BUILDING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES TO

SERVE FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

By

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TO SERVE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"School readiness" is a term that is used frequently in the field of early childhood

education to emphasize the need for quality, early learning environments and positive life

experiences for young children. It is a term used by many state and national leaders to

emphasize the importance of preparing children to enter the public school system – the

importance of preparing children to be "ready" to enter the classroom already equipped

with basic knowledge many did not experience until well into the kindergarten or first

grade year. It is a term parents hear from professionals, advocates, lawmakers and the

media. School readiness is a term that prompts many parents to agonize over the things

they did or did not do when raising their children. A term, that in their mind, glaringly

points out how they have failed their children because they did not enroll them in a

prestigious pre-kindergarten program or purchase the developmentally appropriate toys

and books that some insist are necessary for children to get a good start in life. It is clear

that the term "school readiness" is a term with many different connotations for many

different people.

"Readiness is understood as the match between the readiness of the child and the

readiness of the environments that serve young children" (Kagan & Rigby, 2003, p. 3).

To truly understand "readiness", one must understand that a child's readiness is not just a

matter of cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and social abilities. Readiness also includes the

context where a child lives and the opportunities he or she has to interact with adults, teachers, and community leaders (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Bruner, 2002; Kagan & Rigby, 2003). Families, neighborhoods, schools, and early learning environments are critical components to the "readiness" of a child (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Bruner, 2002; Kagan & Rigby, 2003).

To ensure that a child is ready to learn, one must factor in variables related to the success of the child. Intergenerational poverty, uneducated parents, particularly mothers, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and economics are just some of the risk factors faced by families with young children (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Miller, Melaville, & Blank, 2002). To break free from these factors, there must be quality, early learning environments where children can learn, grow and play (Miller et al., 2002). There must be a strong support structure for parents who are trying their best to provide the basic necessities of life while living with financial stress each day. With many parents in the workforce, it is essential that businesses provide family friendly work environments. It is essential that parents have good health benefits and economic security (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Miller et al., 2002).

To build an infrastructure to support the needs of families with young children, it takes strong community collaboratives, comprised of key stakeholders, to design the system with good leadership and a shared vision to hold the system together (Dombro, O'Donnell, Galinsky, Melcher, & Farber, 1996; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001; Miller et al., 2002). For communities to be successful in supporting families, it will take investment from the state and national level in the form of public policies designed to streamline funding and service delivery systems

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(Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Hepburn, 2004). To ensure that a child is ready to learn, it will involve continued research in the area of child development and best practices. It will require implementing measures for accountability and a method for data collection and analysis to track the progress being made on behalf of young children (Ackerman & Barnett; Hepburn).

Building an early learning system involves multiple strategies, diverse stakeholders, and a strong commitment to families with young children. This work is based on greater understanding of the importance of the first years of life to lifelong learning and the changes in society that affect young children. Community driven, comprehensive early childhood initiatives hold great promise to expand supports for children and families but only if communities, with guidance and support from state government, realize that traditional methods are not meeting the critical needs of young children. It will require that local communities and state government partner with one another to share resources and expertise to collaborate together on behalf of young children.

Purpose of Study

The National Education Goals panel identified three components of school readiness: readiness in the child, schools' readiness for children, and family and community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Bruner, 2002; Halle, Zaslow, Zaff, Calkins & Margie, 2000; Halliburton & Thornburg, 2004; Heaviside, Farris & Carpenter, 1993; Kagan & Rigby, 2003; National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) 1991; Ochshorn, 2000, Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000). This thesis is focused primarily on the third component of the

National Goals panel with the premise of this research study being to explore the effectiveness community collaboratives can have at the local level when seeking to improve outcomes for children. The subject of school readiness and the factors related to the overall preparedness of young children upon entering school will be explored as it relates to community collaboratives.

Stillwater Area Success By 6 ® is a local collaborative that has been in existence for five years and is part of the Smart Start Oklahoma network. This thesis looks at the Stillwater data from the last five years and extrapolates factors that directly relate to the impact the collaborative has had in the Stillwater community. In particular, this thesis explored the efficacy of two data sources: 1) a school readiness assessment by teachers, and 2) an assessment of the quality of the community collaboration by key stakeholders.

Community collaboratives provide a means for community leaders to focus on local issues by incorporating an approach that specifically addresses the needs of families with young children residing in a particular community. Collaboratives provide an opportunity for leaders to identify local resources and service gaps before beginning the process of planning what support structures are required to tackle the needs in a systematic way. This allows community leaders and residents to have a voice in determining what is best for the community and removes substantial control from national or state governmental entities. This research study is an attempt to explore the effectiveness of community collaboratives by analyzing existing data from the Stillwater Area Success By 6 ® collaborative in addition to the six factors developed by Mattessich et al., of the Wilder Foundation.

Mattessich et al., using a decade of compiled research in the area of successful collaborative practice, developed a questionnaire to be utilized by communities for evaluation of local collaboratives.   The questionnaire encompassed twenty factors that influence the success of collaborations. The authors grouped the twenty factors into six categories related to practical steps for communities who wish to start or enhance a collaborative effort. Mattessich et al., (2001) identified the six categories in the following manner:

1. Factors Related to the Environment – Environmental characteristics consist of the geographic location and social context within which a collaborative group exists. The group may be able to influence or affect these elements in some way, but it does not have control over them.

2. *Factors Related to Membership Characteristics* - Membership characteristics consist of skills, attitudes, and opinions of the individuals in a collaborative group, as well as the culture and capacity of the organizations that form collaborative groups.

3. Factors Related to Process and Structure - Process and structure refer to the management, decision-making, and operational systems of the collaborative effort.

4. Factors Related to Communication - Communication refers to the channels used by collaborative partners to send and receive information, keep one another informed, and convey opinions to influence the group's actions.

5. Factors Related to Purpose - Purpose refers to the reasons for the development of a collaborative effort, the result or vision the collaborative groups seeks, and the

specific tasks or projects the collaborative group defines as necessary to accomplish. It is driven by a need, crisis, or opportunity.

6. Factors Related to Resources - Resources include financial and human "input" necessary to develop and sustain a collaborative group. (p. 12-28)

<u>Definition of Terms</u>

The following terms will be used throughout this study:

1. <u>School Readiness</u> – The match between the readiness of the child and the readiness of the environments that serve young children. In addition to the child's emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities, it also includes the contexts where children live and interact with adults, teachers, and other community members (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Kagan & Rigby, 2003).

2. <u>Community</u> – People who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the places where they live (Mattessich, Monsey, & Roy, 1997).

3. <u>Community Building</u> – Any identifiable set of activities pursued by a community in order to increase community social capacity (Mattessich et al., 1997).

4. <u>Community Social Capacity</u> – The extent to which members of a community can work together effectively (Mattessich et al., 1997).

5. <u>Collaboration</u> – A mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals (Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001).

6. <u>Collaborative Group</u> – Refers to the set of organizations that join together in collaboration (Mattessich et al., 2001).

7. <u>Stakeholders and/or Partners</u> – Refers to the individuals who represent

   collaborating organizations (Mattessich et al., 2001).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature reflects the value of building community collaborations and the important role communities' play in supporting families with young children. The term school readiness is defined and its multi-dimensional aspects addressed. Risk factors that affect families with young children who live at or below the poverty level are cited. The need for quality early learning environments for all children as well as the need for a systemic approach to early childhood education is established. The importance of strong parental support systems is discussed. The responsibility communities face to create caring communities while augmenting efforts to provide vital support services to families with young children is established. The review concludes with components of public policy specific to state and national investment.

Conceptual Framework

One of the major challenges faced by society is the ability to keep up with, sort, absorb, and use all the information available to us (Mattessich et al., 1997). The Information Age has afforded society the opportunity to access virtually anything wanted or needed with the stroke of a computer key. Technology is a conduit through which people communicate with one another in a variety of ways, locate and analyze data with ease and access research quickly. Society operates under a "do more, seek more, learn more" mentality. This approach can result in overlooking the wealth of information

already known in a particular field, causing society to re-visit the same issues over and over again (Mattessich et al., 1997). This parallel can be applied to community building and the need to understand and apply what has already been learned.

The term community building or community collaboration is used to describe efforts that seek comprehensive approaches within a neighborhood or community to improve the lives of their residents, particularly children. These approaches usually involve aspects of public service systems reform, resident leadership, and community economic development (Bruner, 2002; Miller et al., 2002). Community-based programs and initiatives seek ways to be more responsive to the families that reside in communities. Some of these have originated as service systems reform, seeking to restructure service delivery to ensure better coordination of efforts or to create new supports that are rooted in the community itself (Bruner, 2002; Miller et al., 2002).

As baby-boomers have or begin to have grandchildren, think about retirement and the pleasures each of these will bring, many become introspective and lament the loss of "community" across the nation. This generation enjoyed a more relaxed approach to everyday living where neighbors shared joys and heartaches with one another. A generation where people within the community knew each other and made every effort to ensure needs were met and people were supported. Over time, community fellowship was replaced with factors such as technology, more people in the workforce, and the need to have more and spend more. High crime rates and violent acts against one another resulted in families keeping to themselves in isolation. Renewed emphasis upon the importance of community in supporting human growth and development has prompted professionals, politicians, parents, and schools to discuss the need to re-invest in

community and the need to stress the importance of community building to strengthen families. However, many find it difficult to articulate what "community" really means. How does one focus attention on the issue of "community" and what factors are the most important in building long-lasting, sustainable community initiatives? While research has been conducted in this area, no single publication synthesizes the research in a way that is easily understood by individuals (Mattessich et al., 1997).

To address the need for practical, fundamental, researched-based information, Mattessich et al., (2001) developed a theoretical framework that takes a look across many initiatives searching for common lessons in community building. Drawing on the research conducted by the Wilder Foundation in 1997, the authors analyzed and reviewed research studies with two goals in mind. The first goal focused on determining whether research continued to validate the nineteen collaborative success factors originally identified by the Wilder Foundation. The second goal sought to determine whether research provided evidence of any new factors (Mattessich et al., 2001).

Mattessich et al., (2001) reviewed research over the past decade in the area of community building. This research was synthesized and applied to support a theoretical framework for collaboration and to develop a useful process for those interested in strengthening communities. Once a thorough review of the research was completed, the authors were able to confirm that the original community building factors, first identified in 1997, continued to be applicable to the overall success of community building. The authors found evidence to support the importance and necessity of these original factors when seeking to achieve sustainable collaborative initiatives.

Relying on their research-based findings, Mattessich et al., (2001), established an infrastructure within which communities could build successful collaborative practices. The infrastructure or framework is based upon the results of research in the area of community building. In addition to laying the fundamental groundwork for community building, the authors provided communities with a working definition of collaboration and an understanding that the needs and goals of collaborative groups will differ across the life span. According to the authors, these differences led to noteworthy implications for effective future collaborative planning (Mattessich et al., 2001).

Historical Background – Community Collaboration in Oklahoma

The formation of the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation and Smart Start Oklahoma is the culmination of a long-standing grassroots effort in Oklahoma to improve educational outcomes for young children. In 1988, United Way of America began replicating an early childhood initiative known as Success By 6®. Impressed by its progress, the Bank of America Foundation made an unprecedented $50 million donation to United Way of America, earmarked specifically to expand the early childhood initiative across the country. Oklahoma seized the opportunity to join and began its own Success By 6® statewide initiative in 1999 with grants to pilot 13 Success By 6® communities.

Soon thereafter, Governor Frank Keating appointed the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education to assess the state of Oklahoma's youngest children. The task force submitted its report to Governor Keating in December of 2000. The report indicated that of the approximately 250,000 children under the age of 5 in Oklahoma, most live in the five largest counties, one-third are born to unmarried mothers, approximately one out

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of every four incoming kindergarteners is not ready for school, and more than one in four

Oklahoma children live in poverty. Based upon these findings, the task force developed

four key strategies as a formal recommendation to improve the well being of Oklahoma's

young children through a long-term early childhood initiative. The strategies outlined in

the Governor's Task Force report (2001) are:

> Strategy One: Enact a Strong Public Policy Promoting Early Childhood Care and
> Education;
>
> Strategy Two: Create a Statewide Public-Private Early Childhood Partnership;
>
> Strategy Three: Implement a Comprehensive Public Engagement Campaign;
>
> Strategy Four: Mobilize Communities to Provide Environments that Support
> Children and Families. (p. 45)

The Governor's Task Force report (2001) also indicated that coordinating early childhood

efforts among public and private partners, with the above strategies as a guide, would

achieve the following results:

> Families nurture, teach and provide for their young children;
>
> Children are born healthy and remain healthy;
>
> Families can find and afford high quality child care, when they need it; and,
>
> Children enter school prepared and continue to succeed. (p. 65-80)

The task force report went on to indicate that if supported by a clearly articulated public

policy, state agencies could combine their efforts in a collaborative manner with those

from the public and private sectors in local communities to achieve these results. Armed

with the accomplishments of the Success By 6® network, task force members and other

advocates sought legislation to create a public-private partnership in Oklahoma to

continue efforts begun by the original Success By 6® communities. In April of 2003, Governor Brad Henry signed the "Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act" formally creating Oklahoma's first public-private early childhood initiative.

The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act authorized the formation of two entities, the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (the Partnership) and its supporting foundation, the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation (OPSR Foundation), which was officially incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization on November 6, 2003. The Partnership is a 29-member public-private board, appointed by Governor Henry, that is comprised of 13 state agency directors and 16 individuals from the private sector with experience ranging from child care providers to pediatricians. The Partnership board officially branded themselves as *Smart Start Oklahoma.* The mission of Smart Start Oklahoma is to lead Oklahoma in coordinating an early childhood system focused on strengthening families and school readiness for all children. Smart Start Oklahoma is supported, in part, with private funds from the OPSR Foundation. The OPSR Foundation is a 10-member board comprised of individuals from the private sector who have a long history of interest in early childhood. Their mission is to solicit and receive private funds in order to maximize the impact of private dollars to positively influence early childhood opportunities for Oklahoma's young children. The two entities work hand-in-hand to enact outcomes that will make a difference in the development and school readiness for young children in Oklahoma. Both entities share the common vision that *"All Oklahoma children will be safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school"* (Governor's Task Force, 2001, p. 45).

The OPSR Foundation and Smart Start Oklahoma have a greater opportunity to develop a comprehensive statewide approach to improving school readiness in Oklahoma by collaborating and facilitating relationships on both the state and local level. With community mobilization as a cornerstone, Smart Start Oklahoma subscribes to a "top-down/bottom-up" philosophy to early childhood. At the state level, sound public policy, research and funding are necessary to support and evaluate opportunities for children and families. However, creating partnerships at the local level is the lifeblood of the Smart Start Oklahoma initiative and is essential in communities where children actually live, learn, and grow. Smart Start Oklahoma communities work to ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop the emotional, social, cognitive and physical skills they need when entering school, by building on extensive research in the areas of brain development and the need for positive early childhood experiences. This research provides the rationale for Smart Start Oklahoma and propels local communities in their efforts to mobilize.

The Smart Start Oklahoma community network consists of 16 communities: Ada, Bartlesville, Cherokee County (Tahlequah), Choctaw/McCurtain/Pushmataha counties (Hugo), Durant, Enid, Guthrie, Lawton, Muskogee, Norman, Oklahoma City, Ponca City, Shawnee, Stephens County (Duncan), Stillwater and Tulsa. The network currently serves over 60% of the population of Oklahoma children under the age of six, with a long-term plan to implement statewide and expand the network to 25 communities. Smart Start Oklahoma community coordinators, within each local community, convene together key leadership, such as local business leaders, educators, advocates, faith-based groups, and parents to develop a plan of action tailored to address the needs of families with young

children in that particular community. The communities then form local coalitions and partner with one another in an attempt to ensure that more children enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

Research states that children who are equipped with a background of quality early learning environments and positive life experiences prior to entering kindergarten are more likely to succeed in school which in turn leads to greater success later in life (National Governor's Association, 2005). This philosophy is the foundation upon which Smart Start Oklahoma is built. By incorporating this philosophy into the vision and mission of Smart Start Oklahoma and by implementing the four strategies with the ultimate goal of achieving the four result areas, Smart Start Oklahoma can help parents, caregivers and communities provide positive early childhood experiences by educating and empowering them to create quality learning environments for young children.

