



Four Rivers Early Learning Hub Governance Meeting Minutes

May 26, 2015, 10:00 AM – 12:00
Steve Burnett Research and Extension Office
66365 Lonerock Road, Moro, OR 97039

Attendance:

Hub Members:

Gilliam County Rep, Steve Shaffer - present
Hood River Rep, Karen Joplin – absent (emailed)
Sherman County Rep, Gary Thompson – absent
Wasco County Rep, Steve Kramer – absent
Wheeler County Rep, Chris Perry – absent
Business Rep, Jennifer Bold – present
Early Childhood Rep, Nancey Patten – present
Health Rep, Teri Thalhofer - present
K-12 Rep, Gary Peterson– present
Parent Rep, Kristen Richelderfer – present
Social Services Rep, Janet Hamada– absent (emailed)
DHS District Manager, David Pike – present
Behavioral Health Rep, Barb Seatter - absent

Guests:

Terri Vann – Keeping Families Together (Child Abuse & Neglect Initiative in HR)
Amber DeGrange – Sherman County Juvenile Department
Jen Heredia – Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC- Migrant/Seasonal Head Start)
Kim Williams – North Central ESD Early Childhood
Joella Dethman – staff

April 28, 2015 Hub meeting minutes – Teri Thalhofer made a motion to approve the April 28 Hub minutes. Steve Shaffer seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

RAC Survey preliminary results – Gary Peterson said Regional Achievement Collaboratives (RACs) were developed to be policy makers at the local level, mirroring the OEIB (Oregon Education Investment Board) setting policy for the Oregon Department of Education. Governor Kitzhaber envisioned RACs to coordinate the system from birth – 21 years of age. Fourteen RACs were developed but not all areas of the state were covered including Clackamas County and NW Oregon. Our RAC received a \$40,000 grant to assess early childhood services. Dan Spatz and Paul Lindberg contracted through Columbia Gorge ESD to survey preschools and Elementary Schools across the five counties served by Four Rivers Early Learning Hub.

Columbia Gorge Community College initially convened RAC partners and included Washington State University and Clark College in the bi-state RAC. At the last RAC meeting, members discussed governance very similar to the process the Hub used to decide on a governance structure. The next RAC meeting will be June 10. Future RAC funding is up in the air as Senate Bill 215 may dismantle the OEIB.

Gary reviewed the Pre School Survey preliminary report completed by Dan Spatz. The one-on-one surveys highlighted the transition from Pre School to Kindergarten, curriculums, challenges, training and continued education. [The preliminary report is included with these minutes.]

As minimum wages increase and families must make more money to survive, fewer families qualify for Head Start, making more than 100% of poverty but unable to afford preschool. Joella said the Strategic Plan identified families living at 100%-200% of poverty for expanded preschool.

Vroom – Joella said she attended a Hub Coordinator meeting in Madras last week. There was a presentation to attendees about applying for grants to bring Vroom, app for the phone with daily messages for parents to incorporate simple brain development activities into their daily lives. Steve said his grandchildren enjoy the activities. Kim said she is overseeing a three county pilot Vroom project serving Sherman, Gilliam and Wheeler Counties. Teri Thalhofer moved to approve Joella applying for a Vroom grant for Hood River and Wasco Counties. Nancey Patten seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Early Literacy Project – Kim reported that she oversees a \$50,000 Early Literacy Project grant serving Sherman, Gilliam and Wheeler Counties. They purchased over 1,000 books, had Heather McNeal from Deschutes County Library conduct a kickoff event, provided books to Story Time in each county and distributed books to all doctor's offices. Story time will continue through June. Joella said the Early Literacy funding will be included in Early Learning Council funds to each Hub combined with other funds.

Hub application update – Joella reported the final Hub application review will be completed soon and then will move for committee approval. We will celebrate the Hub application approval at the next Hub meeting June 23.

Hub funding – Joella passed out three sheets indicating current Early Learning Council funding contracted through counties. Healthy Families contracts will be extended for three months allowing the ELC time to prepare new contracts after allocations have been determined by the legislature. Starting in October 2015, Healthy Families contracts will be released directly from the Early Learning Division to programs. The Strategic Plan calls for continued funding to existing programs. It was agreed by consensus to continue existing funding allocations for the 2015-16 fiscal year. Contracts will be handled by Sherman County, the Hub fiscal agent.

