**Early Childhood Work Group Conversation with Carolyn Willis** - **Mississippi Delta Health Alliance**

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Joy Lyon

Kevin Ritchie

Emily Ferry

Molly Hillis

Noelle Derse

Maressa Jenson

Pat Sidmore

Mandy Evans

Becky Roth

Amber Frommherz

Molly Porter

Tess Giant

Jamie Erickson

Tanya Salmi

Reanna

Mandy Evans

Lessons from their 2 Promise Neighborhoods in rural Mississippi (Deer Creek and Indianola)

When Promise Neighborhood initiative started around 2013, 25% kindergartners were ready for school, now over 60% and targeting 75%.

**Summary of steps to success:**

* Brought together key partners – Head start, private centers, school district (kindergarten teachers). Included parents and families.
* Talked about alignment of contributions, and acknowledged they would suffer losses in autonomy, program design by truly partnering.
* Shared data and took a rigorous look to see what was working, what wasn’t working. Set targets and kept results at the center.
* Trained the people who lived in the rural community with shrinking population and resources by opening training to existing childcare providers (Head start, center-based, in-home/informal) and paraprofessionals.
* Focused on “dual enrollment” – getting kids enrolled in more than 1 early childhood support programs with Imagination Library at the center.
* Six week summer transition camp smoothed transition for kinders *and* allowed for peer to peer training and reflection by teachers, Head start, and center-based providers.

**The details:**

Challenges when the Promise Neighborhood initiative started:

* There are a bunch of programs, but no one direction.
* When Head start and private centers were measuring readiness, they were measuring different things than school district -> Agreed wanted all children ready to learn.
* Needed to have a common definition – decided to use state definition/assessment of kindergarten readiness (based on Briggance with Ages and Stages questionnaire to have incremental assessment.)

Promise Neighborhood initiative structure and tools:

* Created three workgroups: 1) Data, 2) Parental engagement, 3) Quality of transition programs.
* In addition to early childhood literacy efforts, took a wholistic look at family needs, including mental health.
* Used Ages and Stages used as a tool to link services.

Dual enrollment:

* Goal: enroll all kids in more than one early childhood program
* Imagination Library at the core, i.e. if enrolled in Headstart, automatic permission to enroll in Imagination Library)

Six-week summer transition program -

* Continuity of care
* Collect data in the first two days of the program to guide teaching/training
* Six weeks camps funded by promise neighborhood funds. When grant looked like it was going to end, donor stepped up with 90K and state now kicking in. Also matches Headstart requirement around transition. Could leverage Title I dollars for 5 year olds (even if they haven’t officially started school yet.)
* Helped create Headstart, childcare training pathways
* Lead teachers from kinder setting model best practices for center and Headstart, pre-K teachers. Spend morning with kids, 1 to 3pm on Professional Development.

Shared training:

* 1/3 of pre-K kids at Headstart, 1/3 at childcare center, 1/3 at home/informal care.
* During school year, childcare centers synced calendars to mirror school district so they could have the same professional development days/opportunities.
* Reduced the number of days kids were absent at Headstart (when older siblings had school days off.)

Funding:

* Promise Neighborhood grant paid for summer programs, training.
* Within several years Demonstrated investment and intentional focus lead to private donation, state investment, and a renewed federal grant.

**Questions to consider in Southeast Alaska:**

* What other partners could help support?
	+ Libraries can help disseminate info, Hospitals, Health Care providers, and SEARHC, Infant Learning Program, Family Promise, Faith Community, etc.
* How can we fill service gaps? (Few resources with the community (no special ed teacher or speech pathologist), infrequent visits by health professionals, infant learning program, etc.)
	+ In Mississippi they focused on training paraprofessionals and others already in the community – how could we do that here?
* How do we increase attendance and engagement in existing programs and understanding of early childhood development in general?
	+ How could Tlingit and Haida, local tribe, Headstart and school district/Promise Neighborhood staff help encourage participation?
	+ How do we think about the cultural norm that it’s normal for kids to not talk until they are 5.
* How can we share resources to have a greater impact?
	+ There are a number of summer transition camps operated by school districts, Tlingit and Haida, Baby Raven Reads, etc. How can we make these more consistent, streamlined, and impactful?
	+ How could school districts leverage funds to 5 year-olds entering kinder and train other providers?
* Could sharing data and focusing on dual/whole population enrollment in early childhood programs help address the kindergarten enrollment issue (families not enrolling kids until just before or even after school year starts)?
* What are our measures of success?
	+ Increase Alaska Developmental Profile Scores? Increase specific ADP Scores like literacy, numeracy or social and emotional skills?, Dual enrollment with 100% of kids enrolled in Imagination Library?