



Preschool Collaboration Tool

IOWA SCHOOL BOARDS FOUNDATION

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION – TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Community collaboration is a requirement of the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program and for good reason. Effective, meaningful collaboration maximizes resources, minimizes barriers to preschool access and provides important, comprehensive services that meet the needs of children and families.

❖ GETTING STARTED - PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- **Start early and begin learning about the issues.** Start preparing for a successful collaboration. Study the preschool legislation. Talk to others and learn about potential issues that will need to be addressed during collaboration.
- **Identify and invite as many potential partners** in the beginning as you can. It saves time and promotes good will and trust.
- **Involve families and account for their needs** and preferences when developing programs and services. Families are the ultimate consumers of preschool and are important partners to include in the process.
- **Include all early care and education providers** to demonstrate a commitment to quality services, honoring those that are already serving young children.
- **Include a school board member** as a key stakeholder in the collaboration meetings. Involving a member of the school board keeps the entire board aware of the issues, builds board support and promotes a strong board-community connection.
- **Collaborate with many different partners; it shows a commitment** that this is a plan that is responsive to local needs as a community, not just as a school district.

“Putting children and families first in the community is a fantastic way to deliver high quality programs. Entities working together to provide those programs makes the community a richer place for children to learn and grow. Collaboration is work, but it is the right work and has the potential to deliver the best results”.

- Kim Young-Kent, Executive Director, Tri-County Child and Family Development Council, Waterloo, IA

❖ DEVELOPING AND STAYING FOCUSED ON THE VISION

- **Create a vision** for the preschool program that benefits children and families.
- **Be innovative and creative.** Think outside the box. Develop a vision that keeps transitions for children at a minimum.
- **Keep the vision front and center during collaboration.** Be flexible and compromise on issues, except the vision.
- **Use the vision to communicate** to community stakeholders, parents, educators, the media and when hiring staff.

❖ QUALITY PRESCHOOL

- **Ensuring and increasing quality preschool access** for all four-year-olds with priority given to those considered most in need is the ultimate outcome of effective collaboration. Quality preschool includes:
 - A nurturing, certified teacher with early childhood education and experience delivering quality instruction through developmentally appropriate practices
 - A research-based preschool curriculum and research-based assessment
 - Blended funding streams to ensure children from other child care arrangements can participate with minimal disruption
 - Comprehensive services such as extended-day child care, developmental screenings, family education and support and transportation
 - National or state preschool program standards such as NAEYC, Head Start or the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards

“Our collaboration with Drake University Head Start ensures the delivery of a quality early childhood program... Our collaboration agreement also includes health care and family advocate services. The expertise of the people and organization assist us at the local level in providing a well-designed and effective delivery of early childhood programming in Ogden.” - Rick Gustafson, Ogden Community Schools

❖ BUILDING TRUST, STRENGTHENING AND MAINTAINING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

- **Build on existing community collaborative relationships** and forge new ones based on trust.
- **Build in time to talk about partners’ differing organizational issues, requirements and procedures.** This builds understanding and alleviates potential mistrust between non-profit, public and private entities.
- **Recognize the resources, skills and knowledge** that each entity brings to the table.
- **Build trust by being respectful and supportive** of all private services and public agencies.
- **Stay the course. Be persistent.** Effective collaboration and change takes time.

❖ **LEARNING TOGETHER**

- **Study data and information about current needs and services** in the community. Use data from different resources to develop a preschool program that meets the existing needs of children and families and fills the service gaps within communities.
- **Determine community assets and resources and develop a blended approach** to support the preschool program. Combining community resources maximizes the services for children and families.

❖ **REACHING CONSENSUS**

- **Encourage others with opposing views to share concerns.** Collaboration turns competitors into partners. Actively listen and be flexible in solving problems and creating solutions.
- **Be courageous and address issues or potential conflicts directly.** Be open to new ideas and encourage and accept creative thinking. Solutions can arise from the smallest seeds of thought.
- **Focus on creating win-win situations for all partners.**

❖ **COMMUNICATION**

- **Establish channels of communication** to ensure everyone receives the same messages and information. Frank and open communication and decision-making are at the core of community collaboration.
- **Speak on behalf of the entire collaborative group** when talking to others, not just on behalf of your organization.
- **Remember it takes more time to build consensus** among different partners than it does for people within a single agency or group.

❖ **PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

- **Keep the community's perception in mind.** Communication to other community members should focus on the vision of the program – quality preschool for four-year-olds - to prevent misconceptions – such as the new program creates a funding stream for the school district.
- **Build public will and support** by communicating often to policymakers, parents, educators, media, businesses, service agencies and other key stakeholders.

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