The budget shows the majority of Hub current program funds being allocated to Sherman, Gilliam and Wheeler Counties for preschools and child care programs. It was agreed to ask the preschools and child care programs for their budgets, number of children living at <100% of poverty, 100%-200% or >200% of poverty, the model and charge to families – as a condition of the Hub contract. This information will be used to assess targeting of highest risk children with limited funds in the future.

The state estimates Four Rivers Early Learning Hub Coordinator Funds to be \$342,240 for the next biennium. Some of this money will pay for a Hub Coordinator. A budget for the coordinator, supplies and travel is not determined yet.

The Early Learning Division is expecting the legislature to approve a budget between \$15.4 million and the Governor's Recommended budget. Joella's estimates are between \$739,680 and \$987,360 total funds to the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub for the 2015-17 biennium (two years) – based on the state staff best guesses. Grant streams to counties are based on population only. Hub Coordination has a \$50,000 minimum with population based funding added.

Joella asked for input about the staffing model. She sees the Hub Coordinator as a full-time person and there was general agreement that with five counties to cover, it is necessary. Joella suggests placing the Hub Coordinator as an employee with an agency providing support for this lone Coordinator. Amber said she did not think Sherman County would want to hire an employee. Joella asked about an ESD contract. Nancey said the college might be a good place as they serve all five counties. Joella will take this information to the committee.

Next meeting June 23, 10:00-12:00 in Moro. Minutes prepared by Joella 5/26/15.

Four Rivers Early Learning Hub Pre-School Survey: Status Report – May 24, 2015

Summary:

The focus of this survey is early student success with emphasis upon transition from pre-school to kindergarten. The survey uses a standard set of questions (attached) to identify best practices and challenges, explore assessment methodologies, review curricula, and determine the level of two-way, on-going communication that occurs between pre-school and kindergarten instructors across the five-county region. Public and private pre-schools are surveyed. Transition forms, samples of curricula and assessment tools are collected whenever available. Tactile learning tools and other tools to support best practices are documented through photographs as well as field notes. Play time, screen time and fee structures are tracked for comparative purposes. The survey began in mid-April and will conclude in June, at which time a final report will be released; this will also incorporate findings from a parallel set of interviews currently taking place across kindergarten and grades 1-3 in the region's 10 school districts.

Status:

In-person interviews have been conducted with instructional staff and center coordinators at the following pre-schools: Belmont Head Start, Sherman Cooperative Pre-School, Hood River Community Education Mid-Valley Pre-School, Horizon Christian Pre-School, SmartEPants Pre-School, Parkdale Head Start, Little Feet Pre-School, Country Club Head Start, Maupin Head Start, St. Mary's Academy Pre-School, Hood River Community Education Little Learners, Spray School District Pre-School, North Sherman Head Start, Arlington Pre-School, Columbia Gorge Education Service District Pre-School, Fossil Pre-School, Mitchell Pre-School, The Dalles Head Start and Early Head Start, Petersburg Head Start, Condon Pre-School.

Interviews are pending or to be scheduled at the following pre-schools: Bright Beginnings, New Vision School, Sunflower School, Mid-Columbia Adventist Christian Pre-School, Learning Farm, Our Children's Place, Oregon Child Development Coalition, Methodist Pre-School, Great and Small, Dufur School Pre-School.

Preliminary findings and observations:

Assessment tools and curricula:

- Creative Curriculum Teaching Strategies (TS-Gold) is commonly used in public and some private settings. Other assessment tools vary. TS-Gold is cited, both positively and negatively, for the variety and amount of information gathered through this assessment (while it collects a wealth of data, it is time-consuming to administer). Pre-school instructors report that TS-Gold is not considered relevant beyond pre-school, although this needs to be confirmed.
- Formative assessment typically occurs through observation rather than a "sit-down" test with the instructor.
- Some curricula have been developed "in-house," but standard tools are widely used: Handwriting Without Tears, DECA for socio-emotional assessment, Second Steps, ZooPhonics and others, typically in combination. In some instances, weekly lessons plans serve as curricula; there are no additional materials.

