



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

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

*In Attendance:* Pam Langer, ConnPAT; Jennifer Carroll, Family Support Network; Amos Smith, New Haven Community Action Agency; Patti Keckeisen, Bridgeport Parent Leadership Institute; Tawana Bourne, CT Parent Power; Doug Edwards, Real Dads Forever; Louis Tallarita, SDE .

*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; Christina Morales-Smith, COMPASS Collaborative; Darcy Lowell, Child FIRST; Grace Whitney, Head Start Collaboration Office; Trudi Lebron, Family Life Education; Dawn Homer-Bouthiette, Commission on Children.

*Discussion:*

#### ***Cabinet Updates***

After a round of introductions, Sherry and Elaine provided an overview of the Cabinet as the larger context of work to be done by the group—for the benefit of those who had missed the initial meetings. An update was also provided on the change in the Chairperson of the Cabinet, from John Rathgaber to David Title, Superintendent of Fairfield Public Schools. The group was also informed of the federal Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge opportunity for which CT will be applying, and how the workgroup could potentially be a venue for garnering information on Connecticut's family involvement/home visitation systems. In addition, information was shared on the upcoming needs assessment to be conducted and how data from the group would be of value.

A participant emphasized that whatever early childhood education system is hoped to be expanded upon through federal funding opportunities, intentional focus should be placed on children needing early intervention. For example, children with developmental disabilities, and or children in communities with heightened needs. Family Resource Centers and School-Based Health Centers were referenced as examples of resources that some communities are heavily dependent upon.

A brief conversation took place about some misperceptions that the workgroup is purely about education, and the importance of dispelling that perception because the group is focused on early childhood, and not just early care and education.

### ***Process & Content Conversation***

The co-chairs shared the desire to have the meeting process be most meaningful and effective to all in attendance, while meeting the deliverables of the work plan. The content areas captured in the strategies and activities of the work plan were confirmed as, parent education, parent leadership, and home visitation, with special attention given to educating professionals on parent engagement, children with special needs, fatherhood, and the role of culture.

The question was posed as to whether participants would find it valuable to have presentations at the meetings that enable the group to delve deeper into the content areas. The point was raised, as an example, that home visitation is such broad content area that it could consume discussions. Clarification was offered that home visitation, for the purpose of this workgroup, referred to the Home Visitation federal grant opportunity being spearheaded by the Department of Health. Continued discussions offered greater insight into the role of the workgroup and the Cabinet as collaborators with DPH to craft a systematic approach to the delivery of home visitation in our state.

A participant asserted the understanding of the value of holding the “ethos” of a system consistent in the work, while discussions offer the opportunity to deconstruct the components for the purpose of analysis.

The Passport to Prosperity initiative of the New Haven Community Action Agency was highlighted as an implementation of best practices to support families through electronic cross-communication of service(s) providers.

Consensus was reached that, the meetings should include a follow up on previously identified action items, check in by participants to share relevant updates, and presentations by group members or invited guests when appropriate.

### ***Parent Trust***

Elaine provided the group with the background and status of the Parent Trust Act, the law that allows for resources to go toward family civics.

Trish & Doug provided updates on the recent Bidders Conference, with funding being administered by SERC/PIRC, with matched support from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. The total funding reported as \$750,000, with \$250,000 of those funds being the GMF match. Models being considered for funding include: Parents Supporting Educational Leadership (ParentSEE), Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), Parents Empowering Parents (PEP), and Voices for Families. Other evaluated models were welcomed to participate. The emphasis of the grant is collaboration and a continuum for supporting parents’ ability to be leaders.

Tawana B. attested to the fact that as a PEP, ParentSEE, and PLTI graduate, she was provided with a foundation of skills that have enabled her to be her own advocate and to become more active in her community. She also shared her establishment of a non-profit, Healthy Home, Healthy Child as an outcome of her trainings.

A conversation evolved as to how it would be most effective to introduce parents to the opportunity for leadership training. The resounding response asserted the need to meet parents where they are, and not every parent need(s) to have leadership training. The common theme of this discussion was the need for parents' voice to be honored and respected.

The discussion transitioned into the challenges of vulnerable families, and the commitment needed to find an entry point to connecting high risk families to the system. Parent education was identified as often the starting point for most high risk families.

Louis Tallarita shared on his role as the state Coordinator for the McKinney -Vento Act that outlines the educational rights of families experiencing homelessness. He indicated that every school district is required to assign a representative to the role of overseeing the educational needs of homeless families, with the state offering technical assistance to districts as needed.

The question was raised as to how the Act applies to early care and education and higher education. This Act primarily applies to preschoolers in the public school setting, and definitely to children with disabilities having an IEP, due to the mandate to offer services to these children, which in turn provides them with the status of being under the guidance of, "compulsory grade offering." For homeless young adults wishing to go to college, the Act allows for the opportunity for the person to apply for federal financial aid independently, without the usually required income information of a parent.

The point was also raised that districts also have rights under the Act to challenge placement of homeless children.

As the discussion went on, the point was raised that opportunities are subjectively made available and there is a heightened need for cultural competence and the need to engage families irrespective of culture, economic status, or gender.

Elaine offered the option of intentional sharing of resources to allow for even more informed discussion on the varying topics. The group was offered the opportunity to reference copies of Edward Olivos's book, The Power of Parents as one such resource. Elaine volunteered to provide the group with additional relevant resources as appropriate.

Sherry and Trish revisited the Action Items from the previous meetings. Pam confirmed that the PAT Train the Trainers framework has been reviewed, and will now include the Fatherhood Audit. Elaine confirmed presenting on the Fatherhood Audit to the National Conference of State Legislators. Doug will share an electronic copy of the Fatherhood Audit with the co-chairs.

Patti informed the group that teen moms in Bridgeport are now receiving course credit for their completion of PLTI.

Elaine informed the group that the Commission on Children has partnered with the parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) to prepare a federal innovation (I3) grant.

A preliminary discussion of the agenda for the next meeting took place with the agreement that, Home Visitation should be a primary topic of discussion.

**Workgroup Outcome/Action Items**

- Opportunity identified by participant to systematically include the information to parents on the McKinney Vento Act, and the rights of homeless families in Early Head Start visits.
- ECE Cabinet website as a vehicle for information sharing and workgroup communication.

*Adjourn*

***Next meeting is scheduled for September 19<sup>th</sup>, 9:00am-11am at the Commission on Children. Starting in October, all meetings will be on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays of the month, 9:00-11:00 am, at the Commission on Children.***