

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

WE COVER WHAT MATTERS...EVANSTON

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

Organizations Asked to Make Long-Term Commitment to Evanston Cradle to Career Initiative

By Larry Gavin

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

Almost 40 representatives from the School Districts, the City, non-profit organizations, Northwestern University, and Oakton Community College met at Evanston Township High School on March 28 to listen to an update on the Evanston Cradle to Career (EC2C) initiative and to discuss the importance of making a long-term commitment to the initiative.

The initiative, 18 months in the planning, was officially launched at the meeting. EC2C is built on the premise of “collective impact” – that schools, institutions, community organizations, business groups and others can have a greater impact by working together to address complex social and educational issues, than working alone.

“Our work here really is – and I’ll say this from the vantage point of Evanston Childcare Network of Evanston (CNE) – it’s about leveraging our community resources,” said Andrea Densham, executive director of CNE.

“We are an amazing city,” said Ms. Densham, referring to the many public institutions and non-profit organizations in town that are working hard to make a difference, “especially in the context of poverty.” She added, though, “We still see an intractable issue,” one that agencies working in isolation have not been able to solve.

She told representatives in the room, whom she said were “extraordinary people who have worked most of their lives to make a difference,” that “We’re here to take it to the next step. ... to try to work together across agencies and across funding streams to make a difference in people’s lives.”

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 of EC2C is “By the age of 23, all Evanston young adults will be leading productive lives.”

“We need to work together, and that’s what brought the community foundation into this,” said Sara Schastok, president and CEO of Evanston Community Foundation (ECF). “We’ve seen through the grants

we've funded how much work is going on that's really all headed in the same direction, and if we can take all of our strands and weave them together into a strong braid, we believe we can do the kinds of things in this community that we all want."

"The idea is for us to build an infrastructure – not just for this year, not just for next year, but for a decade or more," said Ms. Densham. "We're looking for a long-term commitment for our community to make a difference in the lives of children, youth and young adults so they can be productive adults on the other side of this."

District 202 Superintendent Eric Witherspoon said, "In essence, we're first of all looking for organizations, groups, providers, institutions across Evanston to all join hands in this effort."

EC2C Collective Impact Model

Many communities across the nation, including 16 in Illinois, are relying on collective impact models to solve complex social problems, including to address disparities in educational outcomes.

The paper "Collective Impact," by John Kania and Mark Kramer, published in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, elaborates on the difference between this and other forms of collaboration. "Unlike most collaborations, collective impact models involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communications and mutually reinforcing activities among participants."

A planning committee prepared the Evanston model, guided by Michelle Shumate, an associate professor at Northwestern University who has done extensive research in the area of interorganizational networks designed to impact large social issues. The planning committee is composed of persons affiliated with School Districts 65 and 202, Northwestern University, Oakton Community College, the City of Evanston, CNE, ECF, McGaw YMCA, Second Baptist Church, Youth Organization Umbrella (Y.O.U.) and YWCA Evanston/North Shore.

"Collective impact models are different than traditional 'collaborations' between nonprofits or between governments and nonprofits for three reasons in my view," Dr. Shumate told the RoundTable. "First, they recognize that improving outcomes is not necessarily about creating a new program, but aligning the current programs and helping them improve. Second, they encourage rigorous measurement of outcomes and hold all partners mutually accountable for those outcomes. This means that, over-time, partners make decisions based upon benchmarked data that improves their existing programs or helps existing programs work together to achieve better outcomes.

"Finally, so many collaborations are held together only by the excess time that staff can commit to them," said Dr. Shumate. "Collective impact models, by including a backbone organization that has as its goal to facilitate the coordination of partners, tend to be more sustainable than collaborations without a backbone organization."

Dr. Witherspoon said Dr. Shumate helped the planning committee "understand how collective impact works, ... but has also helped us very much design it to the uniqueness of Evanston to make it an Evanston model."

Solution Design Teams: Under the model, "solution design teams" will be formed to focus on a) literacy; b) community stability including housing and poverty; c) mental health and physical health and safety; d)

career and postsecondary readiness; and e) parent engagement.

Each team will include representatives from the organizations participating in EC2C, as well as members of the community who will focus on the subject area of the team. Each team will develop goals and an action plan to “move the needle” toward achieving the goal. This includes harnessing existing strategies as well as developing new evidence-based practices.

The Evanston approach differs from some national models in several ways. One is that goals will be determined by the solution design teams, not predetermined by the planning committee. The planning committee favored a more bottom-up approach, Bill Geiger, chief executive officer of McGaw Y told the RoundTable.

In addition, the design teams will include “people impacted by the issues we are talking about,” said Ms. Densham, so their voices will be at the table when goals and strategies are discussed. She said the planning committee viewed this as critical.

