

Report Card: Making The Grade

What is Success By 6?

Success By 6 is the Early Care and Education Initiative for Erie County. Primarily funded by United Way of Erie County and a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, the goal of Success By 6 is that all children in Erie County are adequately prepared to enter the education system. In early 2003, early care and education was recognized as integral to economic development in Erie County when this initiative was charged with addressing objective 1B of the Civic Coordinating Committee (C-Cubed) Economic Development Strategic Plan.

"I can't thank you enough for the excellent Learning Fair you and the committee created and sponsored for our families. I was all smiles during and after the event last night. I was very impressed with your attention to details, which resulted in serving all the families well. Union City would be (gladly) willing to host future events/fairs. Let me know what we need to do to make next year's event even more successful (if that's possible)."

— Gwyn Horner,
Assistant Principal of the Union City Elementary School

Food, Fun and Free Stuff

Learning Fair for Preschoolers and Family Invites Awareness

The Parent Education and Community Awareness Committee sponsored three learning fairs in Union City, Corry and Erie during April, 2004. The "Food, Fun and Free Stuff!" fairs featured hands-on exhibits for children entering kindergarten and their parents, as well as information about kindergarten readiness and registration. Several community organizations were available to answer questions and provide free resources to families.

Approximately 275 parents and their preschoolers enjoyed an evening full of fun activities that included music, reading, art and play. They were encouraged to discover how these activities prepare children for success in school. Exhibits, door prizes, goodie bags and refreshments were provided, plus every child received a participation certificate, finger puppet, and at least one age-appropriate book.

The program featured seven activity stations manned by professionals and college/high school volunteers. The families moved from station to station following symbols on their child's registration form. The events included:

- A reading demonstration
- Music and singing
- Art activity relating to the book *Fish Is Fish* by Leo Leone
- Play activities which included "Walking with Bear" to the balance beam, bean bag toss, clothes pin and ball drop, and building with blocks.

The Parenting Committee developed a set of "Six Steps to Success By 6" cards given to each participating family in goodie bags. The colorful cards provide parents/caregivers ideas on how to Walk, Talk, Sing, Read, and Play and therefore enhance growth and development. As follow-up to last year's billboard

campaign, these efforts were implemented to develop parental understanding of school readiness issues. They also affect community awareness that it takes just a few minutes to impact the life of a child.

Exhibitors:

Approximately one dozen exhibitors were present at each event. Exhibitors included WIC, EFNEP, Northwest Intermediate Unit, Union City Family Support Center, Erie Family Center, ION Health, Health Dept., Early Connections, Success By 6 Transition Committee, Head Start, WQLN, Erie Area Safe Kid Coalition, Early Intervention, Hispanic American Council, and Happy Hearts Day Care.

and executed the event included Penn State Cooperative Extension, Child Care Information Services, the Office of Children and Youth, Union City Family Support Center, Erie Family Center, Erie City School Nurse, Hispanic American Council, International Institute, ION Health, Gateway Health, WIC, Safe Kid Coalition, and United Way of Erie County.



Volunteers:

This program would not be a reality without the countless hours and energy contributed by community agencies and volunteers. The event's success is the result of incredible teamwork and dedicated individuals working together because they care about children. The effort given has resulted in three successful and gratifying programs which may well become an annual event.

Over 25 individual groups were involved to bring these events to fruition. The Parenting Committee, which planned

Other volunteers and contributors included Edinboro University Student Volunteers, school teachers from Pfeiffer-Burleigh Elementary School, Early Connections Child Care, Blasco Library, Early Intervention, American Academy of Pediatrics, Health Department, Wegman's, Meadow Brook Dairy, and Neighborhood Art House.

There was tremendous help and support from each of the three school districts. They not only provided and made all the arrangements for the use of the facilities for each of the events, but facilitated the programs. They were also instrumental in helping publicize the events.

Accomplishments Are Great Since 2003

Since the Success By 6 Report Card published in August, 2003, we have concentrated on three broad process-oriented goals:

Goal 1 – Update and revise early care and education strategic plan for Erie County.

Status – In September 2003, a planning retreat took place to revise the strategic plan in an outcomes-based format. Over 40 stakeholders participated, creating a one-page plan summary with prioritized objectives. Three school districts in Erie County were identified as our *initial* geographic target areas: city of Erie, Corry, and Union City. Efforts will continue to benefit young children throughout Erie County; however, these school districts will be our first target areas based on information regarding kindergarten and first-grade retention rates and percent of children scoring below basic on the PSSA.

Goal 2 – Create action plans around prioritized objectives.

Status – Subcommittees are developing and implementing action plans for the highest-priority objectives.

- The Early Care to School Transition Committee is focusing on a process whereby children who are not in Head Start or Early Intervention are transitioned more smoothly from early care to kindergarten. This is a test, or *pilot*, project and will be continued only if it is successful and the results can be measured.
- The Parent Education and Community Awareness Committee is increasing awareness of the importance of early care, existing services, and the Success By 6 initiative itself.
- A Measurement Committee is exploring how common it is for providers to use developmentally appropriate

practices. These providers include centers, family and relative/neighbor caregivers, as well as parents who choose not to place their children in an out-of-home setting. We have also begun to formulate a broad-based scorecard that can be used to set goals, monitor progress, and communicate the results of our collaborative efforts.

Goal 3 – Implement action plans.

Status – The transition from early care to kindergarten is important. By utilizing models provided by our Head Start and Early Intervention partners, the Early Care to School Transition Committee developed materials to collect information from providers and parents key to preparing kindergarten teachers and school administrators for this transition. Local teachers and curriculum experts have reviewed the materials and express strong satisfaction with its content and format. In addition, the Intermediate Unit staff collected all area school district standards for kindergarten readiness. The results were combined into a document called the “Success By 6 Pre-Kindergarten Checklist,” which will be used first as part of the transition pilot project. