

Holistic Community Partnerships Help to Support School-Afterschool Connections

New Britain is located in the heart of Connecticut, half-way between Boston and New York City, and is home to many different immigrant communities. The Polish community is thriving; the Puerto Rican community is vibrant; and the Yemeni population is growing. Over 60 languages are spoken in our schools, and there is pride in the culturally rich environment of the community.

According to the 2010 Census, 80% of the students enrolled in the public schools are eligible for free or reduced price meals, and almost a third of kindergartners speak a language other than



English. Problems of the magnitude faced by New Britain's children and families have defied the traditional approaches to solve them. The social sector (government and non-profit service agencies) typically address issues with isolated interventions by individual organizations. In this era of increasingly scarce resources, schools and programs that support children and families cannot work in isolation to meet the needs of the community.

Coalition for New Britain's Youth

In 2015, four major groups came together to form the Coalition for New Britain's Youth. Rather than working independently, the partners all agreed to join forces to increase the impact they can collectively have on our youth's lives. Today the Coalition is a partnership of almost 50 community based organizations, government agencies and funders working together to serve youth birth to 24 years

The Coalition developed four strategy groups (Connecting Families, Health and Wellness, Early Learning/School Readiness, and Youth and Workforce Development) to organize activities. The groups are using a results-based accountability framework, thinking about the desired end result, and working their way back through data and analysis to develop appropriate strategies and tactics to achieve the intended outcomes, and corresponding indicators to assess progress. Some high-level indicators that have already been identified by the strategy groups include teen pregnancy rate, attendance rates by grade and school, four-year graduation rates, childhood obesity and childhood asthma.

In conjunction with the Strategy Groups' efforts, the Coalition's two committees (Professional Development and Networking and Data and Evaluation) support the work of the Strategy Groups. The Professional Development and Networking committee hosted two evening cafés (for parents and for preschool teachers) to discuss attendance. In addition, the committee is

also hosting an After School Collaborative to allow professionals from across New Britain to share ideas and learn about new research. They have also hosted ongoing training for After School professionals.

Initiatives

One of the initiatives that the Coalition members tackled was school attendance. In 2011, Connecticut issued its first report regarding Chronic Absenteeism. New Britain led the State public schools with the highest absenteeism rate: over 25% of students were attending school less than 90% of the time. As a result, Coalition members began to track attendance in afterschool as well as preschool. Tackling absenteeism is a complex issue, every family faces different challenges to get their children to school: from a need for warm clothing to uncontrolled asthma. Because of the collective work, Chronic Absenteeism rate in the district went down to 16%.



The Superintendent of Schools, Nancy Sarra, summed this impact model saying: “In our journey to develop the whole child, the community partnerships we have formed are crucial to accomplishing our ultimate goal. It truly takes a village to raise a child and without our community partners, it would not be possible. They are an essential part of our brand and who we are.”

New Britain and the Coalition was recognized nationally by the Grade Level Reading Campaign, naming it as a Pacesetter community. The Coalition was one of seven recognized in all four categories including attendance and summer learning. The SEE program won the New York Life Excellence in Summer national award. And, most importantly, the National Civic League named New Britain as an All-America City this past June.

According to Coalition Executive Director Robin Lamott Sparks, “The success we have had in New Britain is a result of the community’s culture of collaboration and working together. The commitment of our members to improve the lives of the children and youth of New Britain makes this job exciting and motivating. There is much work to be done, but together we know we can make a difference.”

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