

MRS Conference Call Notes
January 28, 2009

Counties Participating: Bladen, Clay, Currituck, Duplin, Harnett, Lee, Macon, New Hanover, Randolph, Transylvania, Vance, Yadkin.

Introductions

News from Raleigh

Presentation from Catawba Co on Improving Educational Stability & School Continuity

News from Raleigh

- The National Resource Center is working on updating our risk assessment tool. We received the first report back on the validation. Basically, sometimes the risk assessments are used correctly and sometimes not.
 - They NRC developed a tool which they are recommending for use in NC.
 - Looked at the risk factors they saw in our files and then at the outcomes, to determine which risk factors really increase the risk for placement or repeat maltreatment. The tool essentially functions the same as it does not, but some of the factors on it have been changed.
 - Hopefully we can implement the new structured decision making tool by mid 2010.
 - Supervisory work group is the advisory group to the Children's Research Center.
- Some upcoming workgroup opportunities:
 - Developing structured documentation tools for in home and foster care/adoption tools. This is similar to what we did for 210.
 - Let either Patrick or Holly know if you are interested. Patrick will be heading up the workgroup.
 - Patrick shared that there were requests from the Director's Association to have as many workers on this group as possible since they will be the ones using this documentation.
 - Don't know precisely when it will start, probably within the next month or two, but this is not set in stone.
- DCD letter went out on the 15th regarding a better way to communicate information about policy and automation issues. Will continue to send out hard copies of DCD letters but will also be offering a list-serve (CW listserve). Meant for line workers and supervisors. We will be sending information (especially regarding automation) this way since the Performance Management Section typically sends out information via terminal messages and Administrative Letters (which are not mailed in hard copy to the county.)

Presentation from Catawba Co on Improving Educational Stability & School Continuity

- Sarah Shumate, Social Work Supervisor - Catawba DSS
sarahs@catawbacountync.gov
- Ann Stalnaker, Director of Curriculum & Instruction - Hickory Public Schools
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- Dr. Paul Holden, Director of Student Services Catawba County Schools
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Shared the work they have been doing through a Casey Family Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Improving Educational Stability and School Continuity. (This information was included on a powerpoint which can be requested from the presenters or Holly.)

Slide #1

- Education can overcome many of the disadvantages youth in out of home placement face.
- Placement changes often result in school changes, frequent school changes can have a negative effect on their educational experience.
- Thinking about a child's education should be a part of the permanency planning.

Slide #2

- About 6 yrs ago, Catawba County got involved with Casey Family programs in several different projects, and then applied for a grant on supporting educational needs of children while they are in out of home care.
- Catawba county is one of nine teams ranging from urban to rural areas, many teams have similar issues no matter the size of the area. It is somewhat of a comfort to know that all areas face similar challenges despite differences in sizes.

Slide #3

- What is a breakthrough series collaborative? A methodology that was adapted to child welfare. Previous collaboratives have focused on child safety, kinship care, disproportionality, etc.
- Buncombe & Catawba currently participating on a series on risk. Guilford and Wake have also participated in previous collaboratives.
- Breakthrough series collaboratives are a different way to establish collaboration with in the organization.
- Mandatory requirements are: senior level administration support, a parent and a youth (consumer).
- The structure empowers line staff, consumers, and community partners, who all have the ability to make changes.
- Historically in health care, education and social services we have planned a lot, but not always actually made changes.
- What is really unique about breakthrough collaboratives is their methodology – anyone can have an idea.

Slide #4

- Methodology allows for a common language. Make a plan and implement it quickly after developing it. Example: Foster Parents not getting info they needed from birth parents so created a situation where Foster and Birth Parents were face to face within 72 hours of placement and took out the social worker having to relay the information. Tested the idea with the next family that came in, then came back and talked about issues that came out of the test such as; did the Birth Parents have transportation to the meeting? Discuss how it worked, make any changes, test again, and repeat this cycle until you have a process that is working.

