

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

Present: Lisa Alexander, Leah Bernhardt, Diane Bessel, Susan Block, Connie Ignatowski, Blythe Merrill, Anne Ryan, Becki Schicker, and Michael Weiner

Excused: Helene Kramer, Jean McKeown, Jane Ogilvie, David Rust, Pamela Rouse, and Amber Slichta

Diane began the meeting by presenting the School Readiness Environmental Scan Survey. UWBEC's Education Special Projects Coordinator/AmeriCorps VISTA, Leah Bernhardt, constructed the survey using the Survey Monkey web-tool. Committee members offered several suggestions for improvements including:

- Introductory Paragraph: Change socio-emotional to social emotional for consistency (Full and Short Survey)
- Question 11: Changing Children 5-6 to Children 4-5 (Full and Short Survey)
- Question 11: Fix typographical error: Disabled Populations (Full and Short Survey)
- Question 22: Rephrase to read: Would you be willing to provide feedback on possible early childhood and/or school readiness community indicators for tracking purposes? (Full Survey)
- Adjust link for Short Survey: www.tinyurl.com/schoolreadinessshort (Short Survey)
- Cover letter: missed the word "program" in the second paragraph
- Letterhead will include names of Committee Members as well as signatures from Michael Weiner and Carol Howart-Diez

The Committee also decided to extend the deadline for the survey to August 20th 2010. The sampling frame is based on a list of organizations identified in 2007. Diane presented an updated list to Committee members for their review including contact persons and physical addresses. An additional list of child care providers will be provided by Susan Block of the Child Care Resource Network. Diane will be responsible for sending out the cover letter and surveys as well as a reminder notice to potential participants. Team members will be asked to follow-up with participant agencies following the August 30th meeting.

Diane then presented three exercises using the Results Based Accountability approach. These activities were built into the recently modified action plan.

The first exercise focused on identifying key results for the effort. Diane asked the group to consider whether they wanted to determine the results themselves or if the group wanted to solicit feedback from community partners. After some dialogue, the Committee decided to identify potential results and to offer a similar opportunity to program partners in an effort to increase buy-in and support for the project. It is anticipated that Committee members and community providers will identify similar results (goal) statements.

The second exercise focused on population accountability and is known as a "talk to action" exercise. Using this tool, participants will go through a roughly 45-minute activity in which they identify a key result and several possible indicators for tracking it. Following this discussion, participants will identify appropriate indicators and assess their value based on communication, proxy, and data power as described below:

- Communication Power – Does the indicator communicate to a broad range of audiences?
- Proxy Power – Does the indicator say something of central importance about the result? Does the indicator bring along the data "herd?" (Does the indicator leverage other factors – related/nested indicators/changes?)
- Data Power – Is quality data available on a timely basis?

Committee members discussed the use of this exercise and the importance of making it “worthwhile” to providers who will spend their valuable time working on it. Most notably, the exercise provides an opportunity to identify strategies which will need to be supported by the larger accountability efforts undertaken as part of this initiative. For example, United Way of Buffalo & Erie County will need to support its identified goals through direct funding and coalition based efforts (including offering needed training, technical assistance, marketing, outreach, and grant writing support) to ensure necessary resources are available. Other funders may choose to do the same or the group can work together to leverage opportunities as needed/desired.

The final exercise focused on performance accountability at the program level and can be used by investors based on their interests. This exercise is similar to the “talk to action” exercises used at the population level and focuses on three core questions: How much did you do? How well did you do it? Is anyone better off? The second of these questions creates opportunities for continuous improvement. The Committee will decide at a later date if, when, and how this exercise will be used.

Following this, Diane presented a modified version of the action plan which will elongate the project timeline to May 2011. Members felt that this was still a bit aggressive but would serve as a reasonable guideline for the Committee’s work. The modified plan includes use of the first two exercises described above (Results and Population Accountability “Talk to Action”). Notably, there are a number of people now trained as trainers in Results-Based Accountability including three members of the School Readiness Committee. These individuals may be tapped to facilitate upcoming sessions. The modified action plan was accepted by Committee members in attendance.

Finally, Committee members reviewed the “indicator” materials provided by Diane during the last meeting. This list includes items that are publicly available (including survey-based data which may prove to be less useful as it does not capture the full population). Members thought that the list was fairly comprehensive and may be useful as the group begins to look at results. Ideally, indicators will be selected based on the results identified by Committee members and community partners.

Members decided to move forward with identifying results at the next session. In anticipation of the meeting, Diane will engage in a review of early childhood/school readiness results identified in other communities. She will share these materials with the group prior to the next session.

Next Steps:

- Members will identify other possible participants for the survey
- Diane will field the School Readiness Environmental Scan
- Diane will identify results from other communities
- Members will review indicator materials including the National School Readiness Initiative materials

The August meeting will be held in Niagara Falls. The session will be held on August 30th2010 at American Red Cross which is located at 2079 Sawyer Drive, Niagara Falls, NY 14304. This session will begin at 9am. Light breakfast fare and coffee will be available.