

## Parent Engagement Peer Networking Sessions Summary November 12, 13, and 18

### Greenwich

- Greenwich's Discovery goal/focus: Improving the connection between preschool and elementary school; improving children's social/emotional well-being.
- Have started offering EPIC (Every Person Influences Children) to parents; parents are trained as facilitators and lead the sessions, which are on a variety of topics around improving parenting skills. Elaine Murray is the CT EPIC facilitator and provided training for parents to serve as facilitators.
- Had a good response to the facilitator training, but it has been difficult to sustain facilitator involvement.
- Has also been a challenge to get other parents involved in the classes; parents face many time pressures.
- Also providing tips for parents of kindergarten students (in 6 of the 11 elementary schools) – always using yellow paper, provided yellow folders to the parents.
- Stumbling block—have a diverse group of parents involved in EPIC; some parents didn't feel comfortable participating because it wasn't a group of "their" friends. How to bridge that gap?
- Parents want to be connected to something that relates to their child.
- Parents don't have the same sense of power as educational administrators; not an open discussion as a result.
- Parents serve on the Discovery team (3 – 4 parents out of 10 people at team meetings); however, still don't have full representation of community on team.
- Importance of supportive principals in encouraging parent involvement.
- Think about possible linkages with EPIC, PEP (People Empowering People), and PLTI (Parent Leadership Training Institute)—a progression of parent training opportunities.
- What is the connection between EPIC and the Discovery process in Greenwich? Go hand in hand/overlap—trying to empower parents to get involved.

### Norwalk

- Norwalk's focus: improving the transition from early care to kindergarten.
- Steering committee: meets once/month; parents report feeling welcome. Focus on "discovering" – looking at data.
- Hard to get parents there during the day.
- Group grew over time—size became unmanageable. Have divided up into task forces, which report to the Steering Committee.
- Got parent input through focus groups.
- Put out community report regarding what children need (sharing info with parents)—local paper printed the report.
- In Phase I, had a five person steering committee: parent, United Way, City, BOE, School Readiness. Conducted seven parent focus groups

## Parent Engagement Peer Networking Sessions Summary November 12, 13, and 18

(78 participants); PLTI alums ran these. Also did community conversation.

- At the end of Phase I, opened up the steering committee to other participants; four parents now on committee.
- Phase II: share information with parents, ask them to prioritize top 3 – 5 issues.
- Discovery meetings have been during the day—will be switching to evening.
- Hard to engage parents in the process/planning
  - Long meetings
  - Lots of professionals
  - Time of meetings (daytime)
- Parents need defined task—want to be doing something vs. discussing an issue.
- Want to know parents’ priorities and then want to get parents involved working on these issues.
- Parents said they wanted to have more information about resources in the community. The third edition of the resource guide will be hosted on the City website.
- Part-time coordinator – consultant for Discovery—works with the steering committee. Co-chairs of steering committee are well-connected.
- Four task forces:
  - Parent outreach
  - Kindergarten transition
  - Public will building
  - Data gathering (working with Yale).
- Provide Discovery newsletter to steering committee members; staff person does this plus the minutes of the steering committee.
- Issue for parents: helping children learn/be ready for school. Did family night at Stepping Stones Museum—had a session for parents, while offered activities for children. Provided dinner. Going to do more of these.
- Have struggled with how to involve parents in planning.

### Stratford

- Discovery and SRC are the same organization. One person is staffing the SRC and three subcommittees—stretches them pretty thin.
- Don’t have parent leadership training; don’t have parents comfortable sharing with the Superintendent, etc. Want to help parents develop those skills.

### West Haven

- Developing trust, working to open doors with parents. Learning from parents.
- Educational professionals have done a lousy job reaching out; need a culture change.

## Parent Engagement Peer Networking Sessions Summary November 12, 13, and 18

### Bridgeport

- Importance of meeting people where they are.
- There are people who can activate others in the community without being at the table.

### New Britain

- Completed a parent survey.
- Currently offering parent leadership training (PLTI).
- Small core group of parents involved.
- Challenge: involvement of Polish and Latino parents.
- People act out of self-interest.
- More interest/involvement when kids are younger.
- Use existing networks.
- Barriers: don't use them as excuses; figure out what they are and deal with them.
- Incentives help with recruiting people—gets people to pause when asking them participate
- There is a hunger for self-improvement and sense of community.
- “Ladder” of activism/involvement—first rung the hardest (getting involved). Once people get involved, you can ask them to do more.
- Key: building personal relationships.
- Need to prepare people for the task.
- Figure out how to have fun.
- Agency folks need to put themselves in the shoes of stressed parents and plan accordingly.
- Allow people to participate in ways that work for them.
- Have done the Aspira Apex program (parent leadership). This is a bilingual program.
  - School provided space; Discovery collaborative paid for food and child care.
  - Topics: self-esteem, communication, working within the system; HIV, personal finance.
  - Apex 2: Civic engagement.
  - Recruited parents from library's tot time/story hour.