A parent is a child's first and most important teacher. Unfortunately, many families are consumed by the challenges of everyday life and miss out on opportunities to experience the joy of teaching their young children. Most parents understand that the early years in their child's life are important. However, research shows that parents undervalue their contribution to early learning and do not always know what they should be doing to support early learning. Many also feel like they do not have the time to do what it takes to prepare their children for school. Furthermore, many communities want to support parents and early learning but are unsure how best to respond to the needs of families with young children. Even in the best of circumstances, parenting and caregiving can be enhanced with quality support and information. By working to achieve the four results, Smart Start Oklahoma strives to be in a position to inform the public about early

childhood and the importance of early learning. In addition to responsibilities outlined in legislation, Smart Start Oklahoma and the OPSR Foundation benefit from the experience and support of the 16 communities that make up its network and by the experience and support of its partners. By connecting these communities, leaders from both boards and partnering organizations, Smart Start Oklahoma has the expertise and capacity to create systemic change in the field of early childhood.

If Smart Start Oklahoma and other similar state initiatives are to be successful in supporting the healthy growth and development of children, there must be a mutual understanding of the term school readiness and a mutual vision for achieving success. The inception of the National Education Goals can be viewed as the first unified attempt in accomplishing this task.

School Readiness

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) was established in an effort to prepare America's children for the 21st century (Halliburton & Thornburg, 2004). The NEGP was charged with the task of assessing and reporting on state and national progress toward achieving eight National Education Goals focusing on school readiness. The first of these goals stated that all American children will start school ready to learn by the year 2000 (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Bruner, 2002; Halle et al., 2000; Halliburton & Thornburg, 2004; Heaviside et al., 1993; Kagan & Rigby, 2003; State Boards of Education (NASBE) 1991; Ochshorn, 2000; Saluja et al., 2000). In answer to this goal, the NEGP identified three components of school readiness. The components included: readiness in the child; schools' readiness for children; and family and community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005;

Bruner, 2002; Halle et al., 2000; Saluja et al., 2000). Charged with establishing these goals and armed with research on child development and early education, the NEGP argued that readiness in children went beyond the universally accepted, academically driven definition of readiness.

Research stated that while children may meet the specific age criterion to enter kindergarten, their development is irregular and episodic and will vary greatly (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Saluja et al., 2000). This knowledge supported the Panel's decision to broaden the narrow definition of school readiness to include five domains of children's development and learning that are important to overall school success: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Halle et al., 2000; Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; National Governor's Association, 2005; Saluja et al., 2000).   Physical well being and motor development typically refers to a child's height, weight, and motor skills. Physical well-being focuses on issues like appropriate health care and proper nutrition. Components consist of questions such as is the child growing and gaining weight or is the child under-developed, malnourished, and in need of intervention services. Motor development generally consists of two categories: fine motor development and gross motor development. Gross motor development refers to activities such as running, jumping, hopping, throwing or catching. Fine motor development refers to activities such as drawing, picking up pieces of a puzzle, using blunt scissors and stacking. Delays in motor development can sometimes lead to a child having difficulty adapting to play and school (Marion, 2004). Social and emotional development is the acquisition of a set of

skills that include the ability to identify and understand one's own feelings, manage strong emotions, regulate one's own behavior, develop empathy for others, establish and sustain relationships and accurately read and comprehend emotions in others. Each of these skills build on one another and when social and emotional development becomes skewed, the result can manifest into problems in school and later life (Marion, 2004). Language development is a type of communication in which a child learns to use complex rules to form and manipulate symbols (words or gestures) to generate meaningful sentences. Children who do not experience being read to or talked to in the early years often are faced with inadequate verbal skills (Marion, 2004). Cognitive development refers to how a child perceives, thinks, and gains an understanding of his or her world through the interaction and influence of genetic and learned factors. Cognition is the ability to think, reason, problem-solve and understand (Marion, 2004). General knowledge refers to a child's ability to understand the world around them and the people they interact with on a daily basis (Marion, 2004).

These five developmental domains are closely related to one another with development in one domain influencing or being influenced by development in the other domains (Marion, 2004). Understanding the complexities and the inter-relatedness of the developmental domains is an essential part of understanding school readiness.

Maxwell and Clifford (2004, p. 30) claimed that the Panel's work on school readiness has been important in broadening people's understanding of readiness, "beyond the ABC's and 123's and highlighting the interconnections among the five domains". Maxwell and Clifford (2004) went on to say,

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Even with the work of NEGP and multiple years of research and discussion, a common definition of school readiness remains elusive. Discussions about people's views of school readiness are needed to develop a community-wide set of expectations regarding school readiness. (p. 36)

Research states that while many agree that the five domains are essential elements of readiness, debate continues as to whether these domains are exhaustive. In addition, researchers, educators, and policy makers vary with regard to what they believe should be included as indicators to be met on each of the domains (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Saluja et al., 2000).

A turning point for the school readiness agenda was apparent with the inception of the national goals. By emphasizing positive early learning experiences and the role these experiences play in the lives of children and later school success, early childhood education moved into what has typically been an educational policy agenda encompassing K-12 (Kagan & Rigby, 2003). However, by being linked to a K-12 educational agenda, the phrase, "school readiness" is one that is many times misunderstood and can lead one to focus solely on academics (Kagan & Rigby, 2003). Rather than simply academics, school readiness provides an infrastructure for promoting a child's development that includes key components to the success of the child; components that include families, interactions with others, early environments and communities (Hepburn, 2004; Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; NASBE, 1991; National Governor's Association, 2005).

It is important to bear in mind that the components of school readiness and the success of the child is not the sole responsibility of parents. Readiness is shaped and

defined by people and environments in a child's life and communities have an obligation to offer support to families with young children by taking an active role in the healthy development of the child (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; NASBE, 1991; National Governor's Association, 2005). The positive development of a child begins with those closest to the child and moves outward to include early learning environments, neighborhoods, and schools (Halle et al., 2000).

Research in the area of children's development continues to emphasize that the concept of school readiness is multi-faceted (Halle et al., 2000). If school readiness is oversimplified and not viewed as a multi-faceted concept, the result could be that children will be expected to demonstrate certain skills such as letters of the alphabet and number counting. It is critical to understand that school readiness means much more than academic knowledge (Bruner, Floyd & Copeman, 2005; Kagan & Rigby, 2003; Murphy & Burns, 2002; National Governor's Association, 2005; Rhode Island Kids Count, 2005).

Rather than a one-dimensional approach to school readiness, a comprehensive approach is required. Instead of always looking first to academics, one must include the components that seek to create systemic change in the field of early childhood. Contemporary understanding of school readiness must include a loving and nurturing family, quality early learning environments, good schools where children can learn and grow in knowledge, and interconnected neighborhoods and communities where children can live and play. Cognitive, emotional and physical abilities are not the only sources that contribute to readiness in children, but should also include the need to live and interact with community members, teachers, and other adults (Bruner, 2002; Halle et al., 2000; Kagan & Rigby, 2003; Murphy & Burns, 2002; National Governor's Association, 2005).

Because of the rapid and uneven growth in the developmental domains, the early

years are critical in the life of a child. In the early years, life experiences directly impact the

development of the child. Environmental factors, such as the care they have received and the

learning environments they have experienced all play a critical role in a child's development

(National Governor's Association, 2005; Saluja et al., 2000).   From birth through age six, a

child's development in the cognitive, physical and emotional domains is rapidly growing.

Because of the speed in which children develop it is critical to ensure that children have a

solid foundation early in life (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; Murphy & Burns, 2002; Santa Cruz

County, 1999).

While cognitive and physical development of the child is important, one must not

forget the importance of a child's emotional health and social competence. All

developmental domains must be considered to ensure a holistic approach when building a

solid foundation for children to grow and succeed (Bruner et al., 2005; Halle et al., 2000;

Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; NASBE, 1991; Shonkoff, 2004).

Determining what programs and supports are necessary to nurture and enhance

children's readiness is made difficult without an agreed upon definition of the term,

"readiness" (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Heaviside et al., 1993; Saluja et al., 2000). A

succinct definition of school readiness is crucial to ensuring that appropriate support

structures are put into place to meet the expectations of "readiness" and the impact these

expectations will have on children (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

When the National Education Goals were established in 1990, the first of these goals

stated that all American children will start school ready to learn by the year 2000 (Ackerman

& Barnett, 2005; Bruner, 2002; Halle et al., 2000; Halliburton & Thornburg, 2004; Heaviside

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et al., 1993; Kagan & Rigby, 2003; State Boards of Education (NASBE) 1991; Ochshorn, 2000; Saluja et al., 2000). However, without a universally accepted definition of school readiness and without collective agreement on the qualities and attributes required to achieve school readiness, it is impractical to believe that the first goal can be fully realized. In an attempt to develop consensus on this critical issue, the National Education Goals Panel employed the aid of the National Center for Education Statistics in conducting a survey to assess the beliefs of kindergarten teachers regarding school readiness (Heaviside et al., 1993). The survey was conducted in 1993 and was comprised of over 1,300 kindergarten teachers. The survey focused primarily on three areas: the beliefs of kindergarten teachers in the public school system on the subject of school readiness and the judgments these teachers make when considering the readiness of children. Also included were the teaching methods used in the classroom and the characteristics of each classroom in relation to the type of class taught (full-day, half-day, transitional or mixed ages), diversity of children in the classroom, assistance in the classroom by either paid or volunteer staff and the age of the children – older kindergarten children or younger kindergarten children. Finally, the survey looked at the ethnicity, gender, professional and educational background of each teacher in the sample.

For the purposes of this discussion, three areas of the survey will be addressed: 1) the beliefs of kindergarten teachers; 2) ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status of the children in classrooms; 3) ethnicity and race of teachers. Of the 1,300 teachers surveyed, 96 percent believed that the most important readiness factor was for children to be, "physically healthy, rested and well nourished" (Heaviside et al., 1993, p. 3). The authors found that the teachers surveyed rated this quality as, "very important or essential" (p. 3). Also of significance was the, "ability to communicate needs, wants and thoughts verbally (84

percent) and enthusiasm and curiosity in approaching new activities (76 percent)" (Heaviside et al., 1993, p. 3). Interestingly, the authors found that of least importance to the teachers surveyed was the, "ability to identify primary colors and basic shapes (24 percent), knowledge of the alphabet (10 percent), and the ability to count to 20 (7 percent)" (Heaviside et al., 1993, p. 4).

Socioeconomic status of the children factored into the results of the survey. Heaviside et al., (1993) found that teachers with classes having little or no poverty were more concerned with, "a child's ability to take turns and share" as opposed to teachers with classes having moderate to high levels of poverty (p. 5). In classrooms comprised of low minority students, of the teachers surveyed, 84 percent considered, "enthusiasm and a curious approach to learning as very important or essential to school readiness" as opposed to those teachers with classrooms comprised of high or moderate levels of minority students (Heaviside et al., 1993, p. 5).

In addition to the socioeconomic status of the students, race and ethnicity of the teachers had a bearing on the outcome of the survey. Heaviside et al., (1993) found that,

> black, non-Hispanic teachers were more likely than teachers of other racial/ethnic groups to place a higher value on a child's ability to count to 20 (23 percent compared with 6 percent for white, non-Hispanic teachers and 8 percent for teachers of other races) and that a child not be disruptive in class was also more important to black, non-Hispanic teachers (73 percent) than to white, non-Hispanic teachers (58 percent). (p.5).

Further research in the area of ethnicity found that, "black, non-Hispanic and other minority teachers (74 percent for each) were also more inclined to consider preschool important for

kindergarten success than their white, non-Hispanic counterparts (50 percent)" (Heaviside et al., 1993, p. 7).

Studies conducted by the Starting School Research Project in Australia explored the perceptions of teachers, parents and children in terms of school readiness and effective transition to kindergarten (Dockett & Perry, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2004). During 1996-1998, pilot studies were conducted with teachers in pre-school and kindergarten settings, parents of pre-school and kindergarten children, and children in pre-school and kindergarten classrooms for the purpose of determining what issues were important to consider for children starting school. As a result of these pilot studies, eight areas that affect transition to school were identified: "knowledge, social adjustment, skills, disposition, rules, physical attributes or characteristics, family issues, and education environments" (Dockett & Perry, 2003, p. 30). Once these categories were identified, a questionnaire was developed by the Starting School Research Project and mailed to individuals in 15 locations across Australia. Of the 1290 questionnaires distributed, 517 were returned for a response rate of forty percent (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Significant differences were found between teachers and parents in four areas. Parents rated the ability to count to 20 and knowing how to read as more important than teachers. Parents were also found to place great importance on seeing a child's homework. Teachers rated a child following school rules and routines as more important than parents (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

Upon analyzing the responses within teacher groups, the authors found that teachers in kindergarten settings were more concerned about children's disposition and interactions at school than pre-school teachers. Kindergarten teachers reported that children who are happy and well adjusted are capable of learning anything (Dockett & Perry, 2004). While academic

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progress was important to both groups of teachers, kindergarten teachers were more concerned with meeting district and parent expectations than pre-school teachers (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Dockett and Perry concluded that overall parents were more focused on the academic achievement of children while teachers were more focused on the disposition and social adjustment made by children (2004).

Dockett and Perry (2004) by use of drawing, storytelling, and interviewing were able to identify factors that children consider of great importance when starting kindergarten. Children reported social skills as being very important. Being liked by other children and having friends to play with on the playground was critical factor of school success. The children placed much emphasis on knowing the rules and knowing where to stand in line. They spoke openly about the importance of rules and what happens to children who break the rules (Dockett & Perry, 2002). They also reported knowledge as more important than parents or teachers reported (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

The research findings of Heaviside et al., and Dockett and Perry clearly demonstrate the differences in expectations and understandings related to school readiness among parents, teachers and children. These two extensive studies reveal that parents, teachers and children have diverse views when it comes to determining what is most important for effective transition into kindergarten. This, coupled with the lack of a concise definition of school readiness, hinders effective communication between all parties and disallows the opportunity for dialogue; dialogue that would permit these differences to be discussed in an open and respectful manner. Instead, feelings of frustration, disappointment and unfair expectations of parents and teachers are reflected in attitudes towards "readiness" and the child's ability to learn and succeed (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2004).

Research studies have linked parents' viewpoints about readiness to their socioeconomic status. Statistics show that more than 24 million children, under the age of six, in the United States live in low-income families. Of the 24 million, "forty-three percent or 10.4 million live in low-income families while twenty-one percent or 5.0 million live in poor families" (National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), 2006, p. 1). In 2006, the federal poverty level (FPL) is $20,000 for a family of 4; $16,600 for a family of 3; and $13,200 for a family of 2. Research suggests that, on average, "families need an income equal to approximately two times the FPL to meet their basic needs" (NCCP, 2006, p. 1). The National Center for Children in Poverty has found that the number of children living in low-income families is steadily rising (2006). Poverty is a critical component affecting the readiness of children, but it is not the only component. All potential risk factors must be explored and the impact measured before steps to ensure systemic change can be implemented to improve the lives of families with young children.

