

Onondaga Citizens League meeting notes—June 25, 2013

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Meeting held at ProLiteracy, 104 Marcellus St., Syracuse

Co-chairs: Paul Predmore and Laurie Black

Presenters: Jonnell Robinson, Syracuse University; Jeff Craig, OCM BOCES; Lu Han, Syracuse City School District; and Frank Ridzi, Le Moyne College, facilitator.

OCL: Sandra Barrett and Becky Sernett

Summary: The subcommittee focused on data collection and interpretation presented demographic trends for Onondaga County and the Syracuse City School District, including a discussion of how districts use screening and assessment data.

Upcoming Meetings: All meetings will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at ProLiteracy, 104 Marcellus Street, Syracuse. The next meeting dates are as follows, with information on which subcommittees will be giving presentations:

- Wednesday, July 10—Family Supports
- Tuesday, July 23—Delivery Systems

Subcommittees:

Committee members are invited to participate on one (or more) of the subcommittees listed below. Subcommittee topics can be considered the main themes that have emerged so far in the Early Childhood Education discussions, and these themes need further research, development and refinement. Subcommittees meet separately from the larger committee to discuss these topics, gather research/resources and eventually present what they've learned to the main committee. To sign up for a subcommittee, contact Sandra Barrett at 315-443-4846 or ssbarret@uc.syr.edu.

- **Local Data and Funding:** 0-5 population and poverty census data; child care supply and need; local statistics on school readiness, literacy, absenteeism, graduation rates, etc.; public investments in child care in Onondaga County.
- **Family Services:** current parenting programs and other family support programs; summer and after-school programs.
- **Delivery System:** quality and effectiveness indicators; networks and partnerships; priorities.
- **Model Programs and Practices:** summary of national research findings on early childhood education and learning; examples of effective programs from other communities; examples of local best practices (Chemung County may be a good place to start).

Today's Topic: Local Data

Local data. Jonnell Robinson, assistant professor and community geographer at Syracuse University, presented the “Demographic Trends in the Under 5 Population and Child Care Availability in Onondaga County.” The study—conducted in Spring 2013 with Childcare Solutions and P.E.A.C.E., Inc.—will be made fully available on the OCL Website when it is published after July 31. Robinson said the data in this study could be used to give the committee a “demographic background” for its work on early childhood education. The notes will include the highlights of the data presented.

Population data—The total population of children under age 5 in Onondaga County was 27,378 in 2010. This is an 8.5 percent decrease from the year 2000. The under-5 age group represents 5.9 percent of the county’s total population of 467,026. The northern suburbs and the city of Syracuse had the heaviest concentration of children under 5. Of the surrounding towns, Clay had the highest under-5 population in 2010, with 3,543 children. Cicero came in second, with 1,937 children under the age of 5. The city of Syracuse had 10,217 children under the age of 5 in 2010.

Children in poverty—Around 30 percent of families in the city of Syracuse are living in poverty, according to data collected from the department of Social Services. Robinson said this data is probably a little high, because families may enroll in safety net programs, drop out of programs, and then re-enroll, and so they may be counted more than once. The heaviest concentration of poverty is in the city of Syracuse.

Childcare Programming—Seventy-five percent of childcare providers offer “traditional” care (5 days/week, from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.). Twenty-five percent of providers offer “nontraditional” care (including weekends, events, overnights, flexible hours, extended hours and rotating schedules). Robinson said there seemed to be a good match in the numbers of requests for care and the availability of providers, with the exception of extended care needs. There are not enough openings for extended care hours for children, Robinson said.

Educational milestones. Jeff Craig, assistant superintendent for instructional support at OCM-BOCES—which works with all school districts in Onondaga County except Syracuse, Jordan-Elbridge and Skaneateles—offered insight into the “milestones” through which students traverse in school.

In general, the milestones can be described as thus: birth to age five (preschool); kindergarten to grade 3 (primary); grade 3 to grade 9 (intermediary and middle); grade 9 to graduation (high school); and then, graduation until the age of 25 (college and/or career). “We’re about 25 when we’re mostly done [with brain development],” Craig said.

The first major assessment happens in 3rd grade, when students are given the New York state assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and math. Craig said that if a student isn’t reading at grade level here, “we’re in trouble.” State testing ends in 9th grade, when Regents exams begin, and so this defines the end of the middle school years. “[But] there’s no natural phenomena,” he said. “These are conventions.”

Kindergarten readiness is “a difficult question,” he said. He’s been talking about kindergarten readiness with districts for around five years. The problem is that different districts use different screening methods. “It’s going to be hard for us to talk about it in a way that’s apples to apples.” And he doesn’t have high hopes for a universal screening tool to be adopted anytime soon. For New York state education, “local rule” is very strong. The reason why the mandated New York state assessment begins in 3rd grade is because schools receive federal monies.

But in reality, when schools test children before kindergarten, “it’s not really a screening thing,” he said. Those children will be coming to the school; no child is screened out. Only a parent can opt a child out of attending kindergarten (which is not mandated by law); a school cannot turn a child away. So instead, the screening question really becomes that of placement. While, yes, schools are interested in having children be as ready as they can be for kindergarten (which is one reason why some districts, like Syracuse, have developed universal pre-K programs), a lot of the work during the screening process is to determine how the school should build its classrooms of students. And then, he says, the question becomes “How do you improve placement?”

For many parents, sending a child to kindergarten is a financial issue. “There’s a care element to kindergarten,” he said. Enrollment increases when a district switches from half-day kindergarten to full-day kindergarten.

Most districts do measure students’ academic progress in kindergarten during the school year as a way to develop a baseline for measuring student progress and teacher assessment. Of 19 Central New York school districts, seven use AIMSweb ELA. And so this may be the “backdoor” to get districts to use a universal assessment tool so that we can compare “apples to apples.”

However, districts won’t change, he said, unless there’s a “compelling reason,” and there’s “not necessarily a significant compelling reason to change to something else.”

Federal money pays for the testing in 3rd through 8th grades. New York state would like to expand the testing to 11th grade, but there is no funding for this.

In high school, Regents testing begins. A student can no longer graduate with a local high school diploma. There are only two types of diplomas: Regents and Regents with Advanced Designation. This change in graduation rules over the years complicates comparing recent graduation data to that of, say, five years ago. Also, how districts calculate the data also varies. This makes graduation rate comparison between not only years, but also districts challenging. For example, the Jamesville-DeWitt School District graduation rates also include data on incarcerated youths.

Some districts are trying to track “college persistence” in addition to graduation rates. (Craig’s presentation can be found on OCL’s Web site.)

Syracuse City School District. Lu Han, a data analyst for the city school district, presented a plethora of data on graduation rates for city youth, with information on specific year ranges, schools and student self-identified ethnicity. She said the district has little data on kindergarten readiness, but she would look into analyzing some of the kindergarten assessment information.

Han agreed that with the elimination of a local diploma, the “requirements

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for graduation have become more stringent.” The majority of students in the SCSD graduate high school within five years, she said.

(Han’s presentation can be found on OCL’s Web site.)

Next Study Meeting

The next committee meeting will be at 11:30 a.m. at ProLiteracy on Wednesday, July 10.