



Early Childhood Development

Community Meetings

FINAL REPORT

- September 28, 2012
- Santa Fe, NM

CONVENERS

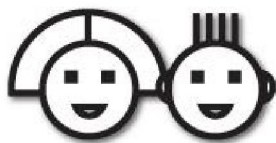
New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership
United Way of Santa Fe County
New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department
New Mexico Business Roundtable

SPONSOR

W. K. Kellogg Foundation

ORGANIZER

New Mexico First



new mexico **early childhood development** partnership



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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the Early Childhood Care and Education Act was signed into law to establish an early childhood system across the state and support quality programs for our state's youngest children. High quality early childhood care and education is vital to ensuring all New Mexico's children can enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed. Achievement of this goal will substantially influence the success of our youngest children and reap the economic success this will bring to our state. We now know that 85% of the brain develops before the fifth year of life. We also know the economic burden that every New Mexico taxpayer bears because of inadequate preparation of more than a third of New Mexico's pre-school age children.¹

This report summarizes the results from an *Early Childhood Development Community Meeting*² held in Santa Fe, September 28, 2012. The goal of the meeting was to enable community members to share ideas about how the Early Childhood Care and Education Act can link to needs in their communities and provide opportunities for our state's greatest asset for the future—our youngest children and their families.

Key Outcomes

Approximately 70 community members registered for the meeting and represented business, early childhood providers and advocates, education, healthcare, government and legislative staff, and elected officials. Participants saw the need for a commitment to the needs of children and families that is community-based, culturally competent, and championed by leaders from all sectors of the community. They proposed ideas regarding ways to:

- Provide support to families of young children
- Encourage involvement of local businesses and business leaders in early childhood care and education issues
- Identify, recruit, and retain qualified and inspired caregivers and teachers for our youngest children
- Improve collaboration among initiatives and programs that support New Mexico families with young children

The results of the community meeting will be submitted to the Early Childhood Learning Advisory Council and will inform their plans to establish an aligned early childhood system across the state.

Conveners

State legislators joined the **New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, United Way of Santa Fe County, New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department** and **New Mexico Business Roundtable** to host the community meeting.



Senator Peter Wirth
District 25, Santa Fe County



Representative Jim Hall
District 43, Los Alamos, Sandoval & Santa Fe Counties

¹ New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership website at <http://nmeecd.org/>

² Other community meetings were held in Clovis, Farmington, Las Cruces, and Taos in 2011. The report from these meetings can be found at www.nmfirst.org.

The **New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership** is a public-private partnership founded to advocate for the creation, adoption, and implementation of robust, effective, and proven early childhood programs that are available to all children, birth to five in New Mexico. NMECDP's mission is to create statewide awareness, support, and understanding of the overwhelming benefits of early childhood development programs, and the positive effect on future generations of New Mexicans.

United Way of Santa Fe County's mission to create lasting change in chronic community conditions is achieved through our **Santa Fe Children's Project**. This project is changing our community by creating new opportunities for children and families. We bring the community together to plan, advocate, and provide programs, prenatal to age eight. Our children become more successful in school and in life, our families become more resilient, and our community becomes stronger both now and in future. Through our partnership and shared leadership of the New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, we advocate for sustainable funding through policy change and broad based engagement of New Mexico's business community.

The **New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department** provides an array of prevention, intervention, rehabilitative, and after-care services to New Mexico children and their families. CYFD partners with communities to strengthen families in New Mexico to be productive and self-sufficient. The organization respectfully serves and supports children and families and supervises youth in a responsive, community-based system of care that is client-centered, family-focused, and culturally competent.

The **New Mexico Business Roundtable** was founded on the belief that businesses should play an active and effective role in the formation of public policy in the areas of education and economic growth. The organization is a statewide association of executives from leading companies, small business owners, executives of trade organizations, and foundations that believe effectiveness is rooted in the direct, personal participation of its investors, who present government with reasoned alternatives and positive policy suggestions.

Organizer

The meeting was organized by **New Mexico First** an organization that engages people in important issues facing their state or community. Established in 1986, the public policy organization offers unique town halls and forums that bring together people from all walks of life to develop their best ideas for policymakers and the public. New Mexico First also produces nonpartisan public policy reports on critical issues facing the state. These reports – on topics like water, education, healthcare, the economy, and energy – are available at www.nmfirst.org.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION RESULTS

During the meeting, participants benefited from presentations by local early childhood care and education experts who outlined the key issues that young children and their families face in the region as well as information that showed where communities face the most risks, where programs currently operate, the quality of these programs, and where gaps need to be filled. This information can help communities make financial and other policy decisions to support young children, families, and communities in a systematic and effective way.