Research indicates that socioeconomic status can adversely affect school readiness; the better the socioeconomic status of the family, the more likely children are going to be ready for school (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2005). Studies have shown that family socioeconomic status is a direct link to many of the underlying factors that affect school readiness (Rouse et al., 2005). For example, research has found that families with low socioeconomic status are less likely to talk or read to their children than are parents with high socioeconomic status (Rouse et al., 2005). Lack of verbal interaction, letter recognition, parent/child bonding, and literacy are just a few of the factors that can adversely affect school readiness. These negative factors also directly impact the five domains of a child's healthy development. Research has found that issues such as

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poverty status, educational or ethnic backgrounds of parents', the health of children and living environments can be linked to the cognitive, language, and social skills a child demonstrates upon entry to school (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Children with parents who are high-school dropouts or exist on the public welfare system are more likely to have lower reading, math, and general knowledge skills and are more likely to experience health problems (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Rouse et al., (2005) found that family socioeconomic status, number of books in the home, low birth weight, and other factors account for, "70-80 percent of the gaps in reading and math" (p. 11).

Research has demonstrated that many low-income families lack the support structures necessary to ensure basic needs are met, which in turn can result in their children being more likely to have difficulties upon school entry. Research has also shown that children who do not have positive early education experiences will start school lacking the social and academic skills that are critical to school success (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). It is essential that factors associated with low-income and poor families be considered at the national, state and local level when determining what "readiness" means.

Risk Factors

Across the country, state and national leaders are asking what can be done to reclaim the number of children who are in jeopardy of school failure. They are asking how problems that place children at risk can be addressed so they can thrive and learn. Poverty, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, unemployment and homelessness are just a few of the fundamental challenges plaguing families in today's society (Miller et al., 2002). Poverty has been a part of society for generations. What has changed is the capacity of poor families in America to cope by themselves with the social and economic pressures that befall them.

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Contributing to this is the decline in the traditional support that families have received from extended families and the communities in which they live (Miller et al., 2002). Families are forced to rely on others for survival, unable to maintain their self-sufficiency. As a result, children, who are now the fastest growing segment of the school population and future work force, are at the greatest risk of failure (Boethel, 2004).

Stegelin and Buford (2004) found that the effects of poverty place children at risk educationally and in order to ensure these high-risk children are ready for school, "innovative policies must be developed and implemented" (p. 34). Efforts to help high-risk children must begin early, before the children enter school (Ochshorn, 2000). Stegelin and Buford (2004) defined "high-risk" as having three or more of the following indicators: Living in a family with an income below the poverty level; living in a family headed by a single parent; living in a family with non-full-time year-round employment; living with a household head that is a high school dropout. (p. 32). There is clear evidence that children who start school with one or more of these risk factors are much more likely to experience problems later in life (Bruner, 2002; Ochshorn, 2000; Stegelin & Buford, 2004). Children have been found to have lower skills in reading, math, and general knowledge, and were more likely to be in poorer health upon entering kindergarten compared to children with no risk factors. Children with more risk factors had lower skills in all five areas of development domains tested as they entered school (Boethel, 2004; Bruner et al., 2005; Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; Rouse et al., 2005; Shields & Behrman, 2002).

Research has shown that a significant number of high-risk children, who start school behind their peers, are at greater risk of encountering poor outcomes and contributing to

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future societal costs (Bruner, 2002; Bruner et al., 2005). Bruner (2002) stated there is evidence that poor outcomes in the early years of life can have "lifelong consequences" (p. 11). Children who do not have positive learning experiences that prepare them for school are more likely to become teen parents, engage in criminal activities, and suffer from depression. These children are more susceptible to high school dropout and are more likely to be unemployed in adulthood (Rouse et al., 2005).

While many children are born healthy and into families that can provide them with loving, nurturing environments, many children are born to parents who struggle with economic security, adequate health care coverage, good parenting skills and education. As a result, almost "3 in 10 babies manifest some risk factors at birth with nearly 1 in 10 possessing several risk factors" (Bruner et al., 2005, p. 3).

Statistics provided by the National Center for Children in Poverty clearly show the enormity of the struggles families with young children face on a daily basis. Out of the 24 million children, under the age of six living in the United States, "nineteen percent or 1.9 million do not have an employed parent in the home" (NCCP, 2006, p. 2). In addition to employment, parent education is a predictor for children who are deemed high-risk. In the United States, "27% or 2.8 children, under the age of six, live with parents who have less than a high school diploma and 34% or 3.6 live with parents who only have a high school diploma" (NCCP, 2006, p. 2).

Another high-risk indicator for young children is family structure. "Fifty percent or 5.1 million children under the age of six live in a single parent household" (NCCP, 2006, p. 3). Research has found that single parenting is associated with lower educational and occupational attainment by mothers and higher developmental risks for children (Shields &

Behrman, 2002). Single-parent families, especially those families with no male present, are much more likely to be poor, and the children are more likely to suffer adverse effects on their development and well being (Shields & Behrman, 2002).

When studying the effects of one-parent households, Shields and Behrman (2002) found that while a large percentage of children are living in the home with single parents, many single mothers are not rearing their children alone. Referred to as "fragile families," the authors suggest that many unmarried parents are working together to raise their children, either by cohabitating or maintaining frequent contact. Research indicates that positive father involvement is important both to the financial and emotional stability of the household as well as children's development. Father involvement has been linked to less frequent behavioral and emotional problems among children (Shields & Behrman, 2002). Research has shown that increased father involvement is associated with improved academic achievement of children and reductions in behavioral problems (Shields & Behrman, 2002).

High levels of poverty and high minority status are believed to be predictors for difficulty later in life and directly related to school readiness (Rouse et al., 2005; Shields & Behrman, 2002; Stegelin & Buford, 2004). Research has shown that race and ethnicity, when coupled with a family's socioeconomic status, can have an adverse effect on a child's readiness for school. The enormity of this statement is evident when examining the number of children born to families of various race or ethnicity. NCCP statistics (2006) show that "66% or 3.4 children, under the age of six, are born to Latino families" (p. 3). "64% or 2.2 million children are born to black families while 25% or 0.2 million children are born to Asian families" (NCCP, 2006, p. 3). Out of the 24 million children under the age of six living in the United States, "30% or 4.0 are white children" (NCCP, 2006, p. 3). Although

Latino and black children are disproportionately low-income, "whites comprise the largest group of low-income children" (NCCP, 2006, p.3).

Research has found that sizable racial and ethnic gaps already exist by the time children enter kindergarten; therefore, it is critical to seek ways to close the gap in school readiness (Rouse et al., 2005). In a national survey of more than 3,500 kindergarten teachers in the late 1990's, 46% of the teachers reported that at least half of the children in their classrooms had difficulty following directions, difficulty communicating, problems with social skills, difficulty working independently and in groups, lack of academic skills upon entry into kindergarten and adjustment problems (Rouse et al., 2005). The research went on to find that these problems were more common among black and Hispanic children than white children (Rouse et al., 2005). A high proportion of minority children were reported by teachers as having substantially more problems than teachers with a low proportion of minority children. According to the research, the teachers perceived that black and Hispanic children were lagging behind the white children in both academic and self-regulatory aspects of school readiness (Rouse et al., 2005).

The sheer number of children in the nation under the age of six who live at or below the poverty level is staggering. When factoring in the many variables that affect families with young children, it is clear that more must be done to ensure a level playing field for all children. A level-playing field that includes, among many other things, quality-learning environments, access to resources, economic security, adequate health care, and sustainable structures that support families with young children. This recognition should serve as a catalyst for facilitating collaborations with programs and services that can provide families the opportunities needed to raise healthy, happy children.

In an effort to combat these risk factors, strategies are needed to create a pro-family system of integrated services and supports to address the complicated challenges families with young children face today. The types of targeted social investments needed may vary somewhat across the age span of young children (Bruner, 2002). Resources and access to quality early learning environments should be focused on where children are actually spending their days (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). Research has shown that young children today spend significant time in nonparental care (National Governor's Association, 2005). The National Governor's Association, citing data from 2001, estimated that "61 percent of children under the age of six received nonparental child care on a regular basis" (2005, p. 13).

Environments that provide basic care as well as promote the development of social, language, cognitive, and emotional skills along with health are environments where children thrive the most (Halle et al., 2000; Rhode Island Kids Count, 2005; Santa Cruz County, 1999). Research shows that, "high-quality programs can have lasting positive impacts on child development; a few of these programs have also tracked gains to society and to government" (Bruner et al., 2005, p. 13). The use of developmentally appropriate practices is essential in creating enriched, supportive environments for children. Developmentally appropriate practices in early learning environments strives toward creating a safe haven that is inclusive, focused on all developmental domains and considers current, quality scientific knowledge when considering best practices (Gallagher, 2005; Saluja et al., 2000).

Despite the research, many children still do not have access to the kind of quality early learning environments that provide them with the stimulation and nurturing needed so

they can develop to their full potential (Ochshorn, 2000; Santa Cruz County, 1999). High-quality learning experiences that address a child's needs in a holistic manner prepare them to start school ready to learn (Bruner et al., 2005; Hepburn, 2004). Identified through research, some programs and practices have been proven effective in preparing children to start school ready to succeed while strengthening a family's ability to raise their children in nurturing homes (Bruner et al., 2005).

Children who spend time in quality learning environments have a distinct advantage over children who do not have this opportunity. If a child is nurtured and cultivated in the areas of cognitive and noncognitive skills, that child is likely to excel while others remain behind (Heckman, 2006). Longitudinal studies have shown that quality environments reduce the need for special education services and juvenile justice services (Bruner et al., 2005). These same quality environments have also been linked to the reduction in future costs of remediation (Heckman, 2006).

To ensure that families with young children have access to high-quality learning environments, there must be systemic change in the area of early childhood education (Hepburn, 2004; Miller et al., 2002). This requires the willingness of agencies, parents, professionals, advocates, communities and policymakers to engage in efforts to develop a comprehensive early childhood system at the local, state and national levels (Hepburn, 2004; Miller et al., 2002). To be a successful early childhood system, it must support parents as their child's first and most important teacher while providing parents with high-quality options for their children (Business Roundtable, 2003; Hepburn, 2004). These options should include providing access to quality programs for 3 and 4 year old children regardless of their socioeconomic status (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Business Roundtable, 2003). It

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should include offering seamless ways to meet the child care needs of families who must work outside the home and providing strategies for parents to be supportive of their child's learning whether it be at home or in early learning environments (Business Roundtable, 2003).

In addition to meeting the needs of the family, a comprehensive early childhood system must build collaboratives or partnerships to help govern and sustain the system. This is not an easy task but a necessary one if families with young children are to be served successfully (Hepburn, 2004; Katz, Hoene, & de Kervor, 2003). The importance of collaboration and the need to access more resources for families with young children is becoming more apparent and starting to gain momentum (Hepburn, 2004; NASBE, 1991). By virtue of their broad-based representations, collaboratives are becoming an emerging force for change in communities (Bruner, 2002).

To build on this momentum, collaboratives should seek ways to support community planning, program development and oversight around family issues. All sectors of the early childhood field should be included in the discussions as well as key stakeholders at the state and local level to ensure effectiveness and accessibility of services. These collaboratives should find ways to minimize duplication of effort and agree to adequate and shared financing mechanisms that identify priorities for program expansion and priorities that guide the collaborative in times of budget shortfalls (Business Roundtable, 2003). Most importantly, collaboratives must remember that ultimately, the entire effort is about supporting and encouraging parents as they struggle to raise happy, healthy, productive children (Ounce of Prevention, 2003).

<u>Parental Support</u>

Parents are their child's first and most important teacher and are the keys to their child's well being (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005 Bruner et al., 2005; Hepburn, 2004; Santa Cruz County, 1999). Most parents love their children and want to provide a nurturing, loving environment for them. Children thrive when families are able to love and support them with opportunities to learn and explore their world (Rhode Island Kids Count, 2005). Research shows that when children experience positive, nurturing care from a parent, they perform better academically and emotionally (National Governor's Association, 2005).

For parents to achieve success in providing a stable foundation for their children, it is essential to improve economic opportunities and strengthen social protections for the most vulnerable citizens – children. It is essential to place emphasis on building the supports families need to raise children who are educationally and emotionally successful so that these same children can grow up to pursue productive and satisfying careers while raising healthy and happy children of their own. The care a child receives in the early years (0-6) establishes the child's most fundamental sense of trust and self-esteem as well as the child's capacity to connect with and feel as a valued part of society (Santa Cruz County, 1999). The quality of interaction a child receives is a catalyst through which he or she experiences life. When a child is young, it is important that adult/child interactions be nurturing and consistent (Santa Cruz County, 1999). To achieve these goals, research indicates that many people are needed to play an important part in shaping a child's life. In addition to parents, others include grandparents, teachers, neighbors and friends (Shonkoff, 2004). Coupled with human interaction, experience, culture and economic class shape the way children are raised and create a context for aspects of a child's development (Santa Cruz County, 1999).

Many families with young children, particularly high-risk families, are unable to provide these basic, fundamental tenets. Poor parents are generally involved in a day-to-day struggle to assure that the basic needs of their children are met. This daily struggle requires an enormous amount of energy and commitment for parents who want the best for their children. Spurred by growing concern regarding school readiness and the recognition that the early years are critical to a child's development, state and local partnerships are seeking ways to provide the support systems so desperately needed by families today (Boethel, 2004; Bruner et al., 2005; Miller et al., 2002). A growing number of local communities are developing collaboratives to gather the information needed to discuss the challenges families face and to arrive at collective decisions for resolving them. With a common vision, these community collaboratives are becoming a voice for children and families (Boethel, 2004; Bruner et al., 2005; Miller et al., 2002).

<u>Community Collaboratives</u>

Changing a community's current system of services into a profamily system is a long-term process. Increasingly, leaders are seeing functions that were once viewed as the government's domain, also require attention from business and non-profit sectors (Austin, 2000; Flower, 1995). Austin (2000) wrote that cross-sector partnering between business, government, non-profits and communities will be the, "collaboration paradigm of the 21 century" (p. 1). Flower (1995) found that bringing together a diverse set of people within the community could make a difference and bring about positive change. Successful collaboration was shown to create a network of trust and respect within communities and created feelings of reciprocity among the stakeholders. Stakeholders felt that by collaborating, they were able to achieve success in areas where traditional methods had failed

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(Flower, 1995). However, Flower cautioned that a community must move past the notion of hierarchical, command-and-control leadership; that true leadership must be grounded in true collaboration (1995).

Throughout the United States, communities are devising innovative collaborations to give more children access to good quality child care and education, a foundation for school readiness and future academic achievement (Ochshorn, 2000). Building collaborative communities involves organizing and convening a group of diverse stakeholders to develop a vision and implement an agenda for the purpose of seeking change within a community (Dombro et al., 1996; Miller et al., 2002; Ochshorn, 2000). It involves assessing the needs of the citizens within a community and then bringing people together to address these needs (Bruner, Stover-Wright, Gebhard, & Hibbard, 2004; Dombro et al., 1996; Miller et al., 2002, Ochshorn, 2000). Developing a system that will benefit the community as a whole requires the system be supported by the community as a whole (Dombro et al., 1996; Santa Cruz County, 1999). The National Association of State Boards of Education (1991) identifies four action steps when creating caring communities: "local leadership and planning; responsive federal policies and investments; state government leadership; and increased commitment from employers and voluntary agencies" (p. 2). A grassroots approach to building a community collaborative ensures that needs at the local level are identified, problem-solving takes place at the local level and implementation of strategies are connected to community based services and programs (National Governor's Association, 2005; Stegelin & Buford, 2004).

