

**CITY OF NORWALK
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MAY 20, 2009**

ATTENDANCE: Betsy Bain, Chair; Mary Budrawich, Early Childhood Specialist/ Norwalk Public Schools; Linda Willock, Director, Norwalk Youth Services; Lauriston Avery, Five Mile River Nursery School; Evelyn Balamaci, CT Department of Social Services; Hyla Crane, Stepping Stones Director of Education; Cathy DeCesare, Coastal Fairfield County United Way; Barbara Fitzpatrick STAR Rubino Center; Migdalia Garcia, Norwalk Community Health Center; Sherelle Harris, South Norwalk Children's Branch Librarian; Betty Karkut, Mid Fairfield Human Services Executive Director; Patricia Kierecki, N.E.O.N. Head Start Child Development Director; Curtis Law, Norwalk Housing Authority; Ed Musante, Chamber of Commerce President; Joan Parris, NCC Early Childhood Program Director; Rovitta Paul, The Children's Playhouse Director; Lynn Sadlon, Fox Run Family Resource Center; Jeanne Taylor-Hard, Parent Representative; Paula Trujillo, Parent Representative

STAFF: Barbara Smart

OTHERS: Rosalie Witt, NECC; Dana Samak, NCHC, Mary Peniston, NPS; Victoria Schilling, NHFC; Mary Windt, Under One Roof/The Marvin; Eva Thorne, Norwalk Community Health Center; Sonja Ahuja, Graustein Memorial Fund/Discovery

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bain called the meeting to order at 9:30 p.m. Ms. Bain then requested that all those present introduce themselves.

APPROVAL OF THE MARCH MINUTES

**** MS. PARRIS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF MARCH 11, 2009 AS SUBMITTED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

GOOD NEWS

Ms. Budrawich reported on the Building Bridges event. She said that there were about 120 and 130 attendees. It was a very exciting event this year. Ms. Bain said that the Quality Enhancement Grant funded this event. She said that previously, the Quality Enhancement grants were considered defunct, but that this situation had apparently changed.

Ms. Thorne from the Norwalk Community Health Center said that there were two new outreach workers and that they are trying to increase the number of people that utilize the Health center. Ms. Bain said that in March, they had received grant funding to expand.

UPDATES – GRANT

School Readiness Grant: Motion to approve.

Ms. Wilock reviewed the details of the School Readiness Grant and that the grant was ready for submission. A copy of a chart outlining the program was distributed to the Council Members. Ms. Bain said that there had been a report received regarding the monitoring efforts and all the programs are doing quite well. The reviewers are meeting with the providers to address and correct any issues.

**** MS. SADLON MOVED TO APPROVE THE SCHOOL READINESS GRANT APPLICATION FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL.**

**** MS. KARKUT SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Quality Enhancement Grant –

Due to the stipulations for the stimulus funding, the Quality Enhancement Grant Fund has been revived. An RFP had not arrived from the State, but Ms. Wilock said that the Early Childhood Council will submit the previous information from the programs that have been successful. There will be an opportunity revise it later.

**** MR. LAW MOVED TO APPROVE THE SUBMISSION OF THE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT GRANT APPLICATION FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL.**

Ms. Budrawich said that there would be the Second Annual Planning Retreat for Professional Development for the providers will be held in July. Any suggestions can be given to Ms. Parris, Ms. Paul, Ms. Smart or any others on the planning committee.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Ms. Bain was asked about the commitment from the State regarding funding. There was a brief indication that there might be a slight increase in Early Childhood Education slots, but no final decision has been reached at this. Ms. Bain said that the advocacy issue was an every changing landscape.

Ms. Bain explained that there was an additional item that she wished to address at this time. Ms. Bain said that United Way had merged with two others and that they just released their report.

Ms. Peniston said that Norwalk was one of United Way's primary impact areas. Last year, Norwalk was awarded \$45,000 for parental education. However, the Council was informed not to expect the same level of funding this year. Ms. Peniston said that a request is being proposed for \$35,000, to keep the Epic Parent Circles (\$25,000) and \$10,000 for the funding of a position for analysis planner. Mr. Musante said that he believed that this request would be evaluated very closely. Ms. Peniston said that Ms. Wilock worked very hard to make sure that the City matching funds remained in the budget.