### Plymouth

- Importance of relationship building.
- PEP (People Empowering People) training—parents selected community projects to complete.
- Did outreach at church fairs and other community events.
- Learned about civic engagement along the way.
- Gathered data and put out booklet.
- After focus groups/interviews, shared results with those who participated; they appreciated the feedback.
- Resource guide—went into the monthly town paper.
- Parents who went through PEP training became members of the Plymouth Early Childhood Council.
- The PEP parents have gotten to know leaders in the community.

## Parent Engagement Peer Networking Sessions Summary November 12, 13, and 18

- Importance of fun.
- Remember that it's a journey.
- PEP—more flexible than PLTI; gentle way to get involved.
- For more information on PEP, contact Cheryl Czuba—UCONN Cooperative Extension Phone 860-345-4511; cczuba@canr.uconn.edu
- Focus groups: used established groups to talk to parents (PTA, etc.).
- Don't be afraid to ask; parents want to be asked to be involved.
- Will also have a short summary of the data in the newspaper in January—want to get people to work on 5 priorities.
- Importance of communication.
- Need for common definitions.
- Issue of scale, diversity.
- Start small—it can work.

### Naugatuck

- Head Start activity—Rock Dig with children and male figure.
- Involving grandparents—providing child care.
- Kinship care group—including them in Head Start activities (activity with children's bookstore).

### Manchester

- Had a community event on Oct. 23—80 people attended (great turnout).
- Got lists of members (PTA, Library Board, Museum Board, etc.).
- Highlighted the people they knew and made phone calls to those people, using a script.
- Asking people you know—good strategy.
- Parents did the reporting out at the session—ask/challenge them to take part.

### Wallingford

- Discovery – has given parents an opportunity to express their “voice” in Wallingford.
- Making parents feel comfortable:
  - Open table
  - Share information
  - Group leadership supportive
  - People are respectful
  - Moved meeting time
  - Feel listened to

### Hamden

- A challenge they face is continuity of participation.
- Doing focus groups with parents to find out what their needs/priorities are.

### Bloomfield

- Didn't have leadership who could take an active role (too busy)—“table” wasn't built in the beginning; not a lot of attention paid to community building—now back-tracking

## Parent Engagement Peer Networking Sessions Summary November 12, 13, and 18

- Want to have a “Junior Citizen Center” (analogous to a Senior Citizen Center) and co-locate services.
- People want a sense of community.

### Brooklyn

- School sent out survey regarding parent priorities/needs.
- Sponsored a day to talk with parents about issues.
- Parents formed a collaborative; talked about what they wanted to see in the school/community.
- Parents identified a need for school-community liaison/parent outreach worker (new position).
- Parents developed job description for parent outreach worker; interviewed people for the position, along with the principal.
- Paid for outreach worker out of Discovery money; part-time position, new to school district.
- Set up resource table in school for parents, including a suggestion box.
- The resource table is available at open house night, Family Fun Nights.
- Started community bulletin board at school.
- Working to connect families to services.
- Did surveys via phone to find out what parents’ needs are.
- Working on resource guide to distribute to students (grades prek-3).
- Collaborative—includes parents and preschool teachers.
- Workgroups—resource group, connecting school and community; connecting preschools and elementary school.
- Through survey, asked people if interested in Brooklyn Discovery Collaborative for Young Children
  - Collaborative members include: parents (including a dad), BOE member, principal, Superintendent, teachers, first selectman, Head Start, United Services
  - Have meetings after school; offer babysitting services and good food
  - People are comfortable with each other
  - Flexible meeting times—have held subcommittee meetings at soccer practice because that’s where the parents were going to be.
- Why do parents stay involved?
  - Feel comfortable with school
  - Want rest of community to be involved with school
  - “Rowing” together
- Went door to door to get school budget passed.
- How did parent get involved? Received survey from school, asked to be part of focus group; very comfortable, no intimidation
- How did Brooklyn outreach worker get around confidentiality issues? Hired for this purpose, names shared with her.

### Stafford

- Stafford has three elementary schools and three separate communities.

