

Monroe County Leadership Model Examples

Parent Education and Support

In this first step of the Parenting Leadership Continuum we have a parent survey that we administer at various events and activities throughout the community to parents with children 5 and under. The purpose of this survey is to gather information about what parents need or are lacking and where in the county they are located. This provides concrete data rather than the board speculating on the needs of parents and their children. As we review data and comments, the GSPC is able to make connections in the community to address these needs and host activities or events to get the information and resources out to the families.

Examples of what has been revealed in the surveys...

- There is a large number of parents NOT reading to their babies and young children
- Barriers to participation were exposed that were contrary to the preconceived ideas. (i.e. transportation is not as big of an issue as the need for childcare or stroller accessibility)
- Economic issues are affecting people of ALL income levels. Those who never thought they would need to use public programs and services are finding themselves lost in the process
- Basic health needs such as immunizations for children need to be addressed

Actions taken by the GSPC/GSC...

- Children's Health Fair started 2 years ago with participation by many GSC partners and local businesses
 - Health Dept.
 - Dept. of Human Services
 - MSU Extension/Breastfeeding Collaborative
 - Children's Health Plan of MI
 - United Way
 - Monroe Bank and Trust
 - Monroe Co. Library System
- SEE COPY OF SURVEY ATTACHED

Parent Involvement

At all of our local activities and events, we are recruiting new parents to be a part of the GSPC. We have a distribution list that has not grown to over 1300 email addresses of parents with preschoolers in the community. Parents sign a membership form to become a part of the distribution list or "At Large" parent member. These parents, in many cases, want the information, want to know about what is going on in the community regarding early childhood activities and events, but are not yet at the point of taking on a true leadership role. Many share our information with friends and family members and repost our information on their Facebook accounts. Many of these parents attend our annual Parenting Conference held and sponsored by a number of our GSC partners and the business community. At each of the events that these parents attend, the GSPC has information on joining the group, moving to the next level of membership (CORE Group/Tier 2) as well as signing letters to our local Representatives in support of continued early childhood funding. (See attached sample letters) These letters are then

mailed to the Representatives monthly with a short note about where the letters came from and how many people attended the event.

Examples of parent involvement...

- Sharing GSC/GSPC information/resources with their friends and family by forwarding emails, reposting Facebook information, inviting them to events
- Attending local events and activities sponsored by the GSC/GSPC partners and in doing so, learning about what is available in the community.
 - Annual Health Fair
 - Backpack Distributions
 - Parenting Conference
 - Family Fun Night at the community college
 - Celebrate Children annual event
 - Car Seat Safety Checks
 - Child Identification Kit/Safety Days
 - GSPC sponsored family tours/activities and events with local partners

How does this level of involvement meet the goals of the continuum...

- Parents and caregivers are now a community resource by being able to share information and services with others not yet familiar with the GSC/GSPC and their partners.
- This is the beginning of a much larger network of parents in the community. They feel connected to each other and those in similar situations; making their job as parent a bit more understandable and manageable. It is a HUGE task after all!
- Parents are better able to speak up about what their needs are in order to be an active member of the parenting community and truly become an advocate for their child/children.

Parent Engagement

Once parents have attended or participated in the events of the GSPC they are all invited to become a part of our CORE/Tier 2 Parent Coalition. This group of parents is much more active and involved in the community and the advocacy activities. These parents attend once a month meetings where free on-site childcare is provided as well as dinner for the parents and children. The meeting time was determined based on the schedule and needs of the interested parents and as a result, we have 10-20 parents attend each of these meetings. Not only do they attend the meetings but they are out in the community spreading the word about the importance of early childhood funding, programs and services, early childhood brain development, safe sleep practices and proper nutrition just to name a few of the topics discussed. This group also brings information to me about what they are seeing and hearing in the community as part of the larger network. What do parents need? What are some commonly asked questions etc? These parents are very connected with parent groups, church groups, local agencies, businesses and schools. This back and forth dialogue helps the GSPC take action and ensure that our local families and children are getting what they need to ensure a GREAT START!

Activities in which the CORE/Tier 2 groups participates...

- Monthly meetings held in the evening with free childcare and meals provided
- Parents are members of GSC/GSPC initiatives/subcommittees
 - Teen Parent Initiative
 - Numerous standing committees as part of the GSC
 - Serve as parent rep. on local advisory group (Head Start Policy Council)

- Engage in elected official education (attend and share GSPC info with candidates prior to election, letter writing etc.)
- Attend local trainings (Advocacy training with Matt Gillard, Safe Sleep presentation, Early Childhood Brain Development presentations etc.)
- Attend state wide advocacy event (Star Power!!! Attendance has increased every year)

How are these actions making a difference?

- Strengthening community involvement – not only are parents of preschoolers becoming involved in these initiatives but grandparents, other family members, business owners and leaders, K-12 school administrators
- Parents are becoming active members of local planning committees and groups to be the voice of the family in the decision making processes in the community. (United Way, Downtown Business Association etc.)
- Parents are truly becoming the advocates for their children and seeking out resources to ensure that their children enter school ready to succeed!

Parenting Leadership

Our GSPC has a somewhat different design than others in the state. I act as the Parent Coordinator and then have a team of 4 other Parent Liaisons that work for and with me to accomplish the work of the GSC/GSPC. We have been doing this for 4 ½ years so it has been an evolutionary process of development. By having the team working with me, we are able to be at a tremendous number of events throughout the county each week and month, thus, extending our outreach to parents and being accessible to everyone. These 4 parents represent the 4 corners of our county with me living directly in the center and accessible to everyone. In this way, we are able to be a part of most school districts in the county as well as attend and participate in a variety of locally sponsored activities to share our information and network.

How can we be at this point and afford to sustain this with the grant money?

- Our GSC has seen that the GSPC is the driving force of the collaborative. We are the consumers, end users and the voice of the community. As a result of the success of our work, more money is put into the Parent Coalition each year than in any other line item in order to allow us to participate and fulfill the goals of the collaborative. We are the faces of Great Start in our community. While Great Start acts as the hub of all things early childhood in the county, the GSPC provides the outreach and connection to the families in the community.

What are some of the things these parents do in their leadership roles?

- A GSPC member is the Chair of our GSC
- Each member of this group is an active member on numerous committees and workgroups within the GSC and in the community
- Parents are Chairs or Co-Chairs of these groups
- These parents plan and host a number of activities in the community each year
- Parents recruit other parents to become a part of the GSPC
- Parents give presentations about the GSPC to local groups and schools etc.
- These parents are the face of Great Start and early childhood to our local legislators. The legislators recognize us and participate in our local activities whenever possible. These parents develop and have an ongoing relationship with the elected officials to act as the voice of parents in the community.

- Parents engage local businesses and encourage them to participate in the advocacy efforts as well as working with the GSPC to plan events and activities for families in the community to support the importance of early childhood development and education.
 - We currently have over 60 local business partners that we work with throughout the year to engage the community and provide outreach. These businesses donate time, space, supplies or discounts to allow families at all levels the ability to participate.

If you would like more information on any of the points I have discussed today, please feel free to contact me. Best wishes on further developing your Parent Coalition and your local parent leaders!

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