

Community School Readiness Wiring Community Meetings 8/5/09 – 8/26/09

Thrive in 5 worked with community partners in 5 Boston neighborhoods to hold 5 community meetings to discuss Community School Readiness Wiring (CSRW). The purpose of these meetings was to share information about Community School Readiness Wiring and gain community input about how to successfully implement CSRW. This document summarizes the questions and ideas that were generated at the community meetings.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: How were CSRW neighborhoods chosen?

A: Allston / Brighton, Charlestown, Mattapan and Roslindale were selected in order to build on other United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley or City of Boston sponsored early childhood initiatives. Smart from the Start works in Charlestown, Mattapan and Roslindale, and the Allston Brighton Early Childhood System of Care works in Allston / Brighton.

The following neighborhoods are eligible to be the 5th neighborhood for CSRW: East Boston, communities within Dorchester, Roxbury or communities within Roxbury and South End. These neighborhoods were selected based on criteria agreed to with our funder, who wanted an assurance that the neighborhood would be a diverse, low income neighborhood. These criteria are:

- At least 500 children birth to under age 5 reside there.
- At least 70% of children birth to under age 5 are children of color
- At least 29% of children birth to under age 5 live in households that are under the federal poverty line

Q: Are Allston / Brighton, Charlestown, Mattapan and Roslindale going to be given priority for January 2010 funding?

A: No. We will determine which neighborhoods are offered funding to start in January 2010 and which are offered funding for a September 2010 start date based on the strength of the proposals we receive.

Q: What will be the criteria for determining which neighborhoods are funded starting in January 2010?

A: Applicants that demonstrate through their proposals that they have the foundation needed to start CSRW will be funded to start in January 2010. Organizations that apply as a collaboration of 2 or more entities working together will be in better position to be selected for the January start date.

Q: Can a collaboration apply to be a Community School Readiness Wiring hub agency?

A: Yes, we strongly encourage organizations to apply in collaboration. In this case, one organization must be the lead and fiscal manager for the grant. As part of their proposal, partner organizations will submit Memorandum/a of Commitment that outline the roles and responsibilities of each partner.

Q: What does success look like after 1 - 3 years?

A: Community School Readiness Wiring will be different in every neighborhood, based on the neighborhood's assets, needs, demographics and creativity. In each neighborhood there will be a School Readiness Roundtable and CSRW Project Plan. The Request for Proposals (RFP) gives specific, measurable 18-month expectations in Section III. In addition, there are short term and long term outcomes included in the Community School Readiness Wiring logic model.

Q: Is planning time built into the grant?

A: There is project development time built into the grant. Hub agencies will be expected to submit an Outreach and Engagement Plan within 6 weeks of receiving the grant, and a CSRW Site Plan within 6 months of receiving the grant. During this time, we expect hub agencies to focus on gaining community support, recruiting partners (including families), developing a neighborhood-wide vision and creating their project plan.

Q: Budget cuts are making it harder to get services. How is CSRW going to be successful if the state is cutting funding to providers?

A: There is no question that these are tough economic times. We believe that CSRW is even more important in light of the current economic situation, because CSRW is about communities coming together to support each other and support the families of young children. We believe that by working together, providers are better able to compensate for some of the affects of budget cuts so that families receive the high quality, accessible services they want and need.

Q: Are there representatives from each neighborhood on the CSRW Advisory group?

A: There are not currently representatives from each neighborhood on the CSRW Advisory group, however each member of the advisory group works in one or more Boston neighborhood. The advisory group has 13 members that bring diverse perspectives from early education and care, cultural institutions, city-wide nonprofit organizations, health and human service organizations, early childhood collaborations and community centers. There are currently 2 parent representatives on the CSRW Advisory Group.

Q: How did Thrive in 5 get started?

A: In March 2007, a 91-member Action Planning Team, including 26 parents, began to create a vision, mission, goals and strategies for Thrive in 5. This yearlong collaborative planning process produced *Boston's School Readiness Roadmap*, which is a 10-year plan addressing family engagement, health care and early interventions systems, early education and care and the City of Boston to ensure that all children's enter

kindergarten with the foundation they need to succeed in school and in life. There is more information about Thrive in 5 on our website: www.thrivein5boston.org, including a link on the website to download *Boston's School Readiness Roadmap*.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Request for Proposals:

- Be clear about the selection criteria.
- Provide clear budget guidelines.
- Have criteria for how a proposal should look – would be more successful.
- Planning time is very important.
- The funding cycle is really short in relation to the overall vision.
- Need to have concrete, measureable expectations - # of meetings, # of businesses involved, etc. – it's always better to know what your funder expects.

Characteristics of a Strong Hub Agency:

- Needs to have a relationship with local businesses.
- Needs to have access to community resources and established relationships with service providers.
- Needs to have relationships with diverse populations in the community.
- Needs to have the ability to link communities – across cultures and income levels.
- Needs to have community confidence and the trust of residents.
- Needs to have administrative competence.
- Needs to have strength in working with families with young children.
- Needs to have good communication, attention to detail and follow through.
- Needs to have bilingual/bicultural staff.
- Needs to have the ability to bring people together at all levels (youth, parents, community organizations, business leaders and schools).

Neighborhood Implementation of Community School Readiness Wiring:

- First step in each community should be to do a needs assessment – take stock of what we have in the neighborhood. Who are the players? Create a database of services.
- Neighborhood identity is essential – need to know the community you're working in; people need to know the initiative is focus on that community in particular.
- Coordinator position is a key to success.
- More programming outside of the work day.
- It may be possible to build on informal activities that already exist and could be better publicized or coordinated.
- Neighborhoods should have a bilingual website listing activities.

- Have information in other languages.
- Neighborhoods should have a newsletter for families.
- Weekend field trip program would be great.
- Library can be a good resource but programming needs to be educational.
- Need to find a way to share ideas across neighborhoods – use everyone’s good ideas – a plan for how communities can communicate.
- Pediatrician and child care provider are great places to connect with parents.
- Get families to sign up if they are interested – connect families to one another to make services more accessible.
- Often information is only inside the institution that provides the activity which means parents have to go hunting for it. Ask parents how they want to receive the information.
- Health centers, local churches and businesses have good relationships with families who utilize their services.
- Neighborhoods need more face to face communication – bilingual, bicultural.
- Weekend activity examples – keep it fresh and productive:
 - Play groups
 - Sports
 - Dance / plays
 - Computers
 - Community field trips to museums and cultural sites
 - Public park events for families
 - Family fun days
 - Culinary programs that promote healthy eating / nutrition.
- Use the schools all day and evening. Open the gyms, classrooms, pools to all community groups.
- Use the community centers.
- Provide information boards within community businesses.
- Get parents opinions on what their children need to get ready for school.
- Tap into families to spread the word to other families. Have a good rapport. Have parents invite friends.

PARTICIPATION

91 people signed in to a community meeting including:

- 17 parents / grandparents
- 47 community organizations including: non profit organizations, early education and care centers, family child care centers, health centers and local businesses.