness in order to understand its key domains.

In reviewing the documents, committee members suggested changing the targeted age group from birth to five to include prenatal care. They also made adjustments to the vision statement (All children in Erie and Niagara Counties enter school ready to learn through community collaboration) as well as several values (add: collaboration and transparency; modify: grounded in research and accountability for results). These items will be considered during the next session. Diane also included the objectives statement from the Vital Signs report.

Turning to the draft Environmental Scan, participants were asked to review the information included and to identify other resources including programs currently operated through City of Buffalo/Niagara Falls schools and BOCES. The current list was created by examining the websites of local foundations and has little to no information related to Niagara County funding or governmental support for prenatal to five activities. Members are asked to provide this information to Diane in two weeks so it can be included in materials which will be distributed to the group in advance of the next meeting. Diane will also put together a preliminary work plan for the group to review and will establish a website for the group to easy distribution of materials.

Finally, Diane shared a possible schedule for future meetings based on expressed availabilities of participants. The School Readiness Committee will generally meet on the fourth Monday of the month from 8:30-10am at the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County (742 Delaware Avenue) unless otherwise specified. A list of dates follows below:

April 26th 2010

May 24th 2010

June 28th 2010

July 26th 2010

August 30th 2010

September 27th 2010

October 25th 2010

November 22nd 2010

December 20th 2010