

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

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Wednesday, August 24, 2016

EC2C Provisionally Adopts Goals and Outcomes, Nears an Equity Statement

By Larry Gavin

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On Aug. 11, approximately 30 representatives of the partner organizations in the Evanston Cradle to Career Initiative (EC2C) held a partners' meeting at Evanston Township High School to discuss goals and outcomes, an equity statement, and examples of some successes. The partners act much like a board of directors of EC2C.

EC2C, which now has more than 40 partners, is built on the premise of collective impact. The plan is to address the needs of Evanston youth, starting at birth, in a holistic fashion and to focus on all factors that impact learning, health, and social and emotional development. The vision is: "By the age of 23, all Evanston young adults will be on the path to leading productive, satisfying lives."

Perhaps in response to frustration expressed by several members of the Literacy Solution Design Team on July 20, the partners' meeting opened with remarks that effecting change through collective impact is not going to be quick or easy, that it will take time to achieve EC2C's vision, but that significant progress is being made.

Alan Anderson, Director of Community Relations at Northwestern University, presented a graphic listing 26 activities that EC2C has engaged in within the last year to support parents as first educators of their children, help ensure children are ready for kindergarten, support literacy development during the summer, support post-secondary planning and transitions, promote well-being, safety, and stability, and engage the community.

"The work that we're doing is cumulative," said Mr. Anderson. "It's not one of those things where one action is going to solve everything. Systemic work takes a while to happen. This work is going to take time. ... It takes a lot of patience and persistence.

"My hope today – and all future days – is a further affirmation that you should continue to fight the fight."



Karen Tollenaar Demorest, Executive Director of Youth Job Center, discusses partnerships in the ABC Boosters program.



Lawrence Hemingway, Director of the City's Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department, summarizes the City's equity work for the partners in EC2C.

Sheila Merry, Executive Director of EC2C, said, “One of the clear messages we have gotten from the United Way in our neighborhood network is United Way has a clear interest to showcase what’s happening in Evanston. I know we all get frustrated and feel like we’re not making enough progress and not enough is happening, but they [United Way] feel great about what’s happening here.”

The partners include School Districts 65 and 202, the City of Evanston, the Evanston Public Library, Northwestern University, United Way, McGaw YMCA, the YWCA Evanston/North Shore, Youth and Opportunity United (Y.O.U.), the Moran Center, the Infant Welfare Society of Evanston (IWSE), the Evanston Community Foundation (ECF), and many other community organizations and places of worship.

Goals and Outcomes

Seth Green, Executive Director of Y.O.U., led a discussion on goals and outcomes for EC2C. Partners were asked to review in small groups a set of draft goals and outcomes that had been previously discussed, and to provide input. While activities proposed to achieve each of the goals were also identified, the partners were asked not to delve into them at this point, but to focus on goals and outcomes.

Mr. Green said, “When vision meets clarity, that’s where you get change. ... When we are able to articulate the specific goals and the measurable outcomes and activities that are connected to those goals, it unlocks the potential for everyone to be part of it.”

The partners provisionally adopted the following goals and outcomes at the meeting.

Goal No. 1 – Equity

The Goal: *“Address systemic issues of fundamental inequity that undermine the success of children, youth, and young adults in Evanston.”*

Lawrence Hemingway, Director of the City’s Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department, led the group that focused on this goal. He said the group’s “wordsmithing” of the outcomes was intended to make clear that the outcomes “cannot be optional.” He said the outcomes, as revised, are:

- Increase awareness and understanding among partners and others of the impact of inequity on outcomes for children, youth, and young adults in Evanston,
- All partners commit to advance equity within their own organizations and their operations,
- Embed an equity lens into all aspects of the work of EC2C,
- Develop and advance a public policy agenda to address issues of inequity,
- Increase awareness and understanding among partners of the role of trauma in outcomes for children and youth in Evanston, and
- Embed equitable trauma-informed approaches to family support, community-wide, and safety services.

Steve Vick, Executive Director of IWSE, suggested that the outcomes mentioning “trauma” make clear that trauma includes a “mental health aspect.” Mr. Green responded that “trauma” requires a mental health aspect, and that the activities identified to achieve the outcomes could list ways to address the mental health aspect of trauma. Other partners said “trauma” included physical and behavioral aspects, and it

should not be limited.

Goal No. 2: Solution Design Teams

The Goal: *“Advance work of the Solution Design Teams to achieve equitable outcomes for children, youth, and young adults in Evanston.”*

Initially, EC2C envisioned it would achieve its mission by focusing on six areas: literacy, community poverty and stability, youth and family violence, health, career and post-secondary readiness, and parent connections. The plan was to form a Solution Design Team (SDT) to focus on each area.

