

Ready to Learn

City of Springfield, MO Executive Summary

(Edited and Condensed For City Council)

Feb 1, 2010

**Federal Grant from US Dept of Education
Office of Innovation & Improvement**

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U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report
Sept 19, 2008 - Sept 19, 2009 (\$574,780)
Submitted Dec 11, 2009

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Ready to Learn created a partnership between a highly utilized Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Clinic, a year-old public preschool (Shady Dell) and a collaboration of service providers to offer pre-kindergarten academic, reading readiness, and social and emotional skill development to the client population 0 - 7 years (Missouri's preschool age) and their families in Springfield/Greene County. Ensuring children are "ready for school" was the focus of a large social marketing effort to raise community awareness and education of the challenges facing today's children as they prepare to start school and support the community driven Red Wagon Plan for young children. Designated as a 100 Best Community for Youth from America's Promise Alliance, the community was encouraged to fulfill the 5 Promises; every child has caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, an effective education and opportunities to help.

The project's overarching goal was to help meet the national education goal "that all children enter school ready to learn." Partners included: City of Springfield (Mayor's Commission for Children, WIC Clinic); Springfield Public Schools (Shady Dell Pre-School, Parents as Teachers); Springfield/Greene County Library; Community Partnership of the Ozarks; Burrell Behavioral Health.

Ready to Learn results are important to our community because of findings from past in-depth local studies that explored our local "kindergarten readiness" factor. Measures of aggression in the classroom and the "readiness" level of incoming kindergarten children, both academically and social and emotionally showed that 20% of local children were not prepared for school. Throw in the effects of families struggling in poverty and the situation was even more challenging. Aggregate results of all this research provided a detailed understanding of the readiness level of children starting their first day of school. In 2007, a community baseline was established from which to measure improvement in kindergarten readiness over time. Local early childhood educators agreed to use the DECA (Devereux Early Childhood Assessment) and Dial-3 (Developmental Indicators for Assessment Learning) to assess improvement to the baseline.

Ready to Learn activities were chosen because they target an identified need and/or skills that can improve our readiness baseline and help prepare children to enter school ready to learn. Five major goals were targeted.

Goal: Increase availability of Parents as Teachers (PAT) activities for young at-risk children

PAT services were successfully expanded on-site at the WIC (Women, Infant, and Children) Clinic by funding two parent educator positions. PAT is a free service provided by the public school system for all families.

What worked

997 new client children from high-needs families accessed Parents as Teachers through this channel; families provided with services 12 months on-site at WIC or with home visits; trust and relationship between educator and families solidified over time; enthusiastic staff made the model fit NCPAT (National Center for Parents as Teachers), DESE (Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education), SPS (Springfield Public Schools), Ready to Learn, and WIC (Women, Infants and Children Program) guidelines; laptops purchased for all PAT educators in Springfield improved delivery of services and efficiency.

Lessons learned

Challenging to start a program during school year (hiring, salaries, etc); space and adaptability issues with old and new locations required good communication between partners; actual physical move to new location in the last quarter of the grant tested the art of compromise; perception that low-income families are uncomfortable allowing strangers into their home for visits was a lesser issue than expected.

		Oct-Dec Qtr 1	Jan-Mar Qtr 2	Apr-Jun Qtr 3	Jul-Sep Qtr 4	Total	Goal
Parents as Teachers/ WIC	Total Referrals from WIC to PAT	258	151	114	117	640	500
	WIC Referrals	3	76	68	73	220	-
	Referrals to (regular) Home PAT	233	67	32	16	348	-
	Referrals to Others	22	8	14	28	72	-
	Screenings	6	17	32	10	65	-
	Visits	112	204	196	247	759	-
	Contacts	0	6	135	91	232	-
	# of new children	84	192	172	129	577	-
	Total # of Referrals & New Children	339	267	218	173	997	600
	# of Families seen	78	180	114	120	492	-
	No-Shows/Cancellations	5	93	0	0	98	-

Goal: Enhance/offer social/emotional development learning activities and screenings for children. Increase parent knowledge of early learning, literacy and developmental milestones

This goal was addressed through kindergarten camp and working with parents. Kindergarten camp was a fun effective setting to teach children readiness skills in academic and social/emotional competency. Parents were counseled how to integrate age-appropriate readiness skill building for their child into everyday activities to help them be ready for school.

What worked

Getting parent info, resources and children's books out to families at events and programs; Kindergarten Camp; Destination Kindergarten book; family resource bags; educating parents on expectations for their child entering kindergarten through observations/assessments; partnerships with neighborhood churches to use facilities for camps; providing childcare for siblings of k-camp participants so parents could attend education sessions.

