

Onondaga Citizens League meeting notes—Nov. 14, 2013

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Meeting held at ProLiteracy, 104 Marcellus St., Syracuse

Co-chairs: Paul Predmore and Laurie Black

Attendees: Ginny Carmody, Jeff Craig, Nancy Gabriel, Marie Gill, Stan Goettel, Michelle Haas, Terri Hargrave, Holly Hastings, Melissa Hidek, Linda Karmen, Karen Kitney, Peter Knoblock, Annette Krisak, Cynda Lamb, Loren Merola, Brian Moore, Theresa Pagano, Linda Peressini, Frank Ridzi, Jonnell Robinson, Eric Rogers, Peter Sarver, Vito Sciscioli, Sanford Temes

OCL: Sandra Barrett and Becky Sernett

Summary: Today's meeting focused on discussing the draft overall recommendation for a guiding coalition on early childhood education, plus a brief review of the outline for the study report. In addition, Melissa Hidek summarized the results of the family supports subcommittee's parent focus group surveys.

Upcoming Meetings: The next meeting will be scheduled when a draft of the study report is available for the committee to review. This will be in early 2014.

Today's Meeting

The OCL 2013 Study Committee on early childhood education enters the report writing stage. An outline (attached) was provided to the committee prior to the meeting, and Sandra Barrett explained that Becky Sernett, the study writer, will be working on a draft of the full report over the next month. In early 2014, when the study committee reconvenes, it will be to review a draft of the report and discuss additional recommendations.

Sernett may be contacting members of the committee for further information or resources to include in the report. Members are also directed to contact Barrett either via phone or email if they have suggestions and/or information that could be helpful to the report.

Co-chair Laurie Black said she is "amazed at the progress of the meetings" and the timeliness of the topic. "Everyone is talking about this," she said of the study committee's topic, early childhood education.

Co-chair Paul Predmore led the discussion regarding the overall recommendation for a coordinating coalition or council to help direct Onondaga County's early childhood education efforts and invited comments from the committee. The recommendation provided to the committee:

Overall Recommendation:

The OCL Study Committee recommends development of a "coordinating council" or a "guiding coalition" on early childhood development that would design, implement, and coordinate the action plan for kindergarten readiness for Onondaga County. The council/coalition would be comprised of stakeholders from all levels of the early childhood system—service providers, policy makers, support groups, parents, teachers and caregivers—and would be representative of all the key areas in early childhood development (health, early learning, family supports).

The goals of the council/coalition would be to:

- 1. Coordinate and focus community efforts toward ECD goals;*
- 2. Promote greater cooperation among agencies and service providers;*
- 3. Collaboratively solve problems regarding barriers to ECD;*
- 4. Develop an advocacy capacity to lobby for appropriate services and funds for ECD efforts in Onondaga County;*
- 5. Develop an early childhood community dashboard of indicators that reflect the current outcomes of the early childhood system and report annually.*
- 6. Provide information to community and all stakeholders about ECD;*
- 7. Continually re-evaluate goals and make adjustments to mission and ECD efforts as necessary.*

The discussion then addressed the specificity of the recommendation and how prescriptive it should be. Should the study committee specifically name the business community and criminal justice system as desired partners in the coalition? Where should the council be based? Should it be part of a public entity like the city or county?

Agreement seemed to focus on the efforts of having one of the stakeholders take charge of the coalition to move it forward until the coalition is on solid footing, but no specific recommendation was made. Discussion focused on the negatives and positives of having it be a public vehicle, which could thrive or wither depending on who is in office, or be housed in a nonprofit organization, such as the United Way. Comparisons were made to Chemung County and the Literacy Coalition in Onondaga County for leadership and organizational models.

Brian Moore, an associate at the United Way, said he couldn't speak for the United Way officially on this topic, but said that the Success by Six initiative didn't have the resources to take on such a coalition. It is operating at capacity, he said.

The committee made suggestions for “re-imagining” the mission of Success by Six so that it becomes vision-directed (or a strategy) instead of a program.

“We need strategic thinking, not programmatic thinking,” said Vito Sciscioli.

Committee members then addressed the needs for the coalition to be independent of another organization, at least in that the leadership needs to be paid staff whose

specific duties are to meeting the coalition's mission and not necessarily the mission of the parent organization.

Some committee members suggested that key stakeholders contribute funds to the organization (buying a "seat at the table" essentially); these funds would show how serious they were in the coalition and in moving its mission forward. Other members suggested that the County make the coalition part of its re-organization efforts.

Other models were discussed, including the possibility of it becoming similar to the Literacy Coalition. Executive Director Ginny Carmody said that the Literacy Coalition is supported by challenge grants that are then matched by coalition leadership partners.

A few members questioned the need for a separate guiding council. Black reminded committee members that while Onondaga County has many programs and organizations actively working toward improving early childhood education outcomes, there is no unified mission or statement of goals to coordinate countywide efforts. "We don't have a higher level of vision for the key indicators [in early childhood education.]" This is what a coalition can do for us, she said.

Where do we stand currently in terms of kindergarten readiness? Jeff Craig, assistant superintendent for instructional support services at Onondaga-Cortland Madison BOCES, said he couldn't release the full results from the survey of Onondaga County school districts, but he did say that, on average, students come to kindergarten scoring at the 35th percentile. And children who have attended full-day pre-school tend to do better than their classmates in terms of kindergarten readiness.

The report will address various models of leadership for the coalition, along with benchmarks or key indicators that the coalition can use to evaluate readiness success.

Barrett said the committee is forming a conference or event planning sub-committee to prepare for the report's release. Anyone who is interested in planning an event for the report's release can contact Barrett.

Melissa Hidek then provided the committee with the highlights of the parent focus-group surveys. More than 100 parents participated. Twenty-six were men and 76 were women. Seventy-two had children under five years of age and 32 had children aged between 6 and 18. Nearly 45 spoke a primary language other than English. Seventy-one lived in the city of Syracuse. Hidek said she will summarize the comments and make them available to the committee. For now, she reported that parents wanted better access to early childcare/education services. They also

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requested longer hours for childcare. Many parents wanted childcare education experts to come to their homes for help/services. They also cautioned against mandates, and would prefer any recommendations for improving child education outcomes as opportunities for parents and children.

The multiple agencies who assisted with surveying parents reported that their staff enjoyed the additional engagement with parents and would welcome another opportunity to interact and question parents on their needs/ideas.