In May 2015, the first SDT was formed to focus on literacy. That team, composed of more than 50 people, divided into five groups called action teams, which focused on various stages of literacy, and also on other areas that overlap with health, career and post-secondary readiness, and parent connections. Each action team has 10-15 members.

Some of the things the action teams have implemented or are working on include a “text-a-tip” program for parents with young children; creating a City-wide “talk, read, and sing” initiative to address the 30-million word gap; expanding the City’s 311 call center to provide information about available social service programs; revising the kindergarten registration form to collect information about early childhood experiences to guide future planning; working with District 65 and early childhood providers to develop a common definition of kindergarten readiness and to smooth transitions from early childhood programs to kindergarten; expanding summer reading programs to reach more than 5,000 additional youth; and planning ways to expand post-secondary opportunities for youth.

Renee Neumeier, Young Adult Services Supervisor at Evanston Public Library, led the group of partners focusing on the SDTs. She said they recommended the following outcomes:

- Increase literacy among children, youth, and young adults by addressing social and economic barriers that undermine their ability to succeed,
- Develop revised SDTs based on analysis of goals and current framework and activities,
- Shared outcomes and measurements between organizations,
- Decision-making based on data, and
- [Key decision makers] are involved on action teams.

In explaining the second outcome, Ms. Neumeier said when the next SDT is formed, the partners should take into account that the work of the Literacy SDT has incorporated areas initially contemplated for other SDTs. “So maybe that original framework isn’t the right framework for the next topic, but let’s analyze what we’ve done, what’s missing in what we’re doing, and how do we reframe it, so that we either incorporate it into what we’re doing or redesign it.”

Marybeth Schroeder, Vice President of Programs at ECF, said the proposed outcome that “key decision makers are involved in action teams” addresses an issue that came up at a July meeting of the Literacy SDT. She said one action team of the Literacy SDT has representatives of District 65 and early childhood providers on the team, so when a question came up about changing the kindergarten registration form, people were at the table who could say, ‘Yes, we’ll change the registration form.’

“What we’ve discovered on some other teams, there’s not the decision makers on the team, so a great idea doesn’t necessarily happen because there’s nobody there to make it happen.”

While the partners appeared to favor the concept, some expressed concern about the term “key decision makers.” There seemed to be a consensus, though, that each action team should have people on the team who would be able to move the work forward through leadership channels, but that it was important that other people, including people working at the ground level and community members, be part of the team as well.

Goal No. 3 – Measurement

The Goal: *“EC2C uses quantitative and qualitative measurements with an equity lens to measure the effectiveness and impact of our work.”*

Pete Bavis, Assistant Superintendent, and Karen Tollenaar Demorest, Executive Director of Youth Job Center (YJC), proposed the above goal and recommended that the four proposed outcomes remain the same.

The four outcomes are: build substantial effective measurement tools with an equity lens; increase organizational capacity to collect and share data across the network; report on outcomes geared toward promoting achievement and equity; and refine measurement frameworks.

Goal No. 4 – Communication and Clarity of Message

The Goal: *“Strengthen EC2C organizational identity and community understanding of the goals and accomplishments of EC2C.”*

The first and second outcomes are to “broadly communicate mission, work, and outcomes that effectively reach all members of the Evanston community, with particular attention to those who may be more challenging to reach; and to build a ‘tool box’ of resources that inform Evanston residents about the work of EC2C.”

The concept of another outcome is to communicate with the community in a way that will strengthen the role of EC2C.

Goal No. 5 – Community-Wide Ownership

The Goal: *“Create community-wide ownership of the goals and activities of EC2C.”*

Outcomes: Ensure those currently engaged have the information they need for full participation, actively engage underserved voices in the work of EC2C, move from informing the underserved community members of EC2C to co-leading the work, and infuse all Evanston community voices into the mission of EC2C.

The Partners provisionally adopted the goals and outcomes by a voice vote, anticipating that some of the outcomes will be revised in accordance with the discussion. Mr. Green added that the goals and outcomes “will continue in evolution.”

The Equity Statement

Mr. Vick led a discussion on a draft Equity Statement for EC2C. He said the equity statement should “not only

represent EC2C and where we want our City to move toward,” but it should also be a statement “your organization – and you personally – can live with.”

Partners proposed a number of revisions to the statement, which if incorporated into the draft would look something like this:

“Evanston Cradle to Career (EC2C) and partners commit to acknowledge, confront, and eradicate the racial, social, economic, and other systemic inequities that result in too many of Evanston’s youth and families, particularly children of color, not having access and opportunity to realize their life potential.”