For a community to be successful in collaboration and systems building, the community must determine the structure's function and goals and develop a process for

implementing the strategies that will strengthen and improve outcomes for families with young children (Bruner et al., 2004; Dombro et al., 1996; Miller et al., 2002, National League of Cities, n.d.; Ochshorn, 2000). However, before goals and process can be established, the focus must be to create a common vision and a common language among the different groups. A well-developed strategic internal and external communication effort is a prerequisite for the success and effectiveness of an initiative (Dombro et al., 1997; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2002). This is a key component because often stakeholders have a different language they each use to discuss the same issues. A common language must be developed so that internal and external communication strategies, including key messages, framing strategies, and short and long term public information campaigns can be developed to ensure that all within the collaborative and community understand the purpose of the initiative (Dombro et al., 1997; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2002). The process must start with stakeholders agreeing on definitions of what early learning means for children and what an early childhood system represents (Bruner et al., 2004).

Often times community efforts are fragmented and unsustainable, lacking a proper mechanism that would enable them to put their resources to use more effectively in supporting families (Halle et al., 2000; Morgan, Spears, & Caplan, 2003; National League of Cities, n.d.). To have a successful community collaborative, it is essential to create local buy-in and invite all key stakeholders to the table. Decision makers, funders and community leaders must come together to marshal efforts and resources to launch an effective and sustainable partnership (Dombro et al., 1996; Halle et al., 2000; National Governor's Association, 2005; Ochshorn, 2000).

Step by step, collaboratives are constructing learning communities that seek to meet the needs of young children and their families (Ochshorn, 2000). Community driven collaboratives are unique because they reflect its own state's political, economic, and social circumstances, as well as its early childhood needs and resources. This provides the opportunity to address those issues that are the most relevant to a particular community (Miller et al., 2002; Ochshorn, 2000). Local control in community decision-making and responsibility necessitates a strong commitment to the process.

Creating systemic change and providing positive outcomes for children requires a lot of time, energy, and passion for the initiative at hand. The foundation for successful system change efforts is collaboration among diverse stakeholders from public and private organizations at both the state and local level. Facilitating collaboration is a complicated, time-consuming process that requires the concerted and committed efforts of everyone involved over a period of many years (Bruner et al., 2004; Dombro et al., 1996; Miller et al., 2002). Collaborative efforts and the process involved can feel like a never-ending process made more difficult by the inability to see quick results. It is not unusual to see stakeholders suffering from burn out or feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of work required to create a comprehensive, early childhood system (Dombro et al., 1996; Hepburn, 2004).

To avoid some of these issues, it is crucial to incorporate strategies for maintaining momentum from the very beginning of the collaborative effort. These strategies are especially important to the healthy development and sustainability of the initiative. Broad based, systemic change is a process that takes place over a period of time and it is important to note, that over time, the initiative will face many issues including turnover of multiple governors, legislators, city councils. The collaborative will be faced with new partners who

might or might not agree with the goals established by the stakeholders. In addition to changes in leadership, inevitable federal, state, and local funding changes related to programs and structure will arise and it is important that strategies be implemented to sustain the initiative while maintaining momentum (Dombro et al., 1996; Hepburn, 2004).

Sustaining a collaborative requires constant and vigilant attention by all involved. Collaboration is a tool for achieving something of value and can be useful when organizations band together to accomplish an agreed upon set of goals. Collaboration is a way for organizations to join together and seek creative ways to tackle issues that lie beyond the scope of any single organization. Efforts can increase a community's capacity to build social capital thus creating buy-in to get more done and is dependent upon the existence of trust, shared vision, and communication (Mattessich et al., 2001).

While collaboration can be a catalyst for creating systemic change, it does come with its own set of challenges (Dombro et al., 1996; Hepburn, 2004; Miller et al., 2002). Research in the area of collaboration and community building has identified some of the challenges and offered strategies for sustaining the collaborative during difficult times. Knowing some of these challenges in advance can be useful to an initiative when developing goals or assessing or revising community outcomes.

The initial challenge in launching an effective collaborative is as much one of changing beliefs and motivation as it is or acquiring or spending more money (Ochshorn, 2000). Understanding that the traditional way of doing business is not producing the results needed or wanted can be the mechanism for bringing together individuals around a particular issue or problem. This means convening a group of people from different parts of the community, the neighborhoods, the business people, and others to do an assessment and

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determine the need within the community (Dombro et al., 1996; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 1997; Miller et al., 2002). Strategic partnerships that combine the energies of parents, providers, the business community, philanthropic foundations, and government can be used to effectively leverage systems-building efforts (Dombro et al., 1996; Miller et al., 2002).

Challenges to convening a large group of stakeholders are ensuring that inclusion has been exercised and then identifying and developing strong leadership within the collaborative. Active leadership from organizations and stakeholders within the community is essential to the collaborative. In addition to the local leaders, champions in political office or public opinion leaders must play an early and critical role in advocating, planning and implementing state initiatives. Effective leadership requires the ability to communicate a common message across sectors that focuses on shared concerns and opportunities for collaboratively leveraging resources (Dombro et al., 1996; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2002).

During the convening phase, the collaborative must ensure a cross section of members that represent each segment of the community who will ultimately be affected by the collaboratives activities (Mattessich et al., 2001). No agency or organization is solely accountable for promoting early childhood development and school readiness. Therefore, multisector leadership is necessary to create a common vision and bridge funding streams and program responsibilities (Dombro et al., 1996; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2002).

Once all organizations are represented, the challenge is for the stakeholders to believe they will benefit in some way from their involvement in the collaborative. Without this belief or feeling of ownership by the stakeholders, the challenges of reallocating resources

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and streamlining administrative procedures could be more difficult to achieve (Dombro et al., 1997; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2002). Many times, issues of turf and loss of autonomy are concerns the partners have which is why it is important to establish a feeling of mutual respect, understanding and trust. Too many times collaboratives are anxious to start the work and believe that relationships and communication will be developed as the process unfolds. This is a common mistake collaboratives make and can lead to feelings of hostility and mistrust, thereby destroying the work of the group.

Mattessich et al., (2001) cautioned that at the very beginning of an effort, the purpose of the collaborative should be set aside and partners focus on learning about one another. Sufficient time should be allowed for trust and respect to develop. During this time, partners should be honest with one another, discuss their reasons for being a part of the group and what their own agendas might be. This can be a real challenge for the collaborative because partners are leaders in the community with busy schedules and often feel time spent getting to know one another is not productive. On the contrary, if collaboratives will make the effort to do this in the beginning, it will lessen the potential for future conflict (Dombro et al., 1997; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2002).

Financing for the sustainability of an integrated, comprehensive early childhood system is one of the primary challenges collaboratives face (Dombro et al., 1997; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2002). The collaborative should consider financing strategies that enhance sustainability through making better use of existing resources, maximizing public revenue, creating more flexibility in existing categorical funding, and building upon the public/private partnerships found within the community (Dombro et al., 1997; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2002).

Research has found that community collaboratives will face challenges at one time or another during the process (Dombro et al., 1997; Hepburn, 2004). Collaboratives that implement a thorough strategic engagement process that addresses communication, leadership, coordination, finance, accountability, and measurement challenges can succeed in achieving optimal health development and school readiness for all children (Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich et al., 2001).

Throughout the United States, communities are building local collaboratives and cultivating local partnerships in an attempt to provide a strong foundation for children to attain school readiness and academic achievement through high-quality support services (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; Ochshorn, 2000). Learning communities are being constructed that expand traditional boundaries to encompass the needs of young children and their families (Ochshorn, 2000). Communities are learning how to augment existing programs and services and are seeking ways to conduct information and outreach campaigns to build public support while also informing parents about appropriate developmental practices (National Governor's Association, 2005; Shonkoff, 2004). Communities play a key role in providing support services to families through prenatal care, home visits, literacy, income support, and parent-child education programs (National Governor's Association, 2005). Communities are the front line of service delivery for health care needs, quality learning environments, mental health services and social supports that reach out to high-risk families and families who are socially isolated (National Governor's Association, 2005; Rhode Island Kids Count, 2005; Santa Cruz County, 1999).

"Progress towards the school readiness goal will benefit children, families, local communities and our nation" (NASBE, 1991, p. 2). Coordination of these efforts will help to

ensure that children are happy and healthier and that parents feel empowered while providing for their family (NASBE, 1991). For local community collaboratives to be successful in their endeavors and have a positive, long-lasting impact on families with young children, more commitment is required from the state and national level in the form of public policy.

<u>Public Policy</u>

A common assumption prevails that only families themselves, local communities and private agencies are responsible for helping children and their families. In extreme cases, some people believe that poor children and their families should support themselves with no assistance from others. However, government plays a vital role in helping families nurture and prepare children to reach their full potential (Miller et al., 2002). The concept that an activist government should help children and families continues to be a subject of debate among citizens and the politicians who represent them. This is ironic since many analysts concede that government is an important factor in the lives of Americans. To affect real changes in the nation's economy and to affect sweeping public policy reforms, government should and must take a stance in the fight against poverty and protection of the nation's most valuable resource – the children (Bruner et al., 2005; Miller et al., 2002). To make certain that our nation is an economic and political power for future generations, steps must be taken to improve the educational system for the healthy development of our children. Seeking ways to reduce the number of children growing up in poverty and minimizing the risk factors associated with poverty can result in opportunities for children to reach their full potential and achieve success in life (Ochshorn, 2000).

To build and sustain a comprehensive, early childhood system, there must be support from the public and private sector. Public and private entities bring with them unique and

specialized knowledge from their respective roles (National Governor's Association, 2005).

In addition to partnerships, legislation which is supported by policymakers, educators, direct service providers and families, is also needed to ensure community initiatives meet the needs of families so that children are ready to learn (National Governor's Association, 2005; Stegelin & Buford, 2004). Public/private partnerships and advocacy for public policy cannot take place without local community collaboratives leading the way. In an effort to improve school readiness and educational outcomes, states should look closely at communities and their collaborative efforts. Communities play an important role in informing state policy because many times they are the source of pilot initiatives which lay the groundwork for future state policy and programs (National Governor's Association, 2005; Ochshorn, 2000).

While community collaboratives are responsible for building infrastructure at the local level, streamlining service delivery systems, prioritizing investments, providing resources and implementing public policy are the responsibility of government at the state level. The outcome will be a top-down, bottom-up approach to early childhood investment; an approach where all stakeholders have a voice in how the system is developed and supported (Bruner et al., 2005; NASBE, 1988; Ochshorn, 2000). An approach that can produce results to help build public and political support that is critical to the long-term success and growth of early childhood initiatives (National Governor's Association, 2005). "Responsibility for school readiness lies not with the children, but with the adults who care for them and the systems that support them" (National Governor's Association, 2005, p. 1).

Research has shown that a wide array of people play an important part in the healthy development of a child and to build an effective early childhood system requires significant investment from the public (Bruner et al., 2005; Shonkoff, 2004). Building partnerships to

work toward a common goal of understanding school readiness and the long-term benefits to children is the responsibility of the community as a whole (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; National Governor's Association, 2005; Shonkoff, 2004). This means advocating for and implementing state-level policy at the grassroots level. Such implementation can offer many rewards to families and communities but can also present many challenges as well. Believing and committing to the philosophy that the future of the nation is dependent upon the well-being of all children requires that each individual set aside his or her own agenda to work towards the common goal of improving the lives of children (Miller et al., 2002; Shonkoff, 2004).

Believing in and working towards the common goal of improving the lives of young children is a critical piece of the early childhood system. However, accountability is also critical to the overall success of the system. Accountability must be built into the process if success is to be found at the local and state level. Conducting research to identify best practices as well as lessons learned is one form of accountability. Evaluation of the programs within the system in addition to tracking the progress of the children is a key component of accountability. Data collection and analysis, setting outcomes and benchmarks, assessment of the system and continued research in the area of child development can ensure that the system will flourish and meet the needs of children. Establishing incentives for meeting or exceeding objectives and enforcing consequences for continuous failure to achieve children's outcomes is also way to ensure that the system is healthy and really making a difference (Business Roundtable, 2003). These efforts will require strong leaderships from state policymakers, the private sector and the business community, major changes in public schools and new public investments (NASBE, 1988).

Research has shown that many of the nation's elected leaders are beginning to realize that quality, early childhood initiatives are critical to society as a whole (Katz et al., 2003). This realization can be linked, in part, to the growing understanding of the importance of the early years to lifelong development and success. There is also the reality that family life has changed over the last 30 years. Gone are the days when the traditional, nuclear family was comprised of a father who worked outside the home and a mother who cared for the children in the home. Present day finds both parents or in many cases, the only parent, working outside the home in order to support the family (Bruner, 2002). "The proportion of families where both, or the only, parent works outside the home has more than doubled and the number of children raised by a single parent has more than tripled" (Bruner, 2002, pp. 1 & 2). Also, growing disparities can be found in the development and well-being of children, with much of this evident in the early years (Bruner, 2002).

Great strides can be made to ensure that children are healthy and ready to learn if efforts are made to work jointly rather than separately. By agreeing to partner with one another the risk factors faced by families with young children can be reduced and the level of parental support systems and quality, early learning environments improved. Economic security can become the norm rather than the exception if efforts are shared. By building collaborative communities and marshaling expertise and political will in the form of public policy, steps can be taken to ensure that families with young children receive the services and supports they need. Acting alone, no one will succeed.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The National Education Goals panel identified three components of school

readiness: readiness in the child, schools' readiness for children, and family and

community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness (Ackerman &

Barnett, 2005; Bruner, 2002; Halle, Zaslow, Zaff & Calkins, 2000; Halliburton &

Thornburg, 2004; Kagan & Rigby, 2003; National Association of State Boards of

Education (NASBE) 1991; Ochshorn, 2000). This thesis is focused primarily on the third

component of the National Goals panel, as school readiness will be explored as it relates

to community collaboratives.

Stillwater Area Success By 6 ® is a local collaborative that has been in existence

for five years and is part of the Smart Start Oklahoma network. This thesis looks at the

Stillwater data from the last five years and extrapolates factors that directly correlate to

the impact the collaborative has had in the Stillwater community.

Methodology

Greenstein (2001) wrote that the primary purpose of social and behavioral

research is to, "find out what, exactly, is going on in society" (p. 3). He wrote that when

conducting a research study, one must look at the information available about a particular

topic, determine if there is any existing data about the topic and then explore what is

known about the topic (Greenstein, 2001). He emphasized that it is important to become

familiar with the basic facts surrounding the chosen topic and look for patterns, ideas or

questions related to the topic. It is very possible that one might discover that the topic

area is new or has very little research written about it. He defined this stage of social

research as "exploratory" (Greenstein, 2001).

<u>Data Sources</u>

In an effort to address the issue, this thesis focused on data collected from the

Stillwater Area Success By 6 ® collaborative in the year 2000, 2003 and 2005. Data

were gathered from a multiplicity of sources in the Stillwater community and are utilized

in this thesis as a means of determining the impact, or the lack thereof, the Stillwater

Area Success By 6 ® collaborative has had on child outcomes in the Stillwater

community.

Two sources of information were utilized for this exploratory examination of the

impact of a community collaborative on the school readiness of children. School

readiness surveys of area teachers and a rating of the quality of the community

collaboration completed by Stillwater Area Success by 6® board members.

School Readiness Surveys. Teachers completed surveys about school readiness in

2000 and 2005. They indicated whether the majority of their students possessed a variety

of school readiness abilities and experiences. There were also open-ended questions that

documented their perceptions of the needs of children and families, supports available,

and barriers to meeting these needs. Results from the two surveys were compared. This

survey can be found in Appendix A.