Slide #5

- Focus of Breakthrough Series Collaboratives – group of experts from education and childwelfare developed a plan with 8 focus areas. This was a vast array of areas and although they may not have gotten to all of them but this was the guiding focus.
 - Develop measurable systems of agency/interagency accountability.
 - Establish school stability and seamless school transition procedures.
 - Implement best practices to maintain school continuity and manage transitions.
 - Empower youth, family, and community actions.
 - Increase stakeholder investment through training and education.
 - Improve court's knowledge, engagement, and oversight.
 - Ensure equal access.

Slide #6

- Catawba county is home to three separate school systems which presents a bigger challenge internally as children move within the county.
- The school system and DSS had a good working relationship before they started this project, so that was not a problem, but when you do this, you have to not only have a positive relationship, you must create an intensity of the relationship. Feel that was the most important thing.
 - Established and trained school personnel as foster care designees at each school.
 - Must have a focus when a DSS social worker walks into a school – this way the social worker has a designated person to talk to when they come in.
 - Shared data between foster care and the school systems to identify common children.
 - DSS liaison sends a list of kids in care which goes to each school so each school know for sure who in their school is in care. It is that extra bit of attention given in a positive way, that helps to resolve problems before they arise.
 - Negotiated transportation enabling students to remain in their school or origin

- Foster parent may live just far enough away that there is no regular bus service. Minimize school changes by providing alternative transportation.
- Captured information regarding student achievement in court reports.
 - The education records may provide information useful to a judge and schools have encouraged DSS to get that information into their reports (such as how often a child has had to change schools)
- Involved birth parents and youth in analyzing system needs.
 - Really have to make focus effort to have a youth truly involved – they are critical and also put a face on the whole purpose of the work. Also need to take the birth parent’s input into account

Question: How did they recruit a birth parent?

Parent and youth involvement was a requirement from Casey, talked to LINKS coordinator about who might be good as a youth (she was a really good student and her issue was when she transferred to a new school often was that she was actually ahead of the new school. This was something new to think about because generally we think about students transferring being behind. Also she was never able to do extra-curricular activities.)

Need a birth parent who has been in the system and can give feedback, but sometimes they need some space after their involvement, have to be able to put their anger or resentment aside.

It is a challenge to get everyone involved and also meet at times that everyone can come.

Question: Did they have to do anything in particular to ensure that people were on the same page regarding ensuring that everyone’s voice was heard and issues weren’t taken personally by anyone?

Not specifically. Its all part of the methodology and may have to make more of an effort with some issues than others, but just think about the relationship and use it for improvement.

Slide #7

- What they learned:
 - Communication – school principle meetings at DSS, training for school front office workers, a protocol for information exchange.
 - School people generally do not have the level of engagement to understand the different roles within DSS so they don’t really realize who they may be talking to or who they need to talk to.
 - Also establish a protocol as to what the DSS workers do when they walk in the front door of the school and ensure that the DSS workers and the school personnel both understand the process.
 - Relationships – regular meetings, knowing who to call, a child’s face and story.

- Joint Planning – transportation across district lines, education liaison position.
 - Liaison person should not be solely education or solely DSS, they should be able to cross the lines between the two and understand each systems jargon (to enable them to guide other's through it).
- Transportation – even when you want to provide transportation its difficult without funding.
 - Sometimes have gone outside the box. Have had teachers who have transported children, foster parents, drivers ed's teachers. Have used homeless funds for a short term situation. The point was that they had to problem solve each situation individually and see if there was any way in the world possible to allow the child to stay in the same school.
- Difficult to limit school moves (transportation and placement resources).
- There is no interface for child specific data between Child Welfare and schools computer systems.
 - Have a monthly exchange of lists of kids in each system to ensure no one falls through the cracks.
- It is important to engage biological parents and foster parents in educational issues.
- One of the collaborative partners (San Diego) has a foster care liaison and in all their CFT meetings the liaison goes to and helps to determine what factors are in play in each situation that affect if a child will be able to stay in their school of origin. In San Diego's area, 53% of youth not in relative placement were in their original school.
- Also be aware of some new legislation:
 - In October congress passed the "Fostering Connections for Success" legislation which assures full time enrollment, that a child remains in their school of origin during placement or provide clear documentation as to why the school was changed.
 - Assuring that the foster care placement takes the educational setting into account when determining placement.
 - Assures that if a school change has to happen that records are transferred in a timely manner so not as to delay enrollment. This is not a significant issue for NC due to NC Wise, but may be an issue more for other states.
 - May be able to claim federal reimbursement for children remaining in the school of origin.
 - NC will have to interpret this federal legislation.

