

Head Start Research, Demonstration and Evaluation Strategies: The Case of Family and Community Engagement

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Head Start has been a comprehensive program from the start and has served as a laboratory for programmatic, research and evaluation innovation for nearly fifty years.

Examples

- commitment to testing innovative program and evaluation approaches (CFRP, CCDP, etc.)
- commitment to stimulating research with/about Head Start and getting it into practice (HS research conference)
- commitment to program and research partnerships and research to support practice improvement (EHS)
- commitment to high quality impact study

Head Start has built understanding of the key roles families play in development and of the practices to support them to do so.

- positive parent-child relationships
- families as educators
- family connection to peers and community
- family well-being
- family engagement in transitions and school readiness
- family as advocate and program and community leader

Research-Informed Reframing of Family and Community Engagement

- Early childhood programs set the F&CE pathway
- F&CE from birth through school
- F&CE across contexts to access learning resources
- F&CE as a shared responsibility
- F&CE as systemic, integrated and sustained vs. “random acts” and as an ongoing process vs. “event”
- F&CE programs and policy afford Head Start’s six practices

Lessons for R&CE positioning, practice and research: the Consortium on Chicago School Research (Bryk et al, 2010)

- school district-researcher partnership
- longitudinal data collection
- specification and testing of a complex, multi-component ecological and organizational model
- focus on relationships, trust, organizational characteristics and community context/characteristics

The Consortium Model of Five Essential Elements

- Leadership as the driver of change
 - coherent instructional guidance system
 - professional capacity
 - strong parent-community-school ties
 - student-centered learning climate
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- The importance of relational trust across the board

The recipe metaphor: It isn't a cake without all five ingredients combined and baked in the oven of relational trust...in a context with resources

- F&CE is a key ingredient in interaction with other ingredients, IT IS NOT A SILVER BULLET—"Improving schools entails coherent, orchestrated action across all five essential supports."
- It is possible to trace the pathways and interactions of F&CE with the other ingredients that lead to school improvement measured here in improved math and literacy achievement
- The importance of community context and resources (neighborhood social capital and collective efficacy and the proportion of children living in extraordinarily difficult circumstances) and tipping point between a focus on improvement and the five supports vs. meeting basic needs or "the three strikes problem"

Implications for HS/EHS

- There is evidence F&CE is a necessary but not sufficient ingredient in raising the achievement of economically disadvantaged children
- The Consortium model has implications for the organization of the five essential ingredients in HS/EHS programs
- The HS National Center on Family and Community Engagement is working with HS to incorporate and align its key F&CE practices into and in support of the other four essential ingredients so that they interact to support children's learning, school readiness, and subsequent success.

Models of HS Family and Community Engagement

Integrating Systemic and Sustained F&CE

- **Leadership**
- **Professional development**
- **organizational and staff relationships, actions and practices around learning and family engagement**
- **connection to community building and resources**
- **attention to the new possibilities of reciprocally sharing accessible, comprehensible and actionable data on child development and performance to support F&C engagement**

Adding to the Research, Development and Evaluation Portfolio

- large scale impact studies
- support for developing and testing program models (early literacy)
- development of standards, assessment and performance management strategies
- HS/EHS as a research and evaluation laboratory and harvesting the results for improved practice and continuous improvement
- Other investments in the portfolio

Networked Improvement Communities

- development and testing of interventions requiring multiple strands to solve complex problems
- addressing the challenge of scaling evidence-based programs and getting them into practice
- building in variation to understand how innovation works under different conditions to prepare for scaling
- building capacity to use research-based practices in continuous improvement cycles

Getting Ideas into Action: Building
Networked Improvement
Communities in Education
Bryk, Gomez & Grunow, 2011
Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of Teaching