Community Coalitions: There is no solution design team built around early childhood development, but the EC2C model recognizes there are existing coalitions, such as CNE and ECF, that focus on early childhood development. Under the EC2C model, coalitions that agree to participate in EC2C will assign representatives to serve on the solution design teams and they will coordinate their work with that of EC2C, said Dr. Witherspoon.

Examples of other existing coalitions are Pioneering Healthy Communities and Peaceable Cities: Evanston.

Steering Committee: A steering committee will oversee EC2C. It will guide the work of the solution design teams and the community coalitions, including how they set goals and create initiatives to achieve them. It will supervise overall data collection and analysis, encourage coordination among the participating institutions and organizations, oversee grant funding, and promote and advance a common agenda.

The steering committee is also responsible for hiring and overseeing personnel. It will hire an executive director to manage and direct EC2C and a data analyst to provide oversight in data collection and to lead the statistical analysis of the data to track progress.

“We think with a staff of two people with dedicated responsibilities, we collectively and through our steering committee can mobilize the many resources and support that are needed to make this work,” said Dr. Witherspoon.

Dr. Witherspoon said the organizations that commit to participate in EC2C will collectively determine “how the steering committee will hold water and what organizations and which people will collectively represent all of us in that steering committee.” He said they want that decision-making process to be “highly inclusive.”

Metrics and Accountability: Ms. Densham said one key ingredient of successful collective impact models is the participating organizations must agree on goals and how to measure progress. They also take “collective responsibility,” she said.

EC2C says the solution design teams will set goals, with guidance from the steering committee, and the organizations committed to the initiative “will work together to develop the metrics to track our progress.”

It is anticipated EC2C will develop measures to track progress in early childhood development, academic

achievement, physical and mental health, and an array of social indicators and circumstances that bear on a child's likelihood of progressing in a healthy and productive way. EC2C says the intent is that the mutually agreed-upon measurement system will assess "accurately and honestly" whether "all of our community's children are doing well."

Ms. Densham said EC2C will need to "have the courage" to look at the data honestly and answer "how are we doing?" If something is working, she said, "let's put more resources and time and energy into that." If it is not working, "Let's address that and see what we can do to move it."

She said the data will be made available to the EC2C network and to the entire Evanston community.

Bringing in Employers/Keeping Focus on Evanston

Merrill Irving, associate vice president at Oakton Community College, suggested that EC2C explain to people outside Evanston why they should care, and why employers should care. He said one thing that Oakton might be able to do is leverage partnerships it already has. He referred to a manufacturing expo that Oakton recently sponsored at which 27 companies participated.

Many at the meeting said it would be critical to bring employers into the initiative.

Seth Green, executive director of Y.O.U., said EC2C was intentionally framed in the context of Evanston, "where we have a set of existing relationships and a foundation. This is really based on enhancing our collective impact," he said.

Participating Organizations

Dr. Witherspoon said participating organizations will be asked to commit to have at least one person associated with the organization serve on at least one solution design team. They would be welcome to have representatives serve on more than one team, he added.

In addition, Dr. Witherspoon said, participating organizations will be asked to make an annual contribution to EC2C. The amount of the contribution would depend on the organization's budget.

A schedule prepared by EC2C shows that the largest organizations, such as the school districts, the City and Northwestern University, will be asked to contribute \$50,000 in the first year. There is then a sliding scale. For example, organizations with a budget of between \$1 million and \$2 million will be asked to contribute \$3,500. Those with a budget of less than \$250,000 would be asked to contribute \$500.

Ms. Densham said when organizations put money into EC2C, "It's saying this is in the fabric of what we do ... It's part of our work."

Dr. Witherspoon said the school districts have already voiced support for the initiative, although, they have not formally voted on the funding. Marybeth Schroeder, vice president of ECF, said four organizations, Y.O.U., YWCA, CNE, and ECF, have committed to participate. Members of the Planning Committee have made presentations to the boards of other organizations.

Ms. Densham told the community leaders, "Your organization's commitment is really critical." She added it is important that "board members really understand and are committed to this." She asked that representatives bring the matter before their boards and ask that the boards adopt a resolution to participate in the initiative on a long-term basis – ideally 10+ years – and to make an annual contribution to

EC2C.

The target date to receive the initial participation agreements is June 30. Organizations who have agreed to participate by then will be asked to meet in early July to decide who will be members of the steering committee. The timeline for forming the solution design teams is October.

Dr. Witherspoon listed some advantages Evanston has over other communities that have implemented collective impact initiatives. First, he said, “we’re small. We’re a size we can get our arms around what we’re trying to do.” Second, “we have an amazing infrastructure in place. ... We have institutions, service organizations and coalitions.” He also referred to Evanston’s “volunteerism” and its “sense of passion” to improve the lives of its residents.

“We have quite a bit that does give Evanston a real edge on having a collective impact,” he said.

Related Links:

">Content © 2014

">Software © 1998-2014 **1up! Software**, All Rights Reserved