



National League of Cities



Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

FREDDIE MAC FOUNDATION EARLY CHILDHOOD CHALLENGE

Summary of City Project Activities

Columbus, OH

Columbus Councilmember Charleta Tavares and her staff have partnered with a leading non-profit information and referral organization, Action for Children, to develop a planning process for the city's early childhood work. Among other activities, they have reviewed previous early childhood strategic plans that were developed by the city and a collaboration of early childhood stakeholders. The partners held a school readiness forum in spring 2004 and held a community convening that took place in December 2004. The goal of the community summit was to solicit input from key organizations in the community and using a statewide framework developed for early learning, identify key measurable outcomes which will be targeted for action. In the spring of 2005 the two organizations will again partner to host two or three community forums to address funding for and implementation of a universal pre-K initiative.

Greenville, SC

In partnership with the local United Way, the Vice Mayor Pro Tem of Greenville and the Assistant City Manager coordinated an effort to develop a set of key goals for the city's early childhood initiative. The goals were based upon results from a recent, comprehensive community assessment completed by the United Way. This needs assessment identified early childhood development as a priority in the community. The city's three year strategic plan was unanimously adopted by the Greenville City Council on November 8 and addresses the following areas: supporting parent knowledge of community resources regarding early childhood development; increasing family-friendly policies and practices by local employers; building understanding of the value of high-quality early childhood programs and services; and increasing awareness among policymakers and institutions about the importance of early childhood development.

Fort Worth, TX

In Fort Worth, TX, the Mayor Pro Tem and senior staff from the local child care resource and referral agency partnered to lead the early childhood strategic planning effort for the city. Their work is supported by a broader "Early Childhood Matters" working group made up of representatives from the United Way, the local school district, city public health department, the early childhood provider community, the Chamber of Commerce, and others. Last winter, the working group conducted a survey and held focus groups to solicit feedback from Fort Worth citizens and key stakeholders. This year, regular meetings of the working group were focused on developing a vision, mission, goals and objectives for their early childhood plan. The "Early Childhood Matters: City of Fort Worth Plan for Early Childhood Success" was approved by the Fort Worth City Council

in October. Strategic goals include: supporting families and primary caregivers so they can help children to develop successfully; improving the quality and accessibility of early care and education programs; and improving the health of children through access to medical care and community education. An Early Childhood Matters Council is being formed to work on implementation of the plan over the next several years.

Hamden, CT

The Mayor's Office and School Superintendent's Office co-chair Hamden's School Readiness Council, which has been working to develop and operationalize an early childhood strategic plan for the community. In order to increase the number of children meeting developmental milestones, the Hamden plan focuses on: 1) building strong connections between early care and elementary education by connecting licensed providers to community resources and kindergarten teachers; 2) expanding the supply of high quality early childhood education; 3) connecting parents and relative caregivers to community resources, promoting parent engagement, and supporting parents as their children's first and most important teachers; 4) making community resources – including schools – more receptive to families and young children; and 5) strengthening and supporting a collaborative community infrastructure to address early childhood issues. Through this project, they created a committee structure to carry out this work, including a steering committee, and committees focused on program, advocacy, research and development, and communications and marketing.

Indianapolis, IN

In Indianapolis, a partnership between the Mayor's Office, the United Way, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation was the foundation for developing a comprehensive strategic plan for the community. The planning process utilized both a smaller design team and a larger working committee. Key areas addressed by the strategic plan include: 1) improving children's health status; 2) helping all children meet appropriate social and emotional, language and cognitive milestones; 3) supporting families and primary caregivers; 4) building understanding and support for early childhood development among residents, policymakers, and institutions; and 5) increasing coordination of services for young children and their families. The City plans to announce the creation of an early childhood commission by the end of 2004 that will serve as an ongoing leadership body to coordinate of activities and update the plan as needed.

Jackson, MS

During the first half of the year, the City of Jackson did intensive planning about how to improve the capacity of city-run child care centers to support early reading. This summer, the Director and Deputy Director of the city's Department of Human and Cultural Affairs reached out to the broader community of early education providers, advocates, and parents, to begin laying out community goals for young children and their families, priorities for action, and existing resources. In addition, the City hosted a parent breakfast to gather input on key early childhood needs in the community, and an NLC staff member presented the results of these activities at a City Council meeting to inform and engage elected officials in this planning process.

Kokomo, IN

Last year, staff at Kokomo's city-run child care center completed an early childhood needs and resources assessment and hosted a luncheon at a local early education conference to gather input from child care center directors and teachers. This year, the Mayor and the city's new child care director are organizing a meeting with stakeholders in the community to establish a working group that can develop a strategic plan for the city. Areas the mayor would like the plan to focus on include: fostering early literacy; improving access to resources for families with young children; and developing a long-term funding strategy for early education in the city.

Mansfield, CT

The Town of Mansfield has a School Readiness Council, which is staffed by a school readiness coordinator within the Department of Social Services. This effort also has a high level of buy-in from the Mayor and members of the Town Council. To assess needs, they hosted two well-attended community conversations and a town-wide random survey of the community and of particular groups within the community (e.g. the University of Connecticut, participants in a library parent/toddler program). Based on the results of the second community conversation, several work groups were formed that operate as additional work groups of the Mansfield School Readiness Council including: 1) full-day kindergarten (including a subgroup conducting visits to communities with full-day kindergarten); 2) assessing needs and disseminating information (including work on an early childhood website and a subgroup designing information packets for new parents and new residents who are parents); 3) financing early care and education; and 4) parent representation. The final report of the survey about Full Day Kindergarten has just been completed and will be presented to the Town Council shortly. The Town Council and the Board of Education will decide policy based on this survey and on visits being done five other Connecticut towns that have full day kindergarten. Finally, the School Readiness Council just went through a restructuring process and now has a new name - Mansfield Advocates for Children enabling it to encompass a broader agenda.

Northglenn, CO

This summer, Mayor Kathie Novak hosted a Summit on Early Childhood to kick-off the city's early childhood planning efforts. The city's desire to support early care and education is closely linked to a citywide neighborhood improvement initiative begun by the mayor and city council. Over 45 community leaders attended the Summit and provided feedback on results from a local early childhood assessment. The group also identified three or four top priorities for action on early care and education including ensuring that families have adequate information and resources on early childhood development; increasing understanding among all community members about the importance of early childhood success; and improving access to high-quality pre-kindergarten and other early learning services. Since the Summit, an official working group has been formed called, the Early Childhood Resource Partnership and will meet periodically to develop a strategic plan.

Ralston, NE

In the summer of 2003, Mayor Groesser and the Ralston Public School Superintendent appointed 16 people to an Advisory Commission on Early Childhood with the goal of developing a strategic plan for the city. Members of the Commission are representative of the entire community and include a parent, library staff, a city councilmember, a social worker and representatives from the local community college and the faith community. This Commission has met monthly since August 2003 and over the course of spring and summer 2004 they conducted focus groups with parents, child care providers, senior citizens, apartment managers, preschool and kindergarten teachers, and business owners to get input on early childhood needs. This work helped to inform the key goals of their strategic plan which were presented to city council in late summer. The city has approved \$4,000 in seed money to help the group get started with implementation.

St. Louis, MO

In St. Louis, the momentum built by Mayor Slay's kick-off Summit on Early Childhood Success in January 2004 helped move the city's planning process forward. Senior level staff from the Mayor's office and the Department of Human Services established a strong leadership team with representatives of the local child care resource and referral agency and the United Way. This leadership team created a larger task force made up of a broad cross-section of community stakeholders and organized a series of follow-up summits to develop St. Louis' early childhood strategic plan. The Mayor announced the city's "Strategic Vision for Early Childhood Success" at a press conference in October 2004. The strategic vision has four focus areas: community and economic development; child health and safety; access to quality care; and school readiness. In addition, St. Louis' early childhood success working group was recently awarded a \$1 million Early Learning Opportunities Act Grant (ELOA) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to support early literacy and other early childhood work.

Tulsa, OK

In 2003, the City of Tulsa and the Tulsa Metropolitan Human Services Commission established the Tulsa County Partnership for Early Childhood Success to coordinate overall planning and community engagement efforts around early care and education. The group includes broad representation from all sectors of the community and is chaired by Tulsa Mayor Bill LaFortune. The Partnership is supported by staff from a leading human service and planning organization in the city. The Partnership's 2003-2004 work plan focuses on the following areas: family engagement and support in neighborhoods; community mobilization; responsible parenthood; preventative health care; and early care and learning. The group is currently developing their plans for the coming years.