Graustein Memorial Fund

Ms. Peniston said that the fund had awarded funding for 2009 and 2010 calendar years. She then gave a brief overview of the Family Resource Centers and the impact it has on families. A request was made for one additional parent educator at both Naramake and Fox Run. Naramake had a bi-lingual parent educator who moved on after three months and Naramake was not able to replace this parent educator in the past school year. She then asked that the remaining funding from the previous positions be used for the position.

**** MR. LAW MOVE TO APPROVE THE COUNCIL'S AUTHORIZATION TO PROPOSED THE REMAINING 2008 GRAUSTEIN FUNDING FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE 2009-2010 PARENT EDUCATOR PART TIME POSITION.**

**** MS. AVERY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Policy & Bylaws

Ms. Bain said that the draft bylaws were in the information packet for the council members to review. Ms. Wilock said that the State wants the Council to come into conformity for Performance Operations. Most of the policies remain the same, other than membership and a few minor tweaks elsewhere. Ms. Smart said that she would forward the documents to the Council members electronically. Ms. Bain said that there were other policies that are still in progress.

Ms. Bain said that she had a meeting on Monday with CT Association of Human Services (CAHS) they are working on Discovery issues, such as Better Choices for CT collaborative advocating for more revenue. Ms. Bain then distributed a flyer listing the positions for Better Choices.

Another bill about Sustinet issues (HB 6600) and full readiness issues is presently being considered. The State Legislature was expected to vote on it yesterday, but no word had been received on this. The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition asked that calls be made in support to Senator Duff. Mr. Musante said that the Business Community is against this bill because it advocates a single health care payer bill. He said that 90% of the bill is very good, but it will remove the insurance companies and the individuals' ability to make decisions about health care. The government would be responsible for deciding and rationing the health care. He added that the President was proposing a health care change for July 1st, which could change this entire issue. He encouraged everyone to read the bill carefully before calling their legislators. Discussion then followed about this and for recent Care For Kids issues. It was stated that the legislators listen to those who might be impacted by the legislation rather than the groups they regularly hear from

DATA DISCUSSION

Ms. Bain said that Norwalk has received recognition from around the State as a community that is organized and has a plan for Early Childhood Education. Ms. Peniston then made a few introductory remarks before presenting a PowerPoint presentation on Data Driven Decision Making prepared by the Data Committee for the Norwalk Early Childhood Council. The Data Committee is intended to support the other committees and to give a clearer idea of what needs to be done in moving forward. In general and in public policy, the trend is towards making decisions that are supported by data. She then thanked Ms. Witt for all the work that was done on the presentation.

Setting the Data Agenda included progress reports issued to the community, reviewing frameworks, and creating and implementing a data agenda to facilitate planning discussion for 2001-2014 plan. How the Data can influence the decisions is by moving from just counting the activities to answering the question about the impact of the services. Key questions are the importance of knowing if the program is making a difference, if this data best demonstrates that a return is occurring on the investments, and how this data is being used.

The balancing and descriptive and Analytical work has three goals, the first piece is supply and demand, along with preschool experience and the quality of the programs. Goals 2 & 3 will be the continued data with improved strategies and forming new strategies and messages. Ms. Witt congratulated Ms. Sarnak on the completion of her recent work. Charts regarding the 3 and 4 year old early childhood slots available, which

Ms. Sarnak reviewed in terms of categories. There are some limitations, such as not knowing if families have their names on various child provider lists, there is no data available on non-resident children receiving services in Norwalk or Norwalk residents receiving services outside of the City. It is estimated by the Strategic School Profile that about 15% of the total population do not attend public schools. The next graph displayed showed that the number of students enrolled in the preschool programs. It has been expected that the numbers would increase, but the figures have actually decreased from 85% to 82%. A discussion then followed about which source of information was used to determine the population.