Lessons learned

Long term commitments by parents to a program for their children were difficult to obtain; Kindergarten Camp was a successful alternative (1 week vs 8-12 weeks); catch parents where they are already gathering to infuse parent education into programming; fewer weeks of intensive training was better than long term commitment; when children who were identified as having difficulty at the beginning of K-Camp attended a second week, they showed great improvement in many academic and social skills; original offering of group sessions and parent education at housing projects failed from lack of commitment from parents, transient nature of clientele, and their general belief that they didn't need the services.

		Oct-Dec Qtr 1	Jan-Mar Qtr 2	Apr-Jun Qtr 3	Jul-Sep Qtr 4	Total	Goal
Community Partnership	# students mentored/tutored	0	42	42	0	42	400
	DECA Screenings	0	78	54	54	186	200
	# of children in Small Groups	0	6	63	75	144	600
	Referrals	0	0	115	420	535	500
	Parent Education Materials Distributed	0	255	1109	314	1678	500
	Family Resource Bags Distributed	0	1	99	152	252	400
	# of Parents Trained in Classes	0	14	27	45	86	400

Goal: Make early learning/literacy activities available for young children and parents, including free books.

The learning lab and mini-library setups at both WIC and Shady Dell were a big hit with the clients. Even though there were setbacks with initial space availability and construction, once everything was in place the utilization of these age-appropriate tools and resources skyrocketed. Over 8000 people visit WIC monthly. We also believed that if books were present in the home, young children and parents would be more apt to read together. The desire to have reading material available for every child moved forward with over 8770 books distributed at community events and through partner/family interaction.

What worked

Library staff at WIC reached an underserved audience, many of whom don't visit a Library branch, yet 133+ library cards were issued; positive feedback from parents/staff; books and early literacy computers helped parents see the favorable impact of early literacy; books available for checkout at WIC; distribution of free books and info during community events was huge.

Lessons learned

Working closely with WIC staff gave PAT educators an advantage for breaking the ice with WIC parents; focus on the families as a unit – parents were primary audience to educate; WIC parents were open to discussion of early literacy skills/value of reading to their kids; parent resource collection at WIC supported project goals, and anecdotal and physical evidence demonstrated it provided needed info for parents; free books for children opened the door to starting a conversation about literacy with parents; majority of caregivers expressed true appreciation for book giveaways.

		Oct-Dec Qtr 1	Jan-Mar Qtr 2	Apr-Jun Qtr 3	Jul-Sep Qtr 4	Total	Goal		
Springfield Greene County Library	Shady Dell	Student visits to Library	1056	449	512	205	2222	700	
		Story Sessions	8	16	6	0	30	75	
		Students in Story Sessions	141	141	141	0	141	-	
	WIC Clinic	Women in Library/Lab	5,203	5,234	4,921	5,119	20,477	-	
		Children in Library/Lab	8,676	8,712	4,769	7,386	29,543	-	
		Infants in Library/Lab	5,035	4,792	8,255	6,027	24,109	-	
		Total # of exposures to Library	18,914	18,738	17,945	18,532	74,129	300	
		Total # exposures to WIC Learning Lab	0	0	0	18,532	18,532	200	
		Story Sessions	0	20	45	108	173	40	
		Children in Story Sessions	0	74	264	228	566	-	
		Early Literacy Trainings	0	36	48	245	329	-	
		# of Parents in ELTs	0	112	612	323	1047	400	
		# of books given away	0	0	600	390	990	-	
		# of library cards assigned	0	22	61	47	130	-	
		# of Library Cards Reinstated	0	1	2	0	3	-	
		Bookends Publication Distributed	0	71	629	174	874	-	
		Ready to Read/Early Literacy Materials	0	47	583	233	863	-	
		Quick Guides/211 info	0	5	513	52	570	-	
			Purchased for shelf stock					4850	4760
			Purchased for Giveaways					4069	
	# of free books distributed by all partners	0	440	3626	4706	8772	8000		

- 828 Board Books (WIC)
- 100 Book/CD Sets (Shady)
- 50 Braille/Picture Books (Shady)
- 3452 Picture Books (WIC/Shady/WY)
- 266 Parent Books (WIC)
- 154 Parent/Professional Books (WIC/Shady)
- 4850 Total shelf stock parceled out to WIC, Shady Dell, 16 Wonder Years (Springfield Public Schools Title 1 Pre-School Classes)

Goal: Build community awareness and education of the importance early childhood experiences play in shaping children’s success in school.

