

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

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Wednesday, April 9, 2014

Editorial: All Institutions and Organizations Should Commit to EC2C

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On March 28, the Evanston Cradle to Career Initiative (EC2C), 18 months in the planning, was officially launched at a meeting of almost 40 representatives from the School Districts, the City, non-profit organizations, Northwestern University and Oakton Community College. The meeting was held at Evanston Township High School.

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.

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.”

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

“Collaboration is nothing new,” say the authors of a paper “Collective Impact” (2011) published in the Stanford Social Innovation Review. “The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different. Unlike most collaborations, collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among participants.”

Elsewhere the authors say, “We believe that there is no other way society will achieve large-scale progress against the urgent and complex problems of our time, unless a collective impact approach becomes the accepted way of doing business.”

A planning committee prepared the Evanston model under the guidance of 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, the Childcare Network of Evanston (CNE), Evanston Community Foundation (ECF), McGaw YMCA, Second Baptist Church, Youth Organization Umbrella (Y.O.U.), YWCA Evanston/North Shore and the Youth Job Center.

Under the Evanston model, a steering committee will be formed to oversee EC2C. It will guide the work of “solution design teams” that 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. The teams will set goals in their areas and adopt an action plan to achieve those goals. EC2C will set measures to track progress and give periodic progress reports to its members and the community.

Members of the Planning Committee say this is a long-term project, and they are asking Evanston institutions and organizations to commit to the initiative on a long-term basis, ten years or more. The commitment is to actively participate on at least one solution design team and to make a financial contribution on an annual basis.

We strongly support the cradle-to-career initiative. Working together under a collective impact model holds great promise. We encourage the School Districts, the City of Evanston, Northwestern University, Oakton Community College, local non-profit organizations and the faith community to make a long-term commitment to EC2C.

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