Participants also engaged in small group discussions in which they answered four key questions. These questions were drawn from previous research done by NMECDP and other nonprofit organizations that have been canvassing the state in the past three years. The questions address four issues that still seem to be key to aligning an early childhood system across the state:

- In our community, what are practical ways of providing support to families of young children?
- How can we more directly include and encourage involvement of our local businesses and business leaders in early childhood care and education issues?
- Within our community, what are ideas for identifying, recruiting, and retaining qualified and inspired caregivers and teachers for our youngest children?
- What can be done in this region to improve collaboration among initiatives and programs that support New Mexico families with young children?

The following outlines the results of the participants' conversations.

Supported Families

The participants emphasized the need to respect each family, learn about their strengths, and respect their culture, values, and language. They also recognized in a complex society, some parents need support in fulfilling their role. Sometimes, participants agreed, the community needs to step in and provide support for families.

Community members agreed that young children and their families need services that address a host of needs in their lives. Increased access to affordable childcare services is needed in this community. This access is especially important for low-income families as it allows them to continue their education and to work. Expansion of home visiting programs and the specific use of in-home language, including tribal languages, were also seen as a key need. This type of program helps parents and children build strong family bonds, provides valuable information to address family needs, and facilitates early intervention. Home visiting programs were seen as a starting point for building a network or coalition of early childhood providers that could coordinate efforts within neighborhoods. This coordination would also address another need—addressing the transition needs of children and families through the various education and health systems in the community. Other needs include: prenatal care services; job development services such as GED programs, on-the-job training, and mentoring programs for teen parents; and transportation to available services. Government funding is seen as a primary challenge for service expansion whether for extended library hours and summer camps or for education financial aid which includes a childcare provision.

Outreach to families regarding early childhood resources was also viewed as a need. Identifying points of contact within communities and collaborating among existing services seem to be the key to outreach. Community members emphasized the importance of supporting existing nonprofit organizations that work with families, making specific efforts to involve faith communities to help network within the community, and making better use of school facilities as a community resource for families. Using these natural points of contact, better distribution of resource guides, or establishing one-stop-shops that can connect families to services and support

would enhance family outreach. The way families are approached was also seen as important. Getting to know families through one-on-one conversations, offering services with full respect, and empowering families by engaging them in meaningful activities with their children are keys to helping them meet their responsibilities in the role of parent, teacher, mentor, and advocate.

Participants also saw the importance of building public awareness regarding early childhood care and education. A unified community message that emphasizes the importance of addressing early childhood issues to legislators and business, as well as strengthens a commitment to families that the community cares, was mentioned as a strategy. Holding community forums with inspiring speakers, “talking” stories, and incentives to attend was also mentioned as a strategy.

Involved Businesses

Participants recognized that those who live and work with children everyday see investments in early childhood development can pay huge dividends. Participants stressed the need to increase business awareness that making the success of children a priority leads to making a business successful.

Participants saw the need to educate business leaders regarding the relevance of early childhood issues to the economic well being of the community. Community members acknowledged that better communication is needed regarding the importance of these issues and the outcomes for businesses. Sharing local data supporting the return on investment in early childhood development and the impact on future workforce development would be helpful. Communicating the linkage between access to high quality childcare to lower employee absenteeism, higher employee retention, and greater satisfaction with employers would also be helpful. Participants also suggested bringing business leaders to see the work at provider sites and to listen as families share their experiences would be a way of building awareness.

Community members acknowledged the key was conducting effective outreach to a diverse group of business leaders within the community. Participants suggested conducting a survey to identify a business’s level of issue understanding, how employees currently handle childcare, and what supports are currently being provided by employers. Developing a multi-county coalition or a local outreach team of teachers, principals, and advocates to create relationships with the local Chamber of Commerce and businesses was also suggested. Local advertising and distributing a Child Awareness Report Card for businesses were also mentioned.

Participants also suggested ways businesses could directly support early childhood development programs or institute family-friendly practices for their employees as a way of supporting early childhood needs. Ideas mentioned include:

- Allow employees time to volunteer in early childhood programs.
- Allow parents time to participate in their child’s education without being penalized
- Offer employee incentives or benefits to cover child care expenses
- Provide education programs for families (e.g., banks could teach financial literacy skills)
- Pair up businesses with existing programs, nonprofit service providers, or schools for direct financial support (i.e., adopt-a-program, fund a teacher, provide early childhood education scholarships)
- Allow a tax credit for family friendly policies and activities

Quality Child Care Workforce

Participants agreed that dedicated early childhood professionals know that working in quality settings can support a child’s success and development into adulthood. Participants saw that recruiting a local workforce and developing their skills and loyalty to the field is an important community asset for families and businesses.

