



### **Family Involvement/Home Visitation Workgroup Summary**

July 26, 2011 (9:00am-11:00am)

*In Attendance:* Pam Langer, ConnPAT;; Christina Morales-Smith, COMPASS Collaborative; Family Life Education, Inc.; Darcy Lowell, Child FIRST; Jennifer Carroll, Family Support Network; Dawn Homer-Bouthiette, Commission on Children.

*Cabinet Co-Chairs:* Elaine Zimmerman, SAC/COC; Trish Moylan Torruella, Hartford Department of Families, Children, Youth & Recreation

*Cabinet Project Director:* Sherry Linton-Massiah, SAC

*Absent:* Rudy Brooks, DCF

Amos Smith, Patti Keckeisen, Tawana Bourne, Grace Whitney, Deb Zipkin, Gabe Fonseca, Doug Edwards, Rudy Brooks, Trudi Lebron.

#### *Discussion:*

After a round of introductions, Elaine Z. reviewed the overall goals of the groups to clarify for those attending the workgroup for the first time. Conversation took place on the range of expertise present on the workgroup to inform the work ahead.

Dawn H-B. led a discussion on parent leadership through a review of, 'A Matrix of Parent Opportunities and Community Responsibilities, also referred to as "Parent Voice in Action." She stressed that parent leadership involves a level of civic participation that differentiates it from parent education. The matrix outlines parent opportunities and community responsibilities. Dawn also outlined the readiness factor as parents consider civic participation, keeping in mind that, "parents can enter from where ever they are and move to wherever they need and want to go"—see matrix. The assumption present in both parent education and parent leadership is that the development of stronger families results in stronger communities.

Elaine informed the group that the Parent Trust remains fully funded, with competitive applications to be put forth for parent engagement. These applications will focus on community landscape assessment of parent leadership and sustainability. At the core of consideration is civics, not only programs and services.

The point was stressed that implementing parent leadership has the goal of producing "mind shift" in how families engage and are engaged.

The group was presented with a list of parent leadership options being implemented in CT entitled, “A Sampler of Connecticut Parent Leadership,” that included, but is not limited to, People Empowering People (PEP), The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), and Parent Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE).

A brief discussion took place acknowledging the work of the National Parenting Education Network, with the emerging question of, where does parent peer support fit in the current structure of parent leadership? Other questions raised included, where does the Family Development Credential fit in the infrastructure of parent leadership? While immediate resolutions to the questions weren’t determined, the conversation evolved to identify which systems should be of primary focus when considering systematic embedding of parent leadership.

The State Department of Education was referenced as having policies on how schools should work with parents, yet it was pointed out that those policies when put in practice still reflect the need for a “culture shift,” to effectively engage families.

Education (k-12) and Early Care and Education Systems were identified as systems where a shift is needed from just a service provider perspective, to recognizing the right and responsibility to act differently toward families.

The challenges faced by families of children with disabilities were also touched upon. The example was provided of a family presented with minimal options during an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) where the power differential is exacerbated when the family is left to believe the only choice is to accept what is presented. Parent leadership training would serve to assist the family in asserting their right to additional options.

Elaine provided the group with a brief history of the development of PLTI curriculum from the outcry of parents who initially identified themselves as, “Just a Parent.” The residual effect of factors such as racism, revenue sharing of the 1960’s, and increased involvement of agencies in the issues of families were touched upon as possible explanations for the historical benchmark of parents being recognized “conceptually” as children’s first teachers, yet not provided with the tools to do so realistically. From a process of parent meetings and inquiry into parents self-identified needs, the curriculum was developed with the goal of teaching change and to have parents discover power dynamics without hostility. The curriculum highlights working with people of different backgrounds. The curriculum grew from a ten into a 20 week session at the request of the initial participants in Hartford. To date the Institute has been taught in 14 communities in Connecticut and nine other states.

Out of this discussion came the inquiry into, what percentage of PLTI grads are parents of children with disabilities? While that data is not currently available, Elaine indicated that the information can be researched and tracked going forward.

In addition to opportunities for parent leadership training, a lengthy discussion took place to highlight the importance of training those that deliver services to families. The suggestion was made that individuals serving dual roles as parents and professionals could play an intricate role in delivering

trainings to other professionals. This suggestion presented the opportunity for building allies to effectively engage parents through possible partnership of PLTI alumnae with PIRC to implement trainings.

Another suggestion highlighted the value that the training outcomes of this group could also be beneficial to School Governance Councils. The opportunity for law enforcement training was also raised as a utility of the group.

The question of where do we begin reemerged concurrent with a conversation on available funds to support the work of the group. Research and training were raised to the forefront with potential funding needs. Developing a pilot training for professionals was discussed, followed with the discussion of how other workgroups of the Cabinet could be partnered with to connect parents and professionals with training needs.

A short discussion took place to finalize the procedure for tapping into expertise of community members with resources valuable to the group, with the decision to offer invitations for participation in specific meeting when relevant, as oppose to soliciting additional members.

***Workgroup Outcomes/Action Items:***

- Connect with PLTI alumnae to discuss partnership in training professionals on effective family engagement strategies.
- Identify and pursue opportunities to partner with PIRC to conduct trainings.
- Partner with Professional Development workgroup to discuss option of piloting family engagement training.

*Adjourn*

***Next meeting TBA, watch for upcoming doodle to determine date in August.***