Reverend Patricia Efiom of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and a leader at the Freedom School said the initial draft, which included a second sentence, was “very wordy. It has to punch you in the face. It has to be, ‘Bam.’ This is what we’re doing.”

Mr. Hemingway likewise said the equity statement was wordy. He pointed to a mission statement of the Center for Social Inclusion, an organization working with the City of Evanston: “Our mission is to catalyze communities, government, and other institutions to dismantle structural racial inequity and create equitable outcomes for all.”

Because there were many proposed revisions to the draft equity statement, Mr. Vick suggested that the operations team prepare a revised draft and circulate it to the partners, which they could comment on and perhaps vote on at their next meeting.

Mr. Vick emphasized the equity statement serves a dual purpose. It not only will guide the work of EC2C, but it could be a statement that each member organization could adopt as its equity statement and guide the work of each organization.

“One of the goals of this statement, and again this is something to discuss, is to create a statement we all feel good about – not only as Evanston Cradle to Career partners, but as organizations. Can I take the statement to my board at Infant Welfare Society of Evanston and say, ‘Can we adopt the Cradle to Career statement as our own equity statement?’

“That’s something we have to think about – talk about.

“What I felt was if I’m truly going to be a leader in the charge of equity, I have to take action at my organization, meaning I have to talk to my board. I have to implement strategies within my organizational structure that allows deeper levels of communication and dialogue.”

Referring to a draft six-point “equity lens” he prepared for the Infant Welfare Society, Mr. Vick said, “I believe this must be woven into our [Infant Welfare Society’s] strategic plan. If they’re not, then I’m not carrying the mantle of what Evanston Cradle to Career is trying to do. I have to go about the process of working with my board to embed them into our strategy, our organization, our governance, our programs, how we communicate our culture, and this is hard work. ... This is the work of changing structure that has been put in place and has been systemic for a long time.

“This is what I believe is a big part of Cradle to Career – it’s us going to our own organizations and pushing the envelope with our boards.”

Mr. Vick said once the organizations agree on an equity statement, they should stand together and “put a stake in the ground – that we all commit as leaders and partners in Evanston to the process. This is the

statement we believe in, some of us are working on pushing our organizations, and we are in it full throttle.”

Examples of Successes

Mr. Hemingway said the City has formed an equity committee of eight to 10 people, including City staff and community people. The committee brought in representatives of the Center for Social Inclusion to meet with 60 senior management of the City to help start the conversation around equity.

“We are in the infancy stages,” said Mr. Hemingway. “The City has taken a real serious approach to try to look at itself in the mirror and remove our barriers in how we deliver services to the community as a whole. That work has started for us. It is ongoing.”

On a different note, Ms. Tollenaar Demorest summarized how YJC, ECF, EPL, School Districts 65 and 202, and the City are partnering to provide jobs to youth and tutoring services to children entering kindergarten.

For the last five years, YJC has hired high school students, ages 14-15, to serve as tutors for children identified as needing additional supports to be successful in kindergarten through a program called ABC Boosters. It has been under the radar for the last five years, and this year the partnering organization began discussions “to take it to scale,” said Ms. Tollenaar Demorest.

Last year, the program served 16 students. This year it served 60, and two years from now YJC plans to serve 185 rising kindergartners, the number District 65 estimates can use additional help. To do this, YJC will hire 60 high school students for five to six weeks to provide the tutoring. District 65 teachers will train the high schoolers.

The program serves a dual purpose. It provides a job to 60 high school students, and it provides supports to kids entering kindergarten.

“This is such an important moment to celebrate Cradle to Career,” said Paul Goren, Superintendent of School District 65. Referring to the organizations partnering in the program, he said, “There’s synergy.”

Another example is Parent Ambassadors, which started with 14 parents in May. “We wanted to bring awareness to a literacy campaign and summer learning loss, and we talked to parents about what are some of the barriers about learning about accessing some of these services regarding reading,” said Ismalis Nunez, Family and Community Engagement Specialist at District 65.

The Parent Ambassadors held an event for parents and children, ages pre-K to 5 years old, at Robert Crown on July 23. More than 50 parents attended, and they and children participated in planned activities and crafts, based on books selected for summer reading by librarians. Each child who attended was given a book.

“When you talk about building social capital in the community based on parents’ ideas and initiative, this is how you do it, taking committed individuals and partnering to get it done,” said Ms. Nunez.

Eric Witherspoon, Superintendent of School District 202, said, “Cradle to Career has created a synergy in this community that, I will daresay, has never before existed around these issues. I congratulate and celebrate everybody, every partner organization in the room, and I remind us this is momentum building. All this synergy is going to lead to more and more positive results.”

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