Quality of Community Collaboration. Paul W. Mattessich, Marta Murray-Close

and Barbara R. Monsey, on behalf of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, designed a

questionnaire in 2001 as a tool for community residents, leaders, and funders who wish to

develop their communities in ways that will result in other improvements – whether social, economic, housing, health, educational, safety, or other. The authors utilized the questionnaire as a tool to draw a parallel to six factors related to successful collaboration. The six factors are defined as those factors related to the environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communication, purpose and resources. The six factors are based upon a decade of compiled research in the area of successful collaborative practice. The authors then took the research, synthesized it and produced a reference guide outlining community-building strategies. The reference guide is entitled "Collaboration: What Makes It Work"?

The Stillwater Area Success By 6 ® data and the six factors developed by Mattessich et al., are the foundation upon which this research study is based and will demonstrate that if communities build local collaborations, focused on local needs, families with young children will have a greater chance of receiving the support system needed to ensure that young children are safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. The factors can be found in Appendix B.

The Wilder Survey was completed by board members in both 2004 and 2005. Similarities and differences between the perspectives on the collaborative will be examined between the two years. The six factor scores were calculated.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

<u>School Readiness Surveys</u>

School readiness surveys were distributed to Stillwater kindergarten and first

grade public school teachers in 2000 and 2005. The purpose of the survey was to gather

teacher perceptions about the skills, abilities and experiences of the children in their

classrooms at the beginning of the school year. In addition to the survey questions, the

teachers were asked to complete open-ended questions that asked for their perceptions of

the needs of children and families in the Stillwater area, the needs they feel are not being

met and the barriers to meeting these needs. The teachers were asked to provide

information on the class as a whole rather than information related to individual children.

For the purpose of this study, the two survey results will be compared to determine the

usefulness of the survey in assessing the readiness of children from the perspective of a

teacher and to determine if there has been a change in teacher perceptions over time.

<u>Teacher Demographics</u>

Table 1 shows the teacher demographics as reported in 2000 and 2005. In 2000,

96% teachers reported marital status as married in contrast to the 71% reported in 2005.

Data showed the majority of teachers surveyed were of Caucasian descent (89% and

88%). Demographic analyses reveal there were no significant differences in the number

of total years teaching school, the numbers of years living in Stillwater, and the number

of years teaching and living in the Stillwater community.

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Teachers' Perceptions of Skills, Abilities, and Experiences

Teachers were asked to complete a set of questions related to the skills, abilities, and experiences of the children in their classroom. Teachers were asked to indicate whether the majority of children in their class had entered school that year possessing each of the 15 skills. The percent of teachers that indicated the majority of their class achieved the skill, ability, or experience at the start of the school year has been presented in Table 2 for each of the 15 skill areas as reported in school year 2000 (N=29) and school year 2005 (N=30).

The same items were ranked in the top five by teachers in both groups as being demonstrated: toilet trained, physically healthy, able to perform self-care skills, easily separated from parents, and showing curiosity and interest. At least 90% of the teachers ranked these five items as being met by the majority of their children. Two items ranked showed significant difference between the two survey years. Teachers surveyed in 2000 ranked their children as demonstrating a higher level of skill in the area of basic knowledge as compared to teacher rankings in 2005. Whereas, teachers in 2005 ranked their children as demonstrating a higher level of social skills than the teachers in 2000. The same item was ranked last (able to sit still) by both groups of teachers.

Survey results from 2005 indicated teachers observed a high percentage of children entering school with prior reading experience (90%) as compared to children in 2000 (79%). Teachers in 2005 reported an 11% increase in those children who display good language and communication skills and a 10% increase in those who display good self-care skills.

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Teachers in 2005 ranked children showing curiosity and interest in learning at 97%. This was a 4% increase from 2000 survey results. Perhaps the most meaningful difference between the two survey years was the decrease in those children reported as possessing basic knowledge as rated by their teachers. In 2000, teachers reported 83% of their children showed basic knowledge skills as compared to reports by teachers in 2005 (59%).

Teachers' Perceptions – Most Important Needs, Unmet Needs and Barriers

Stillwater Area Success by 6® formed its community coalition in 2001 when it received funding from United Way of America. In the four years since that time, Oklahoma passed legislation creating the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act. The Act seeks to create a comprehensive early childhood system focused on four goal areas: parent support, health, quality child care, and school readiness more broadly interpreted as quality early learning environments. Stillwater is one of 16 communities that has received funding to identify needs and service gaps within their respective communities. Funding for these activities is provided through a yearly grant process administered by the state partnership known as Smart Start Oklahoma.

In 2000 and 2005, teachers were asked to complete open-ended questions about the needs of families with young children residing in the Stillwater community. The questions were as follows:

1. What do you see as the most important needs for children 0-6 and their families?

2. As a teacher, what are the biggest needs that you see going unmet?

3. What do you identify as the top three barriers that prevent children and families from meeting their needs?

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Data from these open-ended questions were compiled and categorized according to the four goal areas adopted by Smart Start Oklahoma with a fifth area categorized as "other" for those items reported as critical but that do not fall within the scope of the four goal areas. Responses by teachers are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Tables 3, 4 and 5 outline the four goal areas and the characteristics for each as identified by teachers. Each question has been discussed with relevant data presented. Question 1 asked teachers to identify the most important needs of families with young children. Fifty four percent of teachers in 2000 (N=98) and 63% of teachers in 2005 (N=70) reported parent support issues as the most important need. Parent support was defined as being able to provide the most basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Parent support also included access to resources and money, parenting skills and time and attention for the children in the home. Issues such as transportation, positive role models, the educational level of parents and communication were categorized as "other" with 4% of teachers in 2000 (N=8) and 5% of teachers in 2005 (N=6) reporting such findings.

Question 2 asked teachers to describe the biggest needs seen as going unmet. 67% of teachers in 2000 (N=69) and 41% of teachers in 2005 (N=41) reported the biggest need as being parent support needs. Characteristics of parent support were defined the same as those found in Question 1 with the addition of low-cost entertainment and family activities. Health and quality learning environments were ranked the lowest by both groups of teachers. Percentages were 3% for each in 2000 (N=3) and 16% and 3% respectively in 2005 (N=11, N=2).

Question 3 asked teachers to provide information related to barriers they felt like prevent families with young children from meeting their needs. Again, parent support

ranked the highest of the goal areas with 84% reporting this in 2000 (N=92) and 76%

reporting this in 2005 (N=45). Health, quality child care and quality learning

environments were a non-issue for teachers in 2000 (N=0) as well as teachers in 2005.

The exception was found in 4% of teachers in 2005 (N=2) who felt quality child care and

before and after school programs were needed. Sixteen percent of teachers in 2000

(N=16) and 20% of teachers in 2005 (N=12) reported issues such as transportation,

resistance to intervention services, depleted community resources, work environments

and state and federal school mandates as barriers to meeting needs.

As a whole, teachers in 2000 and in 2005 predominately reported parent support

issues as the crux of challenges facing families with young children in the Stillwater

community. The frequency of responses and the correlating percentages in relation to

parental support indicate a prevalent belief among teachers over a five-year span.

Wilder Collaboration Categories and Statistics

Smart Start Oklahoma communities are required to adhere to certain contracting

guidelines upon receipt of funding. One of the guidelines is the annual completion of the

Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory to be completed by those board members serving

in a leadership role. The purpose of the Wilder Inventory is an instrument that

collaborative groups can use to assess their standing on the factors that may promote or

inhibit their success. Those six factors are identified as environment, membership,

process and structure, communication, purpose and resources. Participants were asked to

answer 40 survey questions related to each factor by ranking their responses using a 1-5

scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Data from the Stillwater Area

Success by 6® coalition were analyzed for 2003 and 2005. A comparison of the two

years of data will be utilized to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of local community collaborations in serving the needs of families with young children.

Table 6 is a compilation of the six factors along with the statistical mean (M), standard deviation (sd) and range (R) for the two survey years of 2003 and 2005. The surveys were conducted anonymously and submitted to the Stillwater coalition coordinator via fax or on-line. The survey contains factors related to the six different categories and items or statements designed specifically for each factor. The number of items or statements varies depending on the category: Environment and Membership consists of a 6-item scale; Process and Structure consists of a 13-item scale; Communication consists of a 5-item scale; Purpose consists of a 7-item scale and Resources consists of a 3-item scale. Table 6 shows the overall rankings by participants for both survey years with no significant difference in the rankings between each group. When comparing the results found in Table 6, it is interesting to note that the category environment was ranked the highest in both survey years while the category resources remained ranked as the lowest. Increases in scores were found in the categories of environment, membership, process and structure while decreases in scores were found in the categories of communication, purpose and resources.

Wilder Collaboration Factors, Statements, and Results

The Wilder Inventory results for 2003 (N=5) and 2005 (N=22) have been shown in Table 7. Each category has been separated with the factors and statements outlined clearly beneath each category. The 1-5 scale has been condensed to a 1-3 scale by combining strongly disagree and disagree as well as strongly agree and agree into two response areas. The categories in the 1-3 scale are identified as disagree, agree and

neutral. The frequency of responses is shown along with the correlating percentages for each survey year.

Meaningful differences in 2003 and 2005 were found in 8 of the 40 items. The 8 items were related to 4 of the 6 categories identified in the Wilder Inventory.   The members of the collaborative have a history of working together and problem solving together is common within the collaborative are items related to the environment category. People in the group trust each other and there is a cross-section of appropriate organizations represented on the collaborative are items related to the membership category. Organizations invest the right amount of time to the collaborative, members of the collaborative demonstrate a high level of commitment and there is a clear sense of their roles and responsibilities within the collaborative are items related to the process and structure category. The people who lead the collaborative communicate well with the members is an item related to the communication category. Respondents did not identify any items in the categories of purpose or resources.

Results

Two items were identified in the environment category and relate to prior collaboration and problem-solving abilities. In 2003 (N=3) 60% of those surveyed disagreed with the statement that agencies within the community have a history of working together. In 2005 (N=4) 18% of those surveyed disagreed with this statement which resulted in a 42% decrease over a two-year period. In 2003 (N=2) 40% of those surveyed agreed with the statement that problem solving through collaboration is a common occurrence within the community and has been done before, which in 2005 (N=13) 59% agreed. This is a 19% increase over a two-year time.

Two items were identified in the membership category and relate to trust and appropriate representation within the collaboration. In 2003 (N=4) 80% of those surveyed agreed with the statement that people involved in the collaborative always trust one another, which in 2005 (N=13) 59% agree resulting in a 21% decrease over a two-year time. However, one would need to factor in the number of members in 2005 (N=7) that chose to remain neutral on this question (31%). The statement that people in the collaborative represent a cross section of appropriate organizations indicated that respondents in 2003 (N=4) 80% disagreed with this statement which in 2005 (N=8) 9% disagreed. This is a 71% decrease over a two-year time. In 2003, the collaborative was just convening and seeking ways to marshal efforts around early childhood in the Stillwater community. This would have involved many conversations with organizations and agencies sharing research and the need for collaboration. In 2005, the Stillwater coalition is better established and known throughout the community.

Three items were identified in the process and structure category and relate to investment of time, level of commitment and a clear sense of roles and responsibilities. In 2003 (N=2) 40% of those surveyed agreed with the statement that organizations within the collaborative invest the right amount of time to the collaborative activities. Sixty eight percent agreed with this statement in 2005 (N=15) showing a 28% increase over a two-year time. The statement related to the level of high commitment among collaborative participants showed that 60% of those surveyed 2003 (N=3) agreed with this statement with 90% in 2005 (N=20) agreeing. This is a 30% increase over a two-year time. In 2003 (N=3) 60% of those surveyed agreed with the statement that people within

the collaborative group have a clear sense of their roles and responsibilities, which in 2005 (N=15) 68% agreed. This is an 8% increase over a two-year time.

One item was identified in the communication category and showed in 2003 (N=3) 60% of those surveyed agreed with the statement that people in this collaborative communicate openly with one another. Eighty six percent in 2005 (N=19) agreed with this statement resulting in a 26% increase over a two-year time.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In general this study focused on the third component of the National Education

Goals panel by seeking to demonstrate the impact community collaboratives can have at

the local level to improve outcomes for children. The subject of school readiness and the

factors related to the overall preparedness of young children upon entering school were

explored in relation to community collaboratives. Stillwater was chosen as the principal

community to research these particular issues because of progressiveness in the area of

school readiness initiatives and strong coalition building. To create a baseline for

exploratory research in the areas of preparedness of children and the impact

collaboratives can have at the local level, survey results from 2000, 2003 and 2005 were

utilized.

The same school readiness survey was used for 2000 and 2005 asking public

school teachers in the Stillwater community to share their perceptions about the readiness

of the children in their classrooms. The data were used to compare teacher perceptions

and determine if there were any significant changes in those perceptions over a period of

five years.

Stillwater Area Success by 6® has long been recognized by Smart Start

Oklahoma as a leader in coalition building and community engagement. Smart Start

Oklahoma has been searching for ways to create a foundation upon which to measure the

effectiveness of coalition building as a means to expand the Smart Start community

network across the state and garner additional support from the local and state level. In

an effort to assist in creating the baseline, this study focused on the Wilder Collaboration

Inventory and the Stillwater Inventory results from 2003 and 2005. The same survey was

used for both survey years and asked coalition members participating on the leadership

committee to share their perceptions about the Stillwater collaborative using the six

categories identified in the Wilder Collaboration Inventory. The data were used to

compare board member perceptions and determine if there were any significant changes

in those perceptions over a period of three years.

The purpose of this chapter is a discussion describing what the survey responses

tell about the preparedness of children upon school entrance and the effectiveness of local

community collaboratives in serving families with young children.

Teachers' Perceptions of Skills, Abilities, and Experiences

Two significant findings from the skills, abilities and experiences portion of the

survey related to knowledge and social skills. In 2000, teachers reported children entered

the classroom with more basic knowledge as compared to 2005. As reported in the

literature review, the National Education Goals Panel emphasizes positive early learning

experiences and the role these experiences play in the lives of children. NEGP has

attempted to move away from the traditional academic definition of school readiness by

seeking to broaden it to encompass key components to the success and healthy

development of a child including family, interactions with others and environments

including communities. One could theorize the decrease in basic knowledge upon school

entrance as reported by public school teachers in 2005 could be attributed to the shift in

school philosophy from academic skills related to colors, shapes, numbers and the

alphabet as compared to the more predominate focus on literacy in public schools five years later. This could mean that the work of the NEGP, early childhood professionals and child advocates have laid the groundwork for the beginning of a paradigm shift desperately needed to ensure that a holistic approach to child development is utilized as a much more effective way in helping children enter school ready to learn.

Teachers in 2005 reported a decrease in the number of children who could listen and pay attention in class. Such a meaningful difference leads one to ask are children in 2005 really different from children in 2000 as represented in these three decreases (listening, sitting still, and maturity) or are the expectations of schools different? If expectations of the schools have shifted and more emphasis is being placed on skill and drill and mandated standardized testing, this would be reflected in the decreased percentage of children being able to stay focused during class. Unfortunately, this is a reality in many school districts because of the increased state and federal educational mandates that dictate testing requirements and levy severe financial penalties on those who fail to meet the standard as set forth by the government. If this theory is correct, it could mean that the work of NEGP, early childhood professionals and child advocates has fallen on deaf ears and our children are in greater peril now than five years ago.

Of note was the increase in the number of children entering school with prior reading experience. In 2000, teachers reported that children had very little reading experience as compared to responses in 2005 where teachers reported children were entering school with more prior reading knowledge. There are reasons that could attribute to the increased percentage. Over the course of five years, the Stillwater community implemented full-day pre-kindergarten classes in all public schools and the

Stillwater Area Success by 6® coalition introduced the national literacy program, *Raising a Reader*, to pre-kindergarten classrooms in Stillwater Public Schools. In addition, Success by 6® helped the library increase the amount of story time available to children, introduced reading buddies in child care centers, supported the distribution of books at well baby clinics at a medical center, and assisted an organization with volunteer readers during immunizations at the Health Department. The increase in prior reading experience could perhaps be attributed to the implementation of these programs and the increased attention on the importance of pre-literacy experiences for young children.