Slide #8

- Measurement
 - In May 2008, 92% of children who had a placement change had no change in school placement.

- 85% (79 of 93) of school-aged foster children demonstrated individual progress in at least one academic area of need measured by school records during the 2007-2008 school year.
- 40% of identified child welfare stakeholders have attended a training on school stability as a means of improving educational outcomes during 2007-2008 fiscal year.
- Establishment of policy for information exchange
- New format for court reports that captures educational status (achievement, school origin, future plans)

Questions and comments about your counties experiences with your school system:

- One county has started working with the attendance officer at the school around truancy issues. They are fortunate that most of their foster care children are maintaining placement. Feel that their relationship is moving in a positive direction.
- Generally good, isolated situations that are less positive. Guidance counselors and school social workers work well with DSS. However, they struggle more with some principals. Seem to be miscommunication about what the requirements are and how DSS operates.
 - Suggestion from presenters – a little training can go a long way. There may be misunderstandings about how the system should be operating. (Try the Endless Dreams DVD mentioned at the end of this presentation.)
- Seeing results of efforts to be more efficient working with guidance counselors and also with homeless population. SW Supervisor has gone to meetings with guidance counselors and encouraged open communications because their past problems were inappropriate referrals. Education and open communication have resulted in better help for each side. Don't always ask school to come to DSS, DSS will come to the schools.
- Have a pretty good relationship. There is some confusion and tension sometimes over children in care – for example sometimes not sure who is driving the decisions, the foster or the birth parents?
- Good relationship with schools but as a small county the issue is that most children taken into care will have to be sent 2 counties away for placement.
 - Suggestion to map out where children in care are coming from and where they are being sent for placement and then take that to your PTO and see if that can be used as a recruitment tool for foster parents.
- Like the idea of having a specific person at the school to contact to keep an eye on the children in care.
- One of the school counselors used to work at DSS, so there is an understanding, but they will try to incorporate some of the things talked about today as well.
- Another small county that places children several counties over. Are actively recruiting local foster families. Very positive about the school system.

- Have good participation in interagency meetings. The problem arises when children are placed out of county.
- One DSS divided workers into territories because of the gas prices and this had the added effect of making the school more familiar with the social worker(s) assigned to that particular school which improved communication.
- Work out a lot of issues at CCPT meetings. One thing the school said is that the DSS always lets them know when a child comes into care, but not as much when they go out of care. Going to work on ensuring communication both when children come in and leave care.

Slide #9

- What do kids in Foster Care Need?
 - Transportation back to their school or origin even when they move.
 - Their school information to be accessible (NCWise access by Child Welfare and parents).
 - If the foster parent/guardian could access information via NC Wise.
 - NC Wise is what we call the student information system - they want the information from this system to be able to flow into DSS information systems, and if it cannot, then they would like the DSS workers to be able to access NC Wise via the parent component (which is already a component of the NC Wise system when it was developed but has never been activated).
 - State level commitment to promote partnerships between school systems and child welfare.
 - A face and a voice.

Slide #10

- What you can do – Initial Steps
 - Consider the action steps on the Handout – actions to improve Education Stability for Children in out-of-home care
 - Read about and order a free “Endless Dreams” DVD from the Casey Org website:
<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/EdnlessDreams.htm>
 - Review the American Bar Association’s Legal Center for Foster Care Education website: <http://www.abanet.org/child/education/home.shtml>
 - Email Sarah, Paul, or Ann for additional Information