## Parent Engagement Peer Networking Sessions Summary November 12, 13, and 18

- Wanted to bring everyone together through Discovery.
- Discovery steering committee: first year, included one parent; 2nd year included 3 parents; now: parents are running it.
  - Administration—learned needed to work with parents, not for parents
  - Early on, involved minister, 1st selectman, administrators, FRC Coordinator, Superintendent.
  - Met during day—hard for parents.
  - Focused on social/emotional health of children
  - Wanted to engage parents by building trust
- Had three Family Fun Nights with Educators for Social Responsibility (for parents and children)
- Culminating meeting: did feedback session with adults re: Family Fun Nights and parent priorities.
- Parents said they wanted to do community activities together.
- Let people know about events through fliers—sent home with children.
- Found people of influence—asked them to use their networks; connected to youth groups, PTOs, child care providers, Head Start—to get word out.
- Important to accommodate needs of families—food, child care at meetings; changed meeting time to evening.
- Meet at Methodist church so truly in community.
- Steering committee—parent-driven now (parent is chair).
- Sponsored forum for community—invited selectmen, librarian, business people, Catholic school, realtors, state representative, social service providers, etc.
- Each steering committee member made personal contacts to invite people.
- At the forum, identified four issues to gather data about to determine direction for the community: (1) effective parenting; (2) early childhood care; (3) violence and bullying; (4) bias on the base of racism and classism.
- 3 key words/efforts around parent engagement:
  - *Encouragement*: professional should be behind-the-scenes cheerleaders/ a support/resource
  - *Education*: teach parents skills, such as facilitation)
  - *Empowerment*: asking for and responding to feedback—let community determine direction; allow parents to be in leadership roles
- Parents are involved because they feel equal with community leaders, feel comfortable, have fun in group
- Parent serving as chair—real learning experience; feel very connected
- Feel like they are now on the brink of big things:
- Continuing Family Fun Nights to stay visible in the community
- Want to develop logo/banner – asking High School graphic arts classes

## Parent Engagement Peer Networking Sessions Summary November 12, 13, and 18

to design

- Facilitation method—affinity grouping
  - What issues do you think adversely affect our children’s social, emotional, and physical well-being?
  - Answer on post-it notes (one idea per post it).
  - Put post-its on wall charts; group them according to themes.
  - Develop titles for groupings.
  - Voted on top issues.

### **Windsor**

- Have allowed parents input, but parents don’t run the Discovery effort.
- Have lots of professionals in town—the issue is how to get them to step back and let parents run it.

### **Norwich**

- Need a variety of issues to appeal to parents (as kids get older, parents’ issues/needs change).
- Importance of giving parents the tools to do advocacy.
- Reach out to all parents.

### **General issues**

- Measure progress against yourself, not other communities.
- What is the different between parent involvement and parent engagement? Are these terms interchangeable?
  - Talked about a continuum
- For some, parent engagement really means that the effort is parent-led; agenda determined by parents; making it really parent owned.
- Organizations/professionals have to relinquish control so that it is owned by parents.
- Face to face contact makes a difference (versus fliers); importance of personal contact can’t be overstated
- Send lots of reminders.
- Think of times when parents are open to/seeking information.
- Look for “connectors” in your community—people who are well-known, loved, and respected; people who have lots of contact; people who are part of other networks and can connect to those networks.
- Importance of balance—need to pace yourselves—not a 100 yard dash, but a marathon.
- Common theme: parents get involved when they feel valued.
- Need to shift decision-makers’ values so they want to engage parents.
- Help decision-makers see the impact of policies/programs on families—make decisions based on those needs.
- Professionals can help parents see their role in shaping policy. In Wallingford, public policy has been closed system – trying to get parents into system.
- Parent Power—Tauna Saunders, Coordinator. Phone: 203-797-8088; [ts@ctparentpower.org](mailto:ts@ctparentpower.org)
- How to deal with language barrier and limited literacy:

## Parent Engagement Peer Networking Sessions Summary November 12, 13, and 18

- Naugatuck – putting together community contact list for parents
- Torrington – reach out to Latina community through church (building relationships)
- New Britain—put materials out in multiple languages
- Vision of parent engagement: try harder to engage parents/give them real roles
- Importance of paid staff to do outreach, serve as resource
- Training parents to do what? It should be up to the parents.

### **Why are parents engaged in the Discovery process?**

- Want to be involved in community; be around people. Invited to playgroup—resources available for the first time. Professionals are supporting parents' desires/needs. Key role models encouraged participation.
- Angry—want the community to provide information so parents can understand/access programs and services. Hard to get information. Want to get involved for their child.
- Because of their own children. Want to help make decisions.
- Asked by preschool teacher.
- Have young kids.
- People are looking for resources.
- Not satisfied with quality of care, affordability.
- People want activities for their kids—social activities, learning activities; easier transition to kindergarten.