The early years are an important time in a child's life and the significance of reading to children when they are young is also of importance so they begin to develop the pre-verbal skills that are so vital to the success of a child. The 2005 survey results show teachers reported an increase in those children who display good language and communication skills. Teachers in 2005 also reported an increase in the number of children showing curiosity and interest in learning as well as an increase in those who exhibited appropriate fine motor skills. To support the concept that quality early learning environments are essential to future success, one can look at the child care research in Oklahoma that shows the disposition for learning as demonstrated by 4-year old children predicts test scores in math, general knowledge and social skills up to two years later (Norris, McDaniel, & Dunn, 2005). One could theorize that implementation of pre-kindergarten programs in Stillwater coupled with increased public awareness about the needs of young children have served to shift the primary focus from entrance into formal education (kindergarten) and has re-shifted the focus to include the early years.

From 1996-1998, Dockett and Perry conducted pilot studies with teachers in pre-school and kindergarten settings. Results from these studies meant the authors were able to identify eight areas that affect transition to school. Those eight cited were knowledge, social adjustment, skills, disposition, rules, physical attributes or characteristics, family issues, and education environments (2003). The two surveys conducted in Stillwater encompass six of the eight areas identified by Dockett and Perry as being essential to the healthy transition of the child. Of the six areas that overlap with the Dockett and Perry study, Stillwater teachers identified social adjustment, disposition and physical attributes as the top three skills demonstrated by the children in their classrooms. Knowledge and skills were ranked in the top ten. Family issues and educational environments were not addressed in the Stillwater surveys.

Teachers' Perceptions – Most Important Needs, Unmet Needs and Barriers

The work of Smart Start Oklahoma focuses on four goal areas: parent support, health, quality child care, and school readiness/quality learning environments. All four areas are of vital importance and should be considered when seeking the overall healthy development of young children. Many local communities around the nation are collaborating in an effort to meet the needs of families with young children, but despite these efforts, many children are in jeopardy of school failure. For children to thrive, they must have opportunities to learn and explore their world while being sheltered in a nurturing and healthy family. For children to experience this, families need critical support systems to assist them in facing the challenges they are met with each day - challenges such as poverty, teen pregnancy, unemployment and homelessness. If these factors are not addressed, we will continue to see the cycle of poverty repeating itself and

passed down through generations of children yet to be born. This vicious cycle threatens the very existence of society and diminishes the capacity to build social capital.

The school readiness survey asked teachers to give information about the children in their classroom by answering three open-ended questions related to the most important needs of families, the unmet needs and the barriers to meeting the needs. Survey responses compiled from these three questions in both 2000 and 2005 lend insight to the issues teachers are observing in their classrooms.

Most Important Needs:

In the area of parental support, teachers in 2000 reported the amount of praise, time and attentiveness given on a consistent basis as being one of the most important needs for a child's healthy emotional growth. Adult interaction, family time and activities are crucial to the development process and create a sense of stability and safety for children. Research has shown that children thrive when families are able to love and support them (Rhode Island Kids Count, 2005). When children experience positive, nurturing care from a parent, they perform better academically and emotionally (National Governor's Association, 2005). Research states the quality of interaction a child receives is a catalyst through which he or she experiences life (Santa Cruz County, 1999). When these needs are not met, children can begin to feel unloved or unwanted which leads to anger, frustration and disruptiveness in school.

Both groups of teachers also reported the need for parental support systems such as parent education classes that work with parents on appropriate use of discipline, financial management, tips on being a good role model and increased awareness about the importance of quality education. Teacher responses in 2005 were consistent with the

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responses from 2000. Another important need reflected in survey responses was the area of basic needs. Teachers reported the ability to provide basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter, are lacking. Many families with young children, particularly high-risk families, are unable to provide these basic, fundamental tenets because poor families are generally involved in a daily struggle to make ends meet. This daily struggle requires an enormous amount of energy, which results in a lack of parental time and attention (Boethel, 2004; Bruner, et al. 2005; Miller, et al. 2002).

Both groups of teachers responded to the survey by saying parents are unable to meet the financial demands of the family because of insufficient wages, single-parent households, and parents with little or no formal education to improve their employment opportunities. For parents to achieve success in providing a stable foundation for their children, it is essential to improve economic opportunities and strengthen social protections for children (Santa Cruz County, 1999).

In the area of health, both groups remained consistent in their responses around the need for more information about proper nutrition and adequate health and dental care for children. According to the Oklahoma KIDS Count Factbook, data tells us that for children not covered by any type of insurance at any time during the year, "Oklahoma tied for the 46th worst state in the nation with one in seven (15.3) children uninsured" (p. 13). In addition to a poor rating in health care coverage, "Oklahoma is ranked second worst among the states monitored for two key child oral health issues – tooth decay and untreated tooth decay. 69.4% of Oklahoma third grade students in 2002-2003 had tooth decay with 40.2% of third grade students having untreated tooth decay" (Oklahoma KIDS Count Factbook, 2005, p. 20).

An increase in responses around the need for quality child care was observed for 2005 as compared to 2000. This could be attributed to the implementation of universal pre-kindergarten programs in the Stillwater community. Child care providers have reported seeing their number of children enrolled decline and ascribe this to the steady growth of pre-kindergarten programs across the state. Some child care providers are opting to close their businesses, whether it is a home or center-based facility, because of complaints that the decrease in enrollment is adversely affecting the overall cash flow of the business. While parents of 4 year olds are probably thrilled over the prospect of free pre-kindergarten classes, parents with younger children are seeing a need for more quality child care.

Teachers reported a meaningful decrease in the need for quality early learning environments in 2005. Again, one could attribute this decrease to the fact that Stillwater has universal pre-kindergarten programs in each public school.

Unmet Needs

In the area of parent support, both groups of teachers again were consistent in their responses related to family time and activities. They both reported low-cost entertainment opportunities as an unmet need in the Stillwater community. Also ranked high in the number of responses from both groups is the need for more parent support or parent education classes. Teachers in 2000 and 2005 listed counseling, financial guidance, discipline classes and child development as unmet needs in Stillwater. Also included was the lack of sufficient funds to meet the everyday financial challenges of raising a family, especially for single-parent households.

In the area of health, of meaningful difference was the unmet need in the area of mental health services. Teachers in 2005 showed an increase in responses related to health but particularly mental health. Mental health challenges are becoming more widespread among our young children. "Mental disability is the most common childhood disability in Oklahoma" (KIDS Count, 2005, p. 20). Children mentally unhealthy are unable to form healthy relationships and have difficulty learning. Such difficulties lead to children either beginning school behind their peers or falling behind at some point. The mental health of a child can be easily overlooked with cognition often being the determinant by which children are judged to be ready for school. Many kindergarten screening assessments focus on colors, shapes and knowing the alphabet. While cognitive development of the child is important, one must not forget the importance of a child's emotional health and social competence. It is essential to consider all developmental domains to ensure a holistic approach when building a solid foundation for children to grow and succeed (Bruner, et al. 2005; Halle, et al, 2000; Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; NASBE, 1991; Shonkoff, 2004). To ensure that children are ready for school, it is important to view readiness from a comprehensive approach which includes the five developmental domains as well as a loving and nurturing family, quality early learning environments and adult interaction. When these are not met, despair can set in and children exhibit these feelings of despair through uncontrollable rages, anger, violence, and aggressiveness. Many children will eventually drop out of school, unable to meet the demands of the public school system (Bruner, 2002; Halle, et al. 2000); Kagan & Rigby, 2003; Murphy & Burns, 2002; National Governor's Association, 2005).

Teachers in 2000 and 2005 listed school and business collaboration as another unmet need. Both groups report a lack of communication between the school system, the community and families. Teachers describe a need for businesses and community leaders to collaborate around economic issues such as family-friendly work environments, emergency leave, flexible spending accounts for dependent care and health insurance benefits to name a few. Spurred by growing concern regarding school readiness and the recognition that the early years are critical to a child's future success, state and local partnerships are seeking ways to provide the support systems needed by families today (Boethel, 2004; Bruner, et al. 2005; Miller, et al. 2002). A growing number of local communities are developing collaboratives to gather information needed to discuss the challenges families face and to arrive at collective decisions for resolving them (Boethel, 2004; Bruner, et al. 2005; Miller, et al. 2002).

Barriers to Meeting Unmet Needs

Overwhelming responses from 2000 and 2005 indicate the need for more parent involvement. Teachers from both survey years state there is a distinct lack of time devoted to family. Comments include parents not wanting to "parent" their children and lack of interest in spending free time doing activities with their children. Responses attribute some of this to parents working two or three jobs to meet the financial demands of the family. Others attribute it to sheer laziness and lack of motivation. Comments include lack of parenting skills due to generational issues. Many parents of children were raised in families where there was little or no adult interaction, interest, or self-involvement. Unfortunately, if parents are not equipped with the aptitude needed to raise healthy children, the cycle repeats itself over and over.

Interestingly, teachers from 2000 and 2005 do not cite health, quality child care or quality learning environments as a barrier for families. Again, perhaps the lack of responses to child care and learning environments can be attributed to universal pre-kindergarten in Stillwater. When reviewing the Stillwater end of year report for 2003, it was noted that Stillwater implemented an early learning initiative that served over 250 families in the Healthy Steps project at Warren Clinic. The 2005 needs assessment of the Stillwater community does not report health as being a barrier for families. Rather, families or parents report the need for support groups and child development classes.

Implications – Local Level:

To create systemic change in the area of early childhood, one would need to factor in the issue of economics and the effect the present economy has on families with young children. America's economic future depends on ensuring that children are provided a solid foundation early in life. A solid foundation is one that provides a comprehensive early childhood system, quality learning environments, parental support structures and local and state collaboratives. If children are provided a strong foundation, it allows them to enter school healthy and ready to learn while at the same time preparing and equipping them with the skills necessary to become the future leaders of America. To provide this solid foundation for children, it is crucial that the needs of the family – the current workforce – be taken into account as they struggle to support and provide for the family at society's minimal level.

Over the past 30 years, changing economic times and public policies have doubled the percentage of mothers in the workforce when their children are very young (Bruner, 2002). As a result of economic changes, the country's workforce has increased by "more

than five million workers" (Bruner, 2002, pp. 1 & 2). The workforce is comprised of families where both parents, or the only parent, represent the majority of families with young children. As a result, less time is spent with the young child and more time spent on the job. Unfortunately, simply providing basic needs, such as food and shelter, comes at the expense of family time while imposing financial stresses that can negatively impact the parents' mental health and in turn, adversely affect their children.

While public opinion polls show that a majority of parents would prefer to stay at home with their children, most feel that they must work to provide basic necessities. Economic hardships have resulted in mothers of young children having joined the workforce in an effort to contribute to the family finances and to boost the economy. More than five million mothers of young children are spending more time outside the home, making it difficult for them to meet their child's needs for guidance, supervision, and nurturing.

With so many parents working outside the home, strategies must be implemented that support families and promote good relationships between children and the adults who provide for and raise them. To achieve this, there must be viable choices for working families who are trying to balance responsibilities at home and on the job. Many businesses are beginning to seek ways to provide support structures for the working family. Businesses are finding that when employees have access to policies or programs aimed at supporting the family, they are more satisfied with their jobs, are loyal and willing to retain employment and do what is necessary to help the business thrive and succeed. Some businesses have found there are benefits to providing on-site, quality learning environments for young children. When parents feel that their children are safe and well cared for, it can result in increased work productivity and improves recruitment and retention outcomes for the employer.

Despite enthusiasm for family-friendly work policies, the extent of employer support is limited, and access by working parents is not at all equal. Investments in human capital must be a top priority to ensure children's early needs are met as well as the needs of working parents. When framed in economic terms, results show that quality-learning environments for children can yield high returns to the families with young children, to society and to government. To ensure a promising future in the areas of economics, society and politics, early investments in all young children must be enhanced.

As reported in the 2005 grant proposal, the Stillwater coalition has worked diligently over the last five years to develop partnerships and communication venues for the early childhood community. Committee work is being done in the areas of quality child care, literacy, public awareness, parent support and sustainability of the collaborative. Success by 6® has made a commitment to utilize their outcomes-based strategic plan to select projects that will accomplish long-range outcomes as identified in the strategic plan.

Specific barriers that impede children's ability to be ready for school are identified through the Stillwater needs assessment. The coalition then addresses these barriers with both public and private sectors, identifies the resources available to breakdown the barriers and often times offers seed money to get a needed project off the ground. Stillwater Success by 6® acts as a catalyst of change by bringing all partners to the "table" in an effort to assist families with young children.

In January of 2005, the coalition conducted a strategic planning session to re-define strategies and to pursue an additional strategy of parent support. Parent support was identified as a long-term strategy in the 2002 planning year and board members felt it was time to incorporate this strategy into the 2005 work plan. The coalition formed a Parent

Support Committee and asked committee members to review parent support and mentoring programs that have been successful around the country in reducing child abuse and neglect numbers and that have made a measurable impact to change the lives of young children.

In addition to the work of this committee, the coalition plans to utilize information obtained from the community needs assessment to determine a specific strategy for addressing the barriers currently impeding a more efficient parent support system in Stillwater. The community needs assessment was conducted in 2005 and parents were invited to participate in the focus groups conducted as a part of the process. Several topics emerged from their responses. Parents indicated they wanted more information on discipline issues, child development, support in the way of guidance and friendship with other parents facing the same challenges. Parents also asked for assistance in handling everyday situations like proper nutrition, financial management, family activities and single-parent issues. Interestingly, the parent responses correlated with the responses from teachers surveyed in 2000 and 2005.

Implications – State Level:

Stillwater Area Success by 6® has led by example in their coalition building and in their strategies for addressing the needs in the Stillwater community. The Smart Start Oklahoma network is comprised of sixteen local coalitions who are at various stages of community building. The local coalition boards mirror the state partnership in that each is made up of a diverse group of stakeholders. Each conducts strategic planning to assess the needs at the state and local level. Each board is committed to working on the four goal areas and identifying ways to engage new partners and garner more resources. Smart Start Oklahoma is a state to local, local to state partnership – we each learn from one another.

Stillwater has been very systematic in addressing the needs of families with young children. The state level would benefit from this type of focus and determination. Parent support systems have been identified as a need by the state level board and strides are being made to address these needs through the work of the Policy and Systems Committee, the strategic plan and through public awareness. The state can support the efforts of local communities like Stillwater through the implementation of the new Born Learning public awareness campaign and by affecting public policy. The state level board can act as a catalyst of change for the local communities by creating opportunities to educate legislators about the importance of the early years; fund parent awareness campaigns for the state which is the intent of Born Learning; create a statewide media presence and advocate for more dollars to support the incredible work being done at the local level.

Wilder Collaboration Inventory

Communities across the nation are becoming united in their efforts to serve the needs of families with young children. Communities are addressing these needs by forming local community collaborations that reduce governmental control by placing that control into the hands of local leaders who know their communities and the challenges their families face everyday.

Building a local collaborative requires decisive commitment and willingness on the part of the community to set aside personal agendas and agree that decisions will be made in the best interest of families and children. This entails implementing a well-developed strategic plan complete with an internal and external communication system in place to ensure the success and effectiveness of the collaborative. There must be strong

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leadership at the helm and trust among coalition members. Members must share a stake in the process as well as the outcome and be willing to compromise on tough issues.

