NEVER DOUBT THE POWER: Stakeholder impacts from a collaborative evaluation of a primary prevention community-based early childhood and parenting program

The Program and the Problem

For 30+ years, Minnesota’s Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program offers

- parenting education and early childhood education for all families (0-5yrs)
- usually 1/week, two hour parent/child and parent+child sessions
- through 337 school districts
- licensed parenting & EC educators
- for no or low cost
- in neighborhood/school settings

Previous evaluations reveal its effectiveness for parenting and school readiness. The legacy of the program has provided MN with a culture of parent support during early childhood

BUT with...

- Decentralized administration
- Lack of mandate for evaluation
- Stagnant funding ($120/family)
- Local program staff feeling disenfranchised, under-resourced & overextended
- Threats from shifts in $$, political interests toward child-centric, targeted population programs

Creates the problem:

How to demonstrate statewide program effectiveness with limited resources?

The Collaborative Solution

1. Committee of ECFE, university + field professionals create & pilot template evaluation instrument (retrospective pre-test) + method
   - Low cost & practical to implement
   - Based on identified supports to child well-being

2. State professional agencies offer financial assistance and promotion

3. UMN collaborates w/ ECFE programs for data collection & analysis
   - Enables individual district AND aggregated data

Collaborative Outcomes (2012-current)

- Participation by 33 small to large school district programs (range 35-1128 families)
- Survey translated into 5 languages
- Evaluation costs average $500; dollars reinvested in professional development by UMN
- Individual and state-level reports generated

Stakeholder Impacts*

- Staff and parents feel validated, aware of effectiveness
- Programming improved
- Administrators aware of program’s value, appreciative of supports to families
- Legislators value program data to aid in decision-making
- Invitations to participate in state & federal family engagement discussions
- ECFE teachers included in union advocacy
- Graduate students immersed in community-engaged policy work

*Follow up survey with participating districts, October, 2013 (n=25)

“It is so hard to quantify the difference we are making with parents. This tool was a great way to do that.”

- ECFE Coordinator

Susan K Walker, PhD, Department of Family Social Science skwalker@umn.edu

Aggregate results n=5672#

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Results shared with:

- Federal (Franken, D-MN), state & local legislators
- School boards, and administration
- Teaching and support staff
- Parents
- Media, school district PR
- Regional PreK-3 planning teams
- State teachers union (Education Minnesota)

![ECFE Program Participation in Collaborative Evaluation 2012-2013](image)

*Stakeholder Impacts*