Ms. Peniston pointed out that there was a wide disparity in the numbers of students who attend preschool between different school populations. Columbus has a 100% of kindergarten students with preschool attendance profile, while Jefferson only had 46% percentage of kindergarten students with preschool attendance population.

In terms of the Early Childhood having an impact, the questions of how well prepared are the Kindergarten students are when they arrive and how the impact of the program will be determined. Ms. Witt then reviewed the criteria used to determine the students' level of proficiency.

The discussion then moved to whether about this presentation would be available on the website. It was pointed out that due to Freedom of Information, the information would need to be available to those who asked. Ms. Budrawich said that there were flaws in the data tools and that the original form that was developed for the kindergarten intake was not developed with this information gathering in mind. It is important to have the details of the charts frameworks and the meaning of the data needs to be included with the graphics. The kindergarten screening does not have much mathematically screening, but it is expected that the incoming students will demonstrate understanding mathematical concepts. Ms. Budrawich said that the charts that indicate that the percentage of students that demonstrate rarely demonstrate the desirable behaviors is only 10%, but a population of 900 students would indicate 90 students in this category. Two students of this type in the same class could be extremely challenging. Ms. Avery commented that frequently, the students that had the difficulty in demonstrating desirable behaviors often are challenged in other areas also.

Ms. Witt concluded with the questions regarding what the definition of a quality preschool program would be, what data systems/measurements make sense to develop to support the improvement of quality in the classroom. Ms. Avery commented that how the material is taught and the environment was key to the preparation for the incoming kindergarten students. The discussion then moved to what might constitute a quality preschool. Ms. Peniston said that it would be important to establish what parameters were necessary for kindergarten and once that was ascertained, then the quality preschool programs would become self evident.

Data is still arriving in terms of the health component. The focus on having each child having a primary physician is moving forward. There are four key sources for receiving primary health care, three private physicians and Norwalk Community Health Care Center. Another separate source is Americares. 85% of the 2,300 children that are served at the Norwalk Community Health Center do have some form of insurance. Americares handles about 200 children needed medical attention. Private physicians are seeing the remaining 900 in the population. Ms. Peniston said that one third of the student population is on the Free and Reduced Lunch program and the program is the one that the figures were drawn from. Ms. Sarnak said that it appears that the preschool children do have primary care physicians. She spent time at the Norwalk ER researching the children who went for medical care did have primary physicians. The other component of why people are choosing to go to the ER rather than a clinic seems to be that people do not know that the clinic is open until 8 p.m. or that a physician can be called after hours for a question. Some of the ER patients were there by choice because they found the long lines at the clinic discouraging or they didn't like the physicians. She said that the Norwalk Community Health Clinic might be moving to a new location on the bus line with more parking spaces and more clinic space.

Regarding Family Activities, the goal was to reach low income families and include them in Parent Circles. Four sessions have taken place and this number is anticipated to double. Ms. Witt then reviewed the information regarding the Parent Learning Circles and the feedback is positive. The discussion then moved to the role of the Family Resource Centers and the biggest impact of the FRC's appear to be with the parents who have less than a high school education.

Ms. Budrawich said that the Data Team was sitting on a mountain of data and that the amount of information that has already been gathered. The program is just at the beginning of the process of organizing the information.

Some of the questions that remain to be answered are whether the most important messages are in focus, and which ideas are emerging. Prioritizing the data agenda and the allocation of time and resources in preparation for the next action plan. Focus needs to be on what data will generate the most meaningful decisions. Feedback loops need to be created and the barriers for accessing the data, limitation of the systems already in place and how to undertake the cleaning up of the raw data.

Ms. Bain then said that she hoped that each of the committees would consider some of the information that was presented in this report. Ms. Schilling then said that there would be follow up. She said that it was good to know that most of the children do have primary physicians and that the next question would be whether or not these children were receiving their well care visits. From ages 2-5, it appears that between 76 – 79% of the population

June 10th the main portion will be on a collaborative assessment that the Graustein Memorial Fund will present regarding where the Early Childhood Council is in terms of their program. An electronic document will be sent to all Council Members. It is important to fill out the questionnaire.
Other Updates

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Bain adjourned the meeting at 11:24 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services.