Often times when convening a new collaborative, members are eager to seek solutions for every challenge facing families with young children within the local community. While this is a noble thought, the future success of a new collaborative requires a well developed vision that is shared by all members and concrete, attainable goals and objectives. It is important to know when it is the right time to convene a group because a favorable political and social climate will contribute greatly to garnering the obligatory interest and passion for the work of the collaborative in terms of local buy-in and monetary support. Unfortunately, many community collaboratives have failed in their quest because the resources simply did not materialize whether it was an issue of an inadequate number of staff, a lack of time on the part of members and/or staff, or insufficient funding. Idealistic views and a shared passion for helping families with young children is not enough to sustain a collaborative over time.

In an effort to avoid some of these missteps, the Wilder Foundation created a blueprint for guiding successful community collaboration. The Wilder Foundation synthesized a decade of research in the area of community coalition building and used this information to develop practical steps people can apply in their efforts at the local level. The purpose of the Wilder Collaboration Inventory is to offer a useful reference that can assist in improving collaboration.

In 2003 and 2005, Stillwater Area Success by 6® employed the Wilder Collaboration Inventory to assess the perceptions of board members regarding the collaborative. In 2001, Stillwater Area Success by 6® applied for and received a start-up

grant from United Way of America. With these funds, interested parties began the process of convening an early childhood collaborative in Stillwater. In an effort to assess board expectations, perceptions and feelings, leadership utilized the Wilder Collaboration Inventory. In 2003, the survey was administered to five coalition members who completed the 40-question assessment anonymously. In 2005, the Stillwater coalition chose to repeat the process and administered the survey to 22 board members. Results of the 2003 and 2005 surveys are shown in Table 7.

Wilder Categories and Related Factors:

The Wilder Collaboration Inventory consists of six over-arching categories: Environment, Membership, Process and Structure, Communication, Purpose and Resources. Underneath each category, factors related to the category have been developed along with statements or questions pertaining to each. Participants respond to the statements by using a 1-5 scale. The Inventory is typically completed anonymously through the use of an on-line survey delivery service.

Data from the two surveys has been analyzed and comparisons have been made between the two. Of the six categories identified by the Wilder Foundation, Stillwater data revealed meaningful differences in four of the categories. These categories are environment, membership, process and structure and communication.

Environment, Membership, Process & Structure and Communication:

In 2003, members surveyed indicated there was not a sense of collaboration between agencies within the community and that most if not all were working in their own individual silos on issues each felt was of importance. The 2003 survey also showed that members were not accustomed to working together to solve problems within the

community. In 2005, survey results show a difference in responses and most of the members agreed that a history of collaboration was prevalent as was the task of problem solving. Rather than working parallel to one another, responses lead one to believe that concerns or topics of interest are now brought to the table and strategies discussed together on issues affecting families with young children.

In 2003, the Stillwater coalition was still relatively new and consisted of 16 members from the public and private sectors. In 2005, membership from the initial leadership committee evolved and expanded as the coalition began to grow. In 2005, the Stillwater coalition reported a twenty-one member Board of Directors with nine members from the original leadership coalition formed in 2001. Stillwater has proven very effective in bringing all relevant parties to the table. There is representation from industry, small business, public health and education, child care, volunteers, higher education, civic groups, non-profit agencies, faith-based organizations, city and state government, parents and human services.

The increase in the number of members responding favorably to questions of working and problem solving together could be attributed to the fact that the collaborative has matured over the two years since the first survey was conducted and members now have a better understanding of what collaboration means and entities are uniting more as one in their efforts.

This could also account for the increase in the number of responses related to trust and inclusiveness. Successful community building requires that members learn to trust one another and trust the actions of each are in the best interests of the coalition and ultimately families with young children. Trust takes time to build and cannot be achieved

overnight. In 2005, Stillwater reported retaining nine board members from the original board. Those members were given the luxury of working and learning from one another over a four-year time span. That means those nine members were together when the initial coalition efforts were underway. The initial convening of a coalition can be very stressful and can test the commitment of each at one time or another. Collaborative efforts can often feel like a never-ending process and can lead to burn out of board members or a feeling of hopelessness due to the enormous amount of work (Dombro, et al. 1996; Hepburn, 2004). To have a successful collaborative, it is essential to create a common vision and a common language among the different groups. Local buy-in and inclusion of all key stakeholders at the table is critical to the growth of the collaborative (Dombro, et al. 1997; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich, et al. 2001; Miller, et al. 2002).

Research states that during the convening phase, the collaborative must ensure a cross section of members that represent each segment of the community who will ultimately be affected by the collaborative activities (Mattessich, et al. 2001). No agency or organization is solely responsible for promoting early childhood development and school readiness. Multi-sector leadership is necessary to create a common vision and bridge funding streams and program responsibilities (Dombro, et al. 1996; Hepburn, 2004; Mattessich, et al. 2001; Miller, et al. 2002). Having nine of the twenty-one members familiar and trusting of one another allowed the other twelve members to see trust and cohesiveness in action. The growth of the board and the diverse representation on the board would also account for members answering favorably when asked about an appropriate cross-section of those who have a stake in the vision and goals of the collaborative.

Community building requires an enormous amount of time and energy. Often a coalition will see members excuse themselves because of this or will notice that attendance at coalition meetings begins to decline. Since 2001, the Stillwater coalition has seen a tremendous growth on the leadership committee and a high level of commitment from many of the board members. Records show that members consistently attend meetings and participate in strategic planning and development of initiatives. The growth and commitment of this level is a predictor that Stillwater has built a strong coalition foundation to sustain efforts well into the future.

While working diligently to serve the families in Stillwater, the leadership committee also devoted time to draft and implement by-laws with which to govern the burgeoning coalition. In addition to the leadership committee, Stillwater established standing committees overseen by committee chairs. The standing committees are based on strategy outcomes as defined by the coalition. This keeps the work fresh and the committee members committed to the task at hand with roles and responsibilities for each clearly defined. When members are given specific tasks and asked to produce, the outcome is much more constructive than when members are left wondering what part they play and what are the expectations (Bruner, et al. 2004; Dombro, et al. 1996; Miller, et al. 2002; National League of Cities, n.d.; Ochshorn, 2000).

Stillwater has matured to the point that in addition to strategic planning and evaluation of local initiatives, the coalition also takes the time to evaluate the thoughts of board members in relation to the work that has been done for the previous year. Recipients of services are surveyed, as are those who delivered or administered the chosen initiatives. Records are kept to track the number of participants in each of the

coalition projects as well as those who are impacted by the projects. This data along with an annual Wilder Collaboration Survey are used to guide the outcomes-based strategic planning sessions that occur each January. Coalition development, collaboration indicators, and coalition effectiveness are examined to determine if improvements need to be made.

This type of open communication fosters trust among members, which allows for open dialogue about the wants and needs of the coalition. Members feel free to communicate with one another in a frank manner because a sense of security is present which permits these types of discussion. It also is very helpful in assisting members as they learn their roles and responsibilities while serving on the board.

Implications- Local Level:

To build and sustain a comprehensive, early childhood system, there must be support from the public and private sectors. These entities bring with them expertise unique to their business or agency and a wealth knowledge to share with others. Strong community coalitions learn to work with one another rather than against one another. They find ways to augment existing programs and services and continually seek ways to share information and garner public will while also seeking the best way to serve families with young children.

Successful community building is evident when steps are put into place to address communication, accountability, measurable outcomes, and effective leadership. Stillwater has achieved many of these goals by implementing strong policies, cultivating necessary leadership and membership for the coalition and by creating a systematic way of addressing the needs within the community.

Implications – State Level:

The majority of Smart Start Oklahoma network of communities have been in existence for 2-3 years longer than the state level board. Many times the state board finds itself playing "catch-up" with the communities. That is why the early childhood initiative is truly one of constant flow both up and down because we all learn from one another. The state board has implemented many of the procedures found in the Stillwater coalition. Strong leadership is represented on the state board. There is a level of commitment that grows with each passing day and a true desire to see young children have the resources they need to succeed.

Strategic planning has taken place and many of the state initiatives are shifting to an outcomes based agenda. Steps are in place to begin to measure the state initiatives implemented and much needed evaluation of the effectiveness of those initiatives is beginning to take shape.

The state board can take the lessons learned in Stillwater and share those with new communities that become a part of Smart Start Oklahoma. It is an opportunity to learn from one another, avoid potential pitfalls, share best practices and become more united in our efforts to serve the families of Oklahoma.

Implications of the Research:

There are implications suggested by the results of this study. The teacher survey and open-ended questions appear to be an effective means of determining the preparedness of children as they enter school. The need for an infrastructure to provide parents with the support has been made evident by the number of teacher responses related to parent resources. Of those teachers surveyed, the majority indicated that

children are lacking basic needs, time with parents and activities to participate in jointly

to enhance the level of nurturing and attentiveness children so desperately need.

Teachers also suggested that parents require access to more resources in the Stillwater

area and improved work environments and increases in wages. It will take the partnering

of schools, service providers and businesses to see these suggestions come to fruition for

the families with young children in the Stillwater community.

The model set forth by Stillwater is a first-rate model to replicate across the state

in the other Smart Start Oklahoma communities. Stillwater has proven the effectiveness

and the usefulness of conducting a school readiness assessment, which would be

beneficial for each community. A suggestion would be to conduct an assessment every

two years at a minimum. This leads to a barrier and that is the cost of an assessment.

Stillwater is fortunate in that Oklahoma State University is located in the community and

OSU officials reside on the local coalition board. This is not true for other communities

and would be more difficult to attain. However, it would be in the best interests of the

state board to seek private dollars to fund 16 assessments bi-annually or lobby for

increased dollars from the state legislature. It is imperative that Smart Start Oklahoma

find ways to measure progress, determine the needs of families with young children and

learn from other professionals and partners the best way to move the entire state forward

in this endeavor.

Closely tied to the school readiness of children is the belief that to truly make a

difference in the life of a child, agencies, service providers, schools, businesses and

parents must be unified. Community collaboration is one way to create such unity and

communities like Stillwater are beginning to use this concept as a means for creating systemic change at the local level.

There is currently very little investment in family support programs or early childhood. Positive outcomes for families and their children as well as communities are interconnected. To circumvent poor outcomes for families with young children, states and local collaboratives should take the lead in developing and funding a comprehensive early childhood system by building partnerships with existing programs and services. To strengthen and support families with young children and promote school readiness, communities and local collaboratives can encourage stronger connections among families, service providers, and local schools within the comprehensive system. Communities have a stake in the positive development of young children and an obligation to support families. School readiness is not solely the responsibility of parents but a responsibility of communities as well. Research states that readiness is shaped and defined by people and environments in a child's life and communities have an obligation to offer support to families with young children by taking an active role in the healthy development of the child (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; NASBE, 1991; National Governor's Association, 2005). The positive development of a child begins with those closest to the child and moves outward to include early learning environments, neighborhoods, and schools (Halle, et al. 2000).

Data from the Wilder Collaboration Inventory can be useful to community building but must be utilized in a systematic way. To require communities to conduct the survey annually but not act upon the results is a disservice to those who took the time to complete the survey. Upon analyzing the Stillwater data, it became evident that there

were differences between the two survey years. The results gave insight into the progress the coalition has made over a two-year period and where efforts to improve should be focused.

Often the work of the coalition is draining and very slow and methodical. Members can become frustrated and feel as if accomplishments are not being made quickly enough or at all. The Wilder Collaboration Inventory is a simple way to assess the feelings of board members and share those results at an annual retreat or strategic planning session. This keeps the coalition fresh rather than becoming stagnate and ineffective.   In addition to communities utilizing the Inventory, a suggestion would be to have the state board also complete the survey on an annual basis. This could be very helpful in shedding insight as to the member attitudes and feelings.

Suggestions for Future Research:

This study raised important questions regarding the readiness of children and the important role community collaboratives play in the overall healthy development of young children. If we are to see significant changes in early learning and stability and economic security for families with young children, we must continue to seek ways to generate new and innovative strategies to best meet the needs of our most vulnerable. We must understand that poverty is not someone else's problem but a problem to society as a whole.

School unreadiness is very costly to the children who start behind as well as society as a whole. When essential needs are not met in the early years, children are prone to a wide array of future problems that result in lifelong consequences to children and a heavy price to society. Society incurs a debt related to health care costs to address

chronic conditions throughout life; special education and grade retention costs in elementary years; and juvenile delinquency and remediation costs in middle and high school years. Early interventions for high-risk children yield higher economic returns than later interventions by raising the quality of the work force, reducing dependency on state aid, reducing crime and teenage pregnancies and increasing school productivity.

We must continue to study research and search for best practices to implement at the local level while also continuing to grow more child advocates and garner the resources desperately needed to truly make a difference. "School readiness" continues to be a broad and difficult concept to define, as is the concept of building community collaboratives to serve families with young children. However, both are worthy of our attention and tireless efforts as a means to improve the lives of our children.

Smart Start Oklahoma must continue to move forward while also taking the time to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative. More time should be spent appraising the value of a statewide assessment on school readiness. Many are conducting assessments but are we going about it systematically and in a comprehensive way? Another area to explore for the future is the creation of a universal screening tool to be used upon entrance to kindergarten. The Department of Education does not mandate such a tool so districts are allowed to use any instrument of their choice. It is difficult to determine the level of readiness in our children if each school district and community is using a different method for measurement. Some states have opted for a universal screening instrument and it might behoove Oklahoma to research this issue to determine the pros and cons to such a system.

Smart Start Oklahoma must continue to make efforts to keep abreast of the latest research in community building. The initiative should look to other states and learn from their efforts particularly in the area of board evaluation. What are other states using to evaluate the effectiveness of their board? Are they using anything at all? Is the Wilder Collaboration Inventory a useful tool or are there more efficient ways of conducting board evaluation? Until we determine otherwise, the Wilder Collaboration Inventory is an effective tool for our communities but must be tightened so that all communities across the state are gathering data in the same way. The state level, to advance community efforts, must also utilize the results in a productive way otherwise it is an exercise in futility for everyone involved.

APPENDIX A

Stillwater Area Success By 6® Student Readiness Questionnaire

Children's Skills, Abilities, & Experiences

Please answer the following questions by circling the corresponding Yes or No.

1. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom listen and pay attention?
   Yes   /   No

2. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom have good language and communication skills?
   Yes   /   No

3. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom show positive prior reading experiences?
   (i.e., has been read to, likes books)
   Yes   /   No

4. Are the majority of the children entering your classroom toilet trained?
   Yes   /   No

5. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom follow directions and instructions?
   Yes   /   No

6. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom have good social skills? (i.e., shares, takes turns)
   Yes   /   No

7. Can the majority of the children entering your classroom sit still?
   Yes   /   No

8. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom possess basic knowledge?
   (i.e., knows colors, address, phone number)
   Yes   /   No

9. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom separate easily from their parents or caregivers?
   Yes   /   No

10. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom exhibit fine motor skills?
    (i.e., cutting, writing)
    Yes   /   No

Children's Skills, Abilities, & Experiences

(Continued)

11. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom show curiosity and an interest in learning?
    Yes   /   No

12. Can the majority of the children entering your classroom care for, or assist in caring for, themselves?
    (i.e., dress self, take care of own belongings)
    Yes   /   No

13. Are the majority of the children entering your classroom physically healthy?
    Yes   /   No

14. Are the majority of the children entering your classroom developmentally mature?
    Yes   /   No

15. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom show signs of previous experiences with other children?
    Yes   /   No

APPENDIX A
Children & Communities

Question 1: What do you see as the three <u>most</u> important needs of children 0-6 years of age and their families in this community?

    1. _____

    2. _____

    3. _____

Question 2: As a teacher, what are the three biggest needs that you see going <u>unmet</u> by this community?

    1. _____

    2. _____

    3. _____

Question 3: What do you identify as the top three barriers that prevent children and their families from meeting the needs mentioned above?

