

Executive Summary

Project Background

The Collaboration for Early Childhood has a contractual agreement with the three governmental bodies providing the majority of the Collaboration's funding: the Village of Oak Park, Elementary School District 97, and High School District 200. The work of the Collaboration for Early Childhood was initially planned for by a team of local policy makers and subject matter experts in early childhood, which met over the course of 12 months in 2008. The final planning document, *Partnership for Human Development*, articulated eleven outcome measures to enable the Collaboration to report on progress. The Collaboration's contract with District 97, District 200 and the Village of Oak Park incorporates these measures and identifies key milestones for these reports during the initial five year funding period:

1. During the first two years, the Collaboration is responsible for building a "unified early childhood database" to better understand the characteristics and needs of the birth to five population of Oak Park and River Forest. The database is to be used to monitor progress on the development of an integrated system of high quality programs and services, and to ensure that the programs and strategies being implemented across the Oak Park and River Forest communities make a meaningful difference in children's development.
2. At the conclusion of Year Two, the Collaboration will establish a baseline measurement for each of the eleven outcome measures.
3. Starting at the end of the Year Three, and continuing at the end of Years Four and Five, the Collaboration will issue a report measuring progress from the initial baseline established at the end of Year Two and each subsequent year.

We issue this report two months prior to the end of Year Two, and address the first two of the Collaboration's milestones.

Milestone 1: Building the Unified Early Childhood Database

The unified early childhood database is the Collaboration's "mission control" for bringing together disparate sources of information about the early childhood population in our community, their participation in early childhood services, the quality of the staff who provide early childhood services, and the quality of the various types of early childhood centers that provide care.

After a competitive proposal and selection process, the Collaboration entered into a contract with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago – a nationally-recognized research institution with the technical expertise we need to bring together multiple data sources that do not easily match, and with the policy expertise to help us draw appropriate conclusions from the data.

Our full report includes a "data scorecard" that provides a detailed report on the Collaboration's progress toward this milestone. The amassing of the data into a central location is itself a complex technical endeavor, due to the need to connect data from children at a very young age (where limited individual data is collected) with data from District 97's kindergarten readiness assessment. Chapin Hall's expertise in this endeavor allows us to establish a rich database with the potential for significant longitudinal analysis to inform early childhood policy and practice in Oak Park and River Forest.

As the data scorecard shows, there were a number of challenges to be addressed during this initial database development period. Across our entire universe of data sources, the most significant challenges included:

- Only some of the data needed to address the eleven outcome measures is directly collected by the Collaboration, or by entities (such as District 97) with which the Collaboration has a direct data-sharing relationship. Other sources of data are controlled by state agencies such as the Illinois Department of Human Services, which had to be educated about the Collaboration's work before being willing to consider allowing the Collaboration to receive detailed state data for children and families residing in Oak Park and River Forest. The process of seeking and receiving this data-sharing permission with state leaders has been very slow, and has slowed down even further during the gubernatorial transition, but we are very optimistic about our data access in the near future.
- Some data provided by third parties turned out to be incomplete, or was not covering the exact population we requested. While this was a hindrance in being able to put together a complete unified database, the Collaboration was able to share observations and recommendations about data quality with the owners of the data. This scrutiny is an important factor in improving data quality over time.
- Some data is for programs that are just getting underway. Like any new programs, there are details to be worked out, and improvements to be identified. In some cases, program data can be inconsistent from year to year as enhancements are made.

Milestone 2: Setting Baseline for Outcome Measures

The unified early childhood database brings together three categories of data that allows us to establish a baseline on the eleven different outcome measures established in our contract. The outcome measures fall into three distinct categories:

- **Child Outcomes.** These outcome measures are designed to measure progress toward the goal that *all children begin kindergarten ready to learn*. These measures focus on early childhood program participation, service usage, and the impact of these programs and services on children's development at kindergarten entry.
- **Service Delivery Outcomes.** These outcome measures are designed to measure the extent to which children and families in our target population *receive the early childhood care and education and parenting education and support services they need*. These measures focus on participation in specific programs by families at risk.
- **System Outcomes.** These outcome measures were designed to assess whether the early childhood services in our community reflect our goal to *provide a high-quality, coordinated early childhood system*. These measures focus on our local options for child care and preschool, and their participation and progress in the Illinois Quality Rating System, ExceleRate.

In this summary, we share highlights of the early childhood population in Oak Park and River Forest, along with highlights of findings from each of the three outcome categories. In the full report, we present a detailed assessment of all eleven outcome measures.

Child Outcome Highlights:

- Sixty-nine of the 73 children who had received services through the Early Intervention program and were referred to District 97 received services as 3-5 year olds in 2013-14.
 - This tells us that there is a high level of continuity between services from 0-3 and services from 3-5, which are provided by two different entities. We look forward to seeing how many of the 4-year-olds in this group (in 2013-14) have IEPs when they are enrolled in kindergarten in 2014-15. We expect that there will be some drop-off in the number of children served as they move into kindergarten, as some children will no longer need services.
 - Because each new cohort of children has different needs, it is impossible to place a preference on higher percentages of children who receive EI services continuing to receive services as they progress through the system. However, we are focusing our efforts on ensuring all children who demonstrate a need for assessment are in fact accurately assessed.
- For Preschool for All children (PFA) who enrolled as kindergartners in D97 in 2013-14, 93 percent were rated as proficient or advanced on a selection of objectives determined by local experts as indicative of a child's developmental level across domains.
 - This data is based on assessment using the Teaching Strategies GOLD instrument. It is an observational assessment over time, not a sit-down snapshot of the student.
- Across all kindergartners in District 97 in 2013-2014, 79 percent demonstrated readiness using the Kindergarten Readiness Test (KRT). Students who were in the PFA/Head Start who attend District 97 kindergarten had the same percentage of demonstrated readiness.
 - We recognize that there are differences between the KRT, which is administered one time by a teacher who does not know the student, and administered during the summer prior to kindergarten and the GOLD assessment.
 - District 97 is also administering the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS), which is also an observational assessment, in the fall of the kindergarten year. The Illinois State Board of Education has not yet indicated when they will begin releasing this data to school districts for local analysis. When this data is available, we plan to compare GOLD, KRT, and KIDS.
 - The numbers of PFA/Head Start children progressing to kindergarten and being assessed are small. Therefore, differences in scores between the two assessment instruments can be highly influenced by a very small number of children. Therefore, it is important to watch this trend over time to see if it appears to be a consistent pattern.

Service Delivery Outcome Highlights:

- Twenty percent of 2013-2014 kindergartners in District 97 received free and reduced price lunch. Of this group, 34 percent of children reported that they had attended Preschool for All, Head Start, or a NAEYC-accredited preschool program.

- Of this same group, we do not know the preschool history for 28 percent of the children.
- We also identified some discrepancies between the self-reported preschool history provided during kindergarten registration and information we have about their preschool enrollment from other sources.
- The Collaboration funds a home-visiting program at Parenthesis Family Center. During the program's initial 3-month period we were able to engage 27 families with infants and toddlers meeting risk criteria which includes income, age of the mother, physical and mental health status, employment, and education levels, and developmental concerns about the child.
 - Over a three-year period, we hope to have a minimum of 80 -90 families actively engaged in the program annually, in addition to the home visiting programs funded through other sources. .
- Nearly 60% of District 97 kindergarten students attended a center-based or school-based preschool in Oak Park or River Forest.
 - We will be examining other data and research about how families meet their children's early learning and child care needs. We recognize that many families will seek child care close to where the parents work, not necessarily within our community.
 - Other families are forced to make decisions based on affordability and the availability of full-day care. Many of the high quality programs provide only half-day services. Full day, full year is expensive, even with a child care subsidy and some families do the best they can by stringing together a variety of care settings for their children.
- About 10 percent of all 2013-2014 Kindergartners have IEPs and slightly over a quarter of them are low-income.
 - There are significant challenges with using this historical data to assess information about IEPs. The previous emphasis on data entry into the District 97's system was on compliance. We are collaborating with District 97 to shift this emphasis on using the data for policy analysis.
 - Because of the high threshold of delay required to be eligible for an IEP, some students may be in need of additional services, but are not qualifying. The number of children who need support may in fact be higher.

System Outcome Highlights:

- It is very challenging to get accurate information from the entire set of early childhood service providers.
 - The central organization responsible for collecting this data has not been able to provide us with a subset of the workforce that works in our community in a usable format or in a timely fashion. The Collaboration has routinely conducted its own survey of qualifications, but is not able to reach all providers.

- There are about 405 people working in Oak Park and River Forest who comprise the center-based early childhood workforce in our community. About half of the surveyed early childhood workforce (center directors, teachers, and teacher/assistants) in Oak Park and River Forest has exceeded the required minimum state educational requirements.
- Approximately three quarters of the early childhood workforce in Oak Park and River Forest have met (21%) or exceeded (53%) the state annual professional development requirement of 15 hours.

Measuring Progress: Looking Ahead to Year Three and Beyond

We have provided the first report on the status of data collection and baseline measures for all eleven outcome measures and we have made progress on each one. The processes of data collection and analysis shed bright light on how vulnerable children fall through the cracks of programs *and* data. Identifying these cracks, asking questions in order to understand why the cracks exist, and working to make critical connections in order to obtain the data are all part of the effort to improve program and service delivery. Future reports will describe progress with respect to each of these measures. However, as we work over the next few years, the progress targets cannot become our singular focus. We must also establish a culture of using data for program improvement and policy decisions.

It is vital to the success of the effort that we connect the programming of the Collaboration to the development of the targets. Some targets will focus more on the process or programming needed to make progress. Others may simply identify the progress expected on the target. The data collection and monitoring process should establish a high quality feedback loop whose purpose is to focus our efforts on serving children well – providing strong services, generating useful data and setting ambitious and realistic targets.

The Collaboration and the Measurement and Evaluation Committee propose to work during June to September to establish baseline targets and recommendations for the IGA Governing Board to consider at its September meeting. Some data from Year Two of the contract will be available for this work. Furthermore, we would like to identify a calendar for when different types of reports can be provided so that they will inform the work of the Collaboration and its many partners, including District 97, in a timely way. We propose the following process:

1. Review the baseline measures with the Collaboration Council at the May 29, 2015, Annual Meeting to receive input from Council members in the development of targets of 2015-2016.
2. Provide baseline measures and data concerns to appropriate Collaboration committees to receive guidance in the establishment of targets and related program development strategies.
3. Present recommendations to the IGA Governing Board at the September meeting.