Participants encouraged recruiting within the community as a strategy for increasing a quality early education workforce. This was particularly important for tribal communities where high turnover is a problem for the externally-managed programs as teachers in these programs have a time-consuming commute from Albuquerque or Rio Rancho. Expanding dual language approaches was also seen as a strategy for recruiting and retaining a quality early childhood workforce. This strategy allows communities to reinforce traditional cultures, values, and languages. Additional suggestions include:

- Partnering with community organizations to provide free workshops, career days, and career fairs to promote early childhood education careers
- Recruiting teen mothers and other family members who are promising teachers and mentoring them to work in the early childhood education field
- Involving AmeriCorps in early childhood education

Participants saw the need to strengthen the perception that the early childhood field was a profession, not a trade, and therefore education requirements were needed. However, they also voiced a concern regarding mandates for too many education requirements to enter and remain in the field. Education requirements seen as important include a high school diploma or GED for caregivers and an associate degree for those who want to be educators. They also encouraged creating a career pathway in early childhood care and education that starts in high school and continues through higher education. Additional educational strategies include: more child development classes in Spanish throughout the state, more hands-on classes, and training for K-3 teachers in reading development intervention. Some participants were concerned about alternative licensure as it places workers in classrooms who are untrained in teaching and learning concepts.

Community members recognized the need to provide funding support for education in early childhood development as a retention strategy. The most frequently mentioned suggestions include incentives for employees to continue their education, increasing TEACH scholarships, paid internships in early childhood programs, degree scholarships, and job training support for teacher assistants.

Participants also believed wage and benefit levels is a barrier to retaining a qualified early childhood workforce. Suggested strategies include:

- Increasing pay for caregivers, education assistants, and teachers
- Increasing reimbursement rates for providers
- Providing rewards tied to tenure
- Offering incentives to caregivers who are working towards a degree such as paying tuition and text book costs and giving paid time off
- Offering incentives to staff such as conference attendance, occasional early dismissal, supply budgets, etc. to increase motivation and morale

Funding early childhood education was seen as barrier. In addition to seeking support from charitable organizations, participants suggested using small business organizations such as small business incubators, small business administrations, and Accion to help promote early childhood funding needs. One specific suggestion for United Way of Santa Fe County was to offer the First Born community training at local businesses during the next corporate fund drive to build support.

Collaborative Efforts

Participants viewed making young children a community priority as a practical step to achieving community goals for education, economic development, and overall quality of life. This focus, however, would take collaborative effort in order to have maximum impact.

Participants acknowledged that early childhood programs are already embedded, intentionally or otherwise, in a larger community and therefore each program should engage these formal and informal natural support systems rather than treating external support systems as out-referral opportunities. The program leaders and staff should welcome all support systems to actively participate within the daily activities of early childhood programs. This approach can open up the possibility of supporting a broad range of life activities for all family members in the early childhood setting. The value of one-stop-shops would facilitate alignment of simple processes, such as shared assessments, across functional or agency boundaries.

A key suggestion from participants was to continue and support existing collaborative efforts. These existing efforts include: influencing articulation, identifying children at risk, documenting all education and health systems that provide early childhood services, and supporting collaborations such as the Santa Fe Youth Collaboration. If a more formal regional structure needs to be created, recommendations include: involving all stakeholders as partners and creating an executive board along with smaller regional boards using the Big Brother Big Sister organization as a model. Important collaborative activities include help in grant writing and fundraising as well as collecting data that would facilitate a child's transitions from prenatal care to school graduation.

Another recommendation was to be inclusive and including regional tribal communities. Defining how tribes fit into the work, bringing in tribal leadership, looking for tribal resolutions, and including tribal communities in trainings, etc. would be key to this recommendation. Participants also suggested that regions review how gaming funds turned over to the state are being used and asking that some of these funds be invested back into early education care and education programs. Other stakeholders who could be better utilized are chambers of commerce and businesses, community health councils and hospital administrators, and school superintendents. Training volunteers, in addition to nurses and medical staff, to be advocates in homes was also seen as an opportunity.

Funding and collaboration training was also suggested as important to building community capacity. Suggestions include: regular program provider meetings and conferences as well as parent and volunteer education.

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