Best practices:

- Learning through play, developing and sustaining close family relationships, tailoring curricula to individual children, widespread use of varied and ever-changing tactile learning tools.

- Thus far in the survey, no pre-school allows children to watch television in class; some screen time is occasionally allowed through computers or movies, but only when these complement the curricula. Screen time is not used simply to “occupy” classroom time.
- Playtime is generally used as a learning tool, whether through the use of tactile devices (Playdough to create letters of the alphabet) or to observe and instruct social skills (problem-solving, dispute resolution). Playtime is generally well-structured, with some exceptions.
- One best practice is the use of regular meetings across grade levels to assess individual student learning styles and teaching strategies; these meetings must overcome the logistical challenge of finding a convenient time and location for participants.
- All pre-schools interviewed thus far employ the use of classroom “jobs” to encourage student participation (bell-ringer, weather watcher, door-keeper, etc.). One pre-school developed a specific job for every student, rotating this throughout the year.
- Cost-saving strategies are also identified: low-cost (\$2) noise-cancelling headphones for use when appropriate for diagnosed learning challenges; home-made recipes for Playdough; community partnerships for field trips. When Head Start-eligible and non-eligible students are enrolled in the same classroom, students are always “blended,” with no preferential treatment given.

Challenges:

- Inadequate staffing and funding levels, a rising incidence of socio-emotional problems (reported by most but not all pre-schools), parents who lack essential parenting skills (this is a problem across the income spectrum).
- Access to violent video games is one contributing factor to socio-emotional escalation. A related concern is the electronic disconnect between parents and children, as parents spend more time on their smart phones or tablets than they spend with their children (this concern also crosses the income spectrum).
- Common Core, while not intentionally designed for the pre-school level, nevertheless raises concern among pre-school instructors; it is not considered developmentally appropriate for children of this young age, but it is seen as exerting a subtle influence as school districts implement it in lower grade levels. Instructors do not question the value of encouraging young children to learn the alphabet, numeracy, or bi-lingual skills; they do challenge the wisdom of expecting comparable levels of achievement at the same time in the school year for all children, regardless of individual stages of development.
- Another challenge involves playtime: Children learn through play, but there is concern that the transition to kindergarten is too abrupt, as children are expected to sit quietly for long periods in the kindergarten classroom.
- A significant concern involves the loss of learning momentum that occurs through the long summer break. Instructors try to address this by preparing summer study materials and sending these materials home with parents.

Communication in support of kindergarten transition:

- The level of communication between pre-school and kindergarten instructors varies widely, and does not appear to be associated with the size of a community, whether a pre-school is public or private, or even whether the pre-school is located within the elementary school building (although proximity does help). The common thread for effective communication across grade levels is one of trust and mutual respect developed gradually through the years among individual instructors. This is augmented by administrative support: in one case, a school district

building principal works with the pre-school instructor to identify opportunities for improving transition. In another setting, the district superintendent personally encourages continuing interaction between pre-school and kindergarten staff. In these instances, pre-school instructors (whether in a private or public setting) report that kindergarten instructors are fully engaged, interested in learning effective strategies, and continue to consult with them about individual students following the transition.

- Nevertheless, continuing dialog across the pre-school to kindergarten transition, especially as it concerns effective teaching strategies and methods for dealing with socio-emotional challenges for individual students, is the exception rather than the rule at pre-schools interviewed thus far. More routinely, communication is limited to one or two meetings between staff, or does not occur at all. In these cases, there is little transfer of experiential knowledge about individual students, and little if any understanding of whether curricula are aligned across the grade levels.
- Transition forms are in general use, but their content varies widely. Most pre-schools support the use of a common form across the region.

Training, continuing education requirements and access to resources:

- This varies widely, influenced by the type of program and geographic setting. It is relevant to note that, in Oregon, there are no state licensing requirements to operate a pre-school. This is reflected in responses gathered to date regarding the frequency and level of training required of pre-school instructors, which varies from a minimum of 15 hours of continuing education annually to a single annual conference.
- Knowledge of and access to professional community resources also varies widely across the region. Some pre-schools report excellent access to professional resources such as mental health counseling; others express a feeling of isolation, expressing a desire to learn counseling strategies themselves because they lack, or at least are unaware of, any other resources available.