Various marketing efforts and resources helped drive community education/awareness about the importance of “children entering school ready to learn” and reinforced the redwagonkids plan and 5 Promises. Efforts generated over 35 million potential exposures of messages to the community during grant period.

What worked

Various types of media (radio, poster boards, bus benches, TV, website, kiosk) carried consistent messages over a sustained period of time which increased the impact; messages were effective in increasing enrollment in Kindergarten Camp and kindergarten screenings; bookmarks carried messages cheaply and were easy to distribute.

Lessons learned

Deliver info in small bites repeatedly vs. pages of text or brochures; online presence helps, but it ended up not being the preferred means of communication for community - other support was required to compel people to visit the website; newspaper article was first time reporter had covered local kindergarten readiness activities so don’t assume knowledge of pre-K readiness for media – vital to supply them with ample information.

In spite of a huge back-to-school readiness push, there were still children who showed up on the school’s front step having not been exposed to any type of screening or readiness preparation. However, the numbers of these “unknown” children were much less than prior years and the schools were better positioned to accommodate them. Part of the success in trimming the number of unknown was due to the purposeful back-to-school media push.

		Oct-Dec Qtr 1	Jan-Mar Qtr 2	Apr-Jun Qtr 3	Jul-Sep Qtr 4	Total	Goal
City of Springfield	Kiosk - Days in use	0	0	0	76	76	-
	Contacts/Hits on Kiosk	0	0	0	792	792	700
	Poster boards	0	10	15	44	69	60
	Poster boards - days up	0	59	91	80	230	-
	# Reached by Poster boards	0	50,000/day	50,000/day	50,000/day	18,930,000	100,000
	Print pcs	0	4,000	6,000	781,515	791,515	500
	# Reached by Print	0	4,000	6,000	831,500	841,500	50,000
	Radio Spots	0	280	953	1,040	2,273	800
	# Reached by Radio	0	560,000	1,906,000	2,080,000	4,546,000	50,000
	Bus Benches	0	0	28	42	70	20
	Bus Benches - Days Up	0	0	45	80	125	-
	# Reached by Benches	0	0	70,000/day	70,000/day	8,750,000	50,000
	TV spots	0	1,006	506	205	1,717	-
	# households reached by TV Spots	0	186,074	93,703	1,230,000	1,509,777	-

Goal: Provide guidance/instruction to staff to identify behavioral issues. Either triage or refer to appropriate services.

A mental health professional provided triage services, referrals, and coping strategies for educators and parents at Shady Dell Pre-School. (Concept was borrowed from the success of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Grant). This additional hands-on training built staff confidence to deal knowledgeably with behavior challenged students and keep classrooms under control.

What worked

Teachers were informed/taught about mental health concerns in children; teachers were better able to refer children rather than interpret misbehaviors in other ways; working with parents of preschoolers in counseling sessions gave parents the opportunity to discuss concerns/feelings about appropriate/inappropriate behaviors; able to determine if child needed referral for more intensive help; social skills taught in the classroom along with “homework” related to

the skill sent home for families/children to work together was a big success; returned homework often contained positive feedback.

Lessons learned

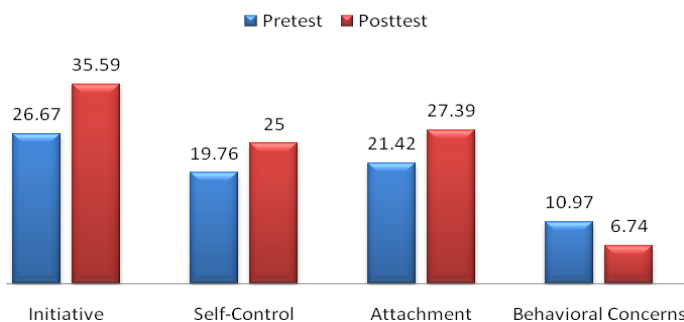
Families/parents still attached to the stigma that goes along with “mental health”; children growing up today lack vital social skills; children need opportunities to learn, understand, and adopt terminology relating to feelings, including helping them understand how they feel and how to communicate these feelings. Many times children in preschool hit, yell, bite, and punch, etc. their peers in an effort to express hurt feelings. Teaching children the words to use, rather than an action, was most fulfilling.

