
APPLYING CAPD'S SCHOOL READINESS APPROACH IN WORK WITH COMMUNITIES IN CONNECTICUT

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CAPD and our colleague organization, Cornerstone Consulting Group, are working with several communities in Connecticut to build community consensus around school readiness outcomes and to develop their capacity to collect and use data on critical indicators. The Connecticut communities have been involved in an initiative funded by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund for the past several years that includes building local system collaboratives and parent leadership as strategies to improve the health, development and school success of children from birth through age eight. At this juncture in their work, all seven communities have identified developing something like a community report on school readiness indicators as a critical part of their long term effort to broaden and strengthen community investment in children. Given the nature of their work, they have identified outcomes in three areas - parent leadership, system responsiveness, and child well-being.

At this point, we are helping a collaborative group in each community recruit broader input into the selection of outcome indicators in each of these areas. We have developed a framework for the outcomes in each of the three areas and work sheets for use at community meetings to help participants identify priority indicators (see Attachment 2).

In putting together these materials we drew from outcomes and indicators already in use or in the literature, including, of course, the Kids Count reports, outcome milestone or benchmark work in other states or communities, and the work of various initiatives.¹ Further, we were guided by the following considerations:

¹ These include the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation work on "promotional indicators" in their states' Initiative.

² One example, from work in Philadelphia, is the creation of a form to collect information on the numbers of children who attempt to register for kindergarten without adequate documentation of immunizations. This form was itself a tool for referral and represented a policy change at that school toward making use of the option for provisional registration. Its use obviously benefitted children directly as well as supporting collection of a critical indicator of child status.

* First, we want to make sure the focus remained on outcomes per se, not just service utilization. Service utilization data are more readily available and there is certainly evidence for many services of the link between receiving the service and achieving a desired outcome. The work sheets separate these two categories of indicators into "Indicators of Outcomes" and "Indicators of Resources/Investments".

* Second, we want to help community participants look beyond the indicator data that are currently available. In particular, we want participants to recognize the disparity in the availability of data by major outcome - for some outcomes, there are considerable existing data and for others, very little. And, the organizers in each city want to help others in their community see the potential for collecting more relevant and meaningful data. Currently available indicators for each outcome area are shown in a separate shaded box on each work sheet.

* And, third, we want to help the communities see how collecting data is itself a system change activity. All of the indicators are feasible, but would require reallocation of priorities and resources to collect. And, particularly in the child well-being and system responsiveness outcome areas, collecting the data could be accomplished through activities that would create direct benefits for children.² That is, there would not need to be independent data collection such as a survey.