    1. _____

    2. _____

    3. _____

APPENDIX B

DESCRIPTION OF FACTORS

Factor 1. Environment: *Environmental characteristics* **consist of the geographic location and social context within which a collaborative group exists. The group may be able to influence or affect these elements in some way, but it does not have control over them.**
History of collaboration or collaboration in the community
- History of collaboration or cooperation exists in the community and offers the potential collaborative partners an understanding of the roles and expectations required in the collaboration and enables them to trust the process.

Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community
- The collaborative group (and, by implication, the agencies in the group) is perceived within the community as reliable and competent – at least related to the goals and activities it intends to accomplish.

Favorable political and social climate
- Political leaders, opinion-makers, persons who control resources, and the general public support (or at least do not oppose) the mission of the collaborative group.

Factor 2. Membership Characteristics: *Membership characteristics* **consist of skills, attitudes, and opinions of the individuals in a collaborative group, as well as the culture and capacity of the organizations that form collaborative groups.**
Mutual respect, understanding, and trust
- Members of the collaborative group share an understanding and respect for each other and their respective organizations: how they operate, their cultural norms and values, their limitations, and their expectations.

Appropriate cross section of members
- To the extent that they are needed, the collaborative group includes representatives from each segment of the community who will be affected by its activities.

Members see collaboration as in their self-interest
- Collaborating partners believe that they will benefit from their involvement in the collaboration and that the advantages of membership will offset costs such as loss of autonomy and turf.

Ability to compromise
- Collaborating partners are able to compromise, since the many decisions within a collaborative effort cannot possibly fit the preferences of every member perfectly

Factor 3. Process and Structure: *Process and structure* **refers to the management, decision-making, and operational systems of the collaborative effort.**
Members share a stake in both process and outcome
- Members of a collaborative group feel "ownership" of both the way the group works and the results or products of its work.

Multiple layers of participation
- Every level (upper management, middle management, operations) within each partner organization has at least some representation and ongoing involvement in the collaborative initiative.

Flexibility
- The collaborative group remains open to varied ways of organizing itself and accomplishing its work.

Development of clear roles and policy guidelines
- The collaborating partners clearly understand their roles, rights, and responsibilities, and they understand how to carry out those responsibilities.

Adaptability
- The collaborative group has the ability to sustain itself in the midst of major changes, even if it needs to change some major goals, members, etc., in order to deal with changing conditions.

Appropriate pace of development
- The structure, resources, and activities of the collaborative group change over time to meet the needs of the group without overwhelming its capacity, at each point throughout the initiative.

Factor 4. Communication: *Communication* **refers to the channels used by collaborative partners to send and receive information, keep one another informed, and convey opinions to influence the group's actions.**
Open and frequent communication
- Collaborative group members interact often, update one another, discuss issues openly, and convey all necessary information to one another and to people outside the group

Established informal relationships and communication links
- In addition to formal channels of communication, members establish personal connections – producing a better, more informed, and cohesive group working on a common project.

Factor 5. Purpose: *Purpose* **refers to the reasons for the development of a collaborative effort, the result or vision the collaborative groups seeks, and the specific tasks or projects the collaborative group defines as necessary to accomplish. It is driven by a need, crisis, or opportunity.**
Concrete, attainable goals and objectives
- Goals and objectives of the collaborative group are clear to all partners, and can realistically be attained.

Shared vision
- Collaborating partners have the same vision, with clearly agreed-upon mission, objectives, and strategy. The shared vision may exist at the outset of collaboration, or the partners may develop a vision as they work together.

Unique purpose
- The mission and goals, or approach, of the collaborative group differ, at least in part, from the mission and goals, or approach, of the member organization.

Factor 6. Resources: *Resources* **include financial and human "input" necessary to develop and sustain a collaborative group.**
Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time
- The collaborative group has an adequate, consistent financial base, along with the staff and materials needed to support its operations. It allows sufficient time to achieve its goals and includes time to nurture the collaboration.

Skilled leadership
- The individual who provides leadership for the collaborative group has organizing and interpersonal skills, and carries out the role with fairness. Because of these characteristics (and others) the leader is granted respect or "legitimacy" by the collaborative partners.

Table 1. Kindergarten and First Grade Teacher Demographics

	2000 N=29	2005 N=30
Age (mean)	41 years	39 years
Marital Status		
Married/ Living with a Partner	96%	71%
Divorced/Widowed	4%	7%
Single	0	22%
Racial/Ethnic Background		
African American		1%
Asian		1%
Native American	7%	7%
Caucasian	89%	88%
Other	4%	1%
Years Teaching (Mean)	13.5 years	12 years
Years Living in the Community (Mean)	15.5 years	19 years
Years Teaching in the Community (Mean)	10 years	10 years

Table 2. Teachers Reporting that a Majority of Children had School Readiness Skills, Abilities, and Experiences

	2000 (N=29)	2005 (N=30)
Toilet trained	100%	100%
Be physically healthy	100%	100%
Easily separate from parents	97%	100%
Show curiosity and interest in learning	93%	97%
Had experience with other children	93%	90%
Able to show good self-care skills	90%	100%
Exhibit fine motor skills	83%	87%
Possess basic knowledge	83%	59%
Prior Reading Experience	79%	90%
Language and communication skills	79%	90%
Listen and Pay Attention	76%	60%
Be developmentally mature	74%	63%
Have good social skills	72%	77%
Follow directions and instructions	68%	69%
Sit still	62%	47%

Table 3. Most Important Needs for Children Birth to Six and Their Families

Teachers' Responses	2000 (N=182)		2005 (N=112)	
	N	%	N	%
Parent Support	98	54%	70	63%
Basic Needs				
Resources and Money				
Parental Time and Attention				
Parenting Skills				
Discipline Skills				
Health	22	12%	22	20%
Nutrition				
Health and Dental Care				
Early Intervention Services				
Mental Health Services				
Quality Child Care	20	11%	6	5%
Before and After School Child Care				
Free Child Care				
Quality Child Care Services				
Quality Learning Environments	34	19%	8	7%
Literacy				
Educational/Learning Opportunities				
Readiness Skills				
Readiness Assessment				
Other	8	4%	6	5%
Transportation				
Positive Role Models				
Communication-Parents/School				
Educational Level of Parents				
Educational Opportunities for Teachers and Parents				

Table 4. Unmet Needs for Children Birth to Six and Their Families

Teachers' Responses	2000 (N=103)		2005 (N=68)	
	N	%	N	%
Parent Support	69	67%	41	60%
Basic Needs				
Resources and Money				
Parental Time and Attention				
Parenting Skills				
Discipline Skills				
Entertainment/Family Activities				
Health	3	3%	11	16%
Nutrition				
Health and Dental Care				
Early Intervention Services				
Mental Health Services				
Quality Child Care	10	10%	2	3%
Before and After School Child Care				
Free Child Care				
Quality Child Care Services				
Quality Learning Environments	3	3%	2	3%
Literacy				
Educational/Learning Opportunities				
Readiness Skills				
Readiness Assessment				
Other	18	17%	12	18%
Transportation				
Positive Role Models				
Communication-Parents/School				
School Discipline				
Teacher Support				
Educational Level of Parents				
Educational Opportunities for Teachers and Parents				

Table 5. Barriers to Meeting the needs for Children Birth to Six and Their Families

Teachers' Responses	2000 (N=109)		2005 (N=59)	
	N	%	N	%
Parent Support	92	84%	45	76%
Basic Needs				
Resources and Money				
Parental Time and Attention				
Parenting Skills				
Discipline Skills				
Entertainment/Family Activities				
Health	0	0%	0	0%
Nutrition				
Health and Dental Care				
Early Intervention Services				
Mental Health Services				
Quality Child Care	0	0%	2	4%
Before and After School Child Care				
Free Child Care				
Quality Child Care Services				
Quality Learning Environments	0	0%	0	0%
Literacy				
Educational/Learning Opportunities				
Readiness Skills				
Readiness Assessment				
Other	16	16%	12	20%
Transportation				
Positive Role Models				
Resistance to Intervention Services				
Depleted Community Resources				
Family Friendly Work Environment				
State and Federal Mandates for Schools				

Table 6. Wilder Collaboration Factors 2003 and 2005

Factor	2003 (N=5)		2005 (N=22)	
	Mean (SD)	Range*	Mean (SD)	Range*
Environment	3.77 (.30)	3.50-4.17	3.87 (.37)	3.17-4.67
Membership	3.80 (.36)	3.33-4.17	3.86 (.32)	3.00-4.67
Process and Structure	3.80 (.31)	3.46-4.15	3.90 (.40)	2.92-4.54
Communication	4.20 (.37)	3.80-4.80	3.99 (.63)	2.60-5.00
Purpose	4.66 (.24)	4.29-4.86	4.27 (.52)	3.14-5.00
Resources	3.67 (.75)	2.67-4.67	3.27 (.44)	2.33-4.00

*Range = 1-5

Table 7. Wilder Collaboration Factors 2003 and 2005

Category, Factor and Statement	2003 Disagree		2003 Agree		2003 Neutral		2005 Disagree		2005 Agree		2005 Neutral	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Category 1. Environment												
History of the collaboration:												
1. History of working together.	3	60%	2	40%			4	18%	15	68%	3	13%
2. Problem-solving together is common.	1	20%	2	40%	2	40%	6	27%	13	59%	3	13%
Seen as a legitimate leader:												
3. Leaders not a part of the group seem hopeful of future accomplishments.			3	60%	2	40%	1	4.5%	13	59%	8	36%
4. Community residents agree organizations at the table are the "right" organizations.			5	100%					20	90%	2	9%
Favorable political & social climate:												
5. Political & social climate seems to be right for starting a community collaborative.			5	100%			1	4%	19	86%	2	9%
6. Time is right for this collaborative project.			5	100%					22	100%		
Category 2. Membership												
Mutual respect, understanding, trust:												
7. People in group trust one another.	1	20%	4	80%			2	9%	13	59%	7	32%
8. I have respect for the others in the group.			5	100%					20	90%	2	9%
Appropriate cross-section in group:												
9. People in group represent a cross-section.			5	100%			1	4%	18	81%	3	13%
10. Organizations who need to are members.	4	80%			1	20%	8	36%	8	36%	6	27%
Members see their self-interest:												
11. My organization benefits from involvement.			4	80%	1	20%			17	77%	5	22%
Ability to compromise:												
12. Compromise on important aspects.			3	60%	2	40%			19	86%	3	14%
Category 3. Process & Structure												
Members share a stake in process and outcome:												
13. Organizations invest right amount of time.	1	20%	2	40%	2	40%			15	68%	7	31%
14. Members want to see the group succeed.			5	100%			1	4%	20	90%	1	4%
15. Level of commitment is high by members.	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%	1	4%	20	90%	1	4%
Multiple layers of participation:												
16. When decisions are made, members have time to confer with respective organizations.			4	80%	1	20%	2	9%	17	77%	3	13%
17. Member represents entire organization-not "part".	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%	3	13%	12	54%	7	31%

Factors and Statements	'03 Disagree		'03 Agree		'03 Neutral		'05 Disagree		'05 Agree		'05 Neutral	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Flexibility:												
18. Members are open to discussing options.			4	80%	1	20%	2	9%	19	86%	1	4%
19. Members open to different approaches.			5	100%			1	4%	21	95%		
Willing to consider different ways.												
Development of clear roles and												
guidelines:												
20. Members have a clear sense of their	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%	2	9%	15	68%	5	22%
roles and responsibilities.												
21. Clear process for making decisions.			5	100%			2	9.1%	17	77%	3	13%
Adaptability:												
22. Able to adapt to changing conditions -			4	80%	1	20%			18	81%	4	18.2%
fewer funds, political climate, leadership.												
23. Ability to survive even with major			4	80%	1	20%			19	86%	3	13%
changes in collaborative.												
Appropriate place of development:												
24. Tries to take on work at the right time.			5	100%			1	4%	18	81%	3	13%
25. Currently able to keep up with the work			4	80%	1	20%	2	9%	14	63%	6	27%
of the collaborative.												
Category 4. Communication												
Open & frequent communication:												
26. Members communicate openly.			4	80%	1	20%			19	86%	3	13%
27. I am informed as often as I should be			4	80%	1	20%			17	77%	5	22%
regarding actions of the collaborative.												
28. Lead staff communicate well with all			3	60%	2	40%	1	4%	19	86%	2	9%
members of collaborative.												
Established informal relationships												
and communication links:												
29. Communication with group happens at			4	80%	1	20%			18	81%	4	18%
formal meetings & in informal ways.												
30. I personally have informal conversations			3	60%	2	40%	4	18%	16	72%	2	9%
with others involved in collaborative.												
Category 5. Purpose												
Concrete, attainable goals and												
objectives:												
31. I have a clear understanding of what			5	100%			1	4%	19	86%	2	9%
we are trying to accomplish.												
32. Members know & understand our goals.			4	80%	1	20%			18	81%	4	18%
33. Members have reasonable goals/ collaborative			5	100%					21	95%	1	4%

Factors and Statements	'03 Disagree		'03 Agree		'03 Neutral		'05 Disagree		'05 Agree		'05 Neutral	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Shared vision:												
34. Members are dedicated to making the collaborative work.			5	100%					22	100%		
35. My ideas about what we want to accomplish are the same as others.	1	20%	4	80%					19	86%	3	13%
Unique purpose:												
36. Our goals would be difficult for a single organization to accomplish by itself.			5	100%			1	4%	21	95%		
37. No other organization in the community is trying to do exactly what we are.			5	100%					20	90%	2	9%
Category 6. Resources												
Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time:												
38. Group has adequate funds to do what it wants to accomplish.	2	40%	1	20%	2	40%	13	59%	6	27%	3	13%
39. Our group has adequate "people power" to do what it wants to accomplish.	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%	8	36%	11	50%	3	13%
Skilled leadership:												
40. Members in leadership positions for collaborative have good skills for working with others.			5	100%			1	4%	18	81%	3	13%

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VITA

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Thesis: BUILDING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES TO SERVE FAMILIES
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Title of Study: BUILDING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES TO SERVE
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Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to focus on data collected from Stillwater Area Success By 6® in the year 2000, 2003 and 2005. Data were gathered from a multiplicity of sources in the Stillwater community and were employed as a means of determining the impact the collaborative has had on child outcomes in Stillwater. Two sources of information were utilized for this exploratory examination. School readiness surveys of area teachers and a rating of the quality of the collaborative completed by Stillwater Area Success By 6® board members. Results were analyzed and compared to determine the usefulness of the survey instrument in assessing the readiness of children from the perspective of a teacher and to determine if there had been change in teacher perceptions over time. Data were also compared to determine the effectiveness of local community collaboratives in serving the needs of families.

Findings and Conclusions: Analysis of the 2000 and 2005 school readiness surveys showed a majority of teachers' reporting differences in the skills, abilities and experiences demonstrated by children entering school in 2005 as compared to 2000. According to the majority of teachers' surveyed, children in 2005 are exhibiting a decrease in basic knowledge skills but an increase in prior reading experience, curiosity and interest in learning. Analysis of open-ended questions asking for teacher perceptions in relation to the most important needs, unmet needs and barriers to meeting the unmet needs for families with young children yielded the same results in 2000 and 2005. According to the majority of teachers' surveyed, the three open-ended questions primarily relate to a lack of adequate parent support structures for families. Analysis of the 2003 and 2005 community collaborative surveys showed a majority of board members reporting differences in the categories of environment, membership, purpose and structure and communication. According to the majority of board members surveyed in 2005, the collaborative has made improvements in these four areas, which could be attributed to maturity and growth. The overall design and support features of the two sources of information were validated with suggestions for improvement.

ADVISOR'S APPROVAL_____