		Oct-Dec Qtr 1	Jan-Mar Qtr 2	Apr-Jun Qtr 3	Jul-Sep Qtr 4	Total	Goal
Burrell Behavioral Health	Referrals	0	5	23	3	31	100
	Individual Sessions	12	70	27	0	109	-
	# of Students	7	24	3	0	34	-
	Group Sessions/Interactions	16	0	0	0	16	-
	# of group members	176	0	0	0	176	-
	Social Skills Sessions	0	58	49	15	122	-
	Family Therapy Sessions	1	15	32	0	48	75
	# of Families in Family Therapy	1	7	3	0	11	-
	Staff Trainings	12	59	80	48	199	-
	# of Staff	20	20	20	9	29	40

The data presented below show the mean DECA (Devereux Early Childhood Assessment) scale scores of the students (based on data collected from 66 students) that participated in the small groups that focused on teaching and utilizing appropriate social skills. The pretest scores were acquired, through teacher report, at the beginning of the Spring Semester of 2009, when the mental health professional began offering the groups. The posttest data were collected at the end of the school year in May 2009.

As can be seen in the graph below, scores increased in the Initiative, Self-Control, and Attachment scales. This indicates that the students showed improvement in these areas. For example, according to these data it can be said that, in general, students that participated in the small group education had improved self-control over time. In addition, the scores for Behavioral Concerns decreased. This indicates that concerns the teachers had about the students’ behaviors decreased over time. All of these changes were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Overall, the data indicates that the students who participated in the small group social/emotional skill building obtained increased protective factors and decreased risk factors, improving their chances for success in school and in life.

Wonder Years DECA Scores



Initiative, self control, and attachment skills improved. (red columns higher than blue)

Behavioral concerns improved by decreasing number of issues. (red column lower than blue)

Some key findings that made a difference:

Get them where they are! Training the WIC staff to recommend PAT services during family visits started the pipeline moving. Going to the families made a difference. One pleasant outcome was a site visit from the National Parents as Teachers (NPAT) organization who came to learn more about the success of our WIC/PAT (Women, Infants and Children Clinic and Parents as Teachers) partnership. It is our hope that NPAT will encourage other cities with WIC Clinics and PAT programs to replicate our process.

As Kindergarten Camp got underway, we were constantly amazed at the huge disparity in the parents' definition of kindergarten readiness. Discussions about what a child should be able to do or know vs what the school should teach demonstrated a huge disconnect in readiness expectations. There is definitely room for improvement in communicating the needed skills to parents of young children, especially those who do not attend Head Start or quality pre-schools.

Effective community education requires significant focus with a simple consistent message repeated over and over for a long period of time using many types of media. It costs money to do it right and most organizations would not be able to sustain the messages for a lengthy time period without significant grants or large fundraising. Playing the social responsibility card ("do it for the kids") and leveraging not-for-profit dollars helps, but still only gets you limited complementary help.

Conclusion

While not everything went exactly as planned, the majority of Ready to Learn was successful and met the intended outcomes. Space, relocation and construction issues were out of our control but the partners showed resiliency and nice compromise in staying the course and making it work with what was available. The inability to unlock the secret to parent involvement with those in the housing projects was disappointing, but that "flop" resulted in the dynamic creation of Kindergarten Camp which has proven to be a huge success. Signing up WIC parents for their Springfield Greene County Library Card showed that spending time with parents and providing a little encouragement can help them take that first step. Watching the kids drag parents over to the free book table and get excited about choosing a new book spoke volumes of the early literacy outreach effort in our community. Listening to comments at community events from people who heard the messages of the social marketing campaign reinforced that the word was getting out.

Proof of the pudding will be the results of the next k-readiness baseline study slated for fall of 2010. Our hope is that activities of this project, as well as many others in the community, will show that we are moving the readiness baseline in the right direction and our kids are being better prepared for school success.

Poster Boards – Kindergarten Readiness



Becoming a “Community of Promise” for Our Children

Springfield/Greene County was designated a 100 Best Community for 3-years running by America’s Promise Alliance. Research shows that the more times children experience the “5 Promises” the more likely they will grow up to be healthy, happy, productive citizens.

We did not win this designation because we have solved all our problems, but rather because we acknowledge there is a lot to do and we are willing to work together to create opportunities for our children to succeed.

Everyone in the community can impact one of the Promises and make a difference in a child’s life. We encourage you to join us in keeping the Promises to our children every single day.

Have You Seen a “5 Promises” Poster Board?



**Every Child
Has Caring Adults**



redwagonkids.net
Funded by the U.S. Dept of Education,
Office of Innovation & Improvement - Ready to Learn Grant



**Every Child
Has Safe Places**



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**Every Child Has
A Healthy Start**



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**Every Child Has An
Effective Education**



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**Every Child
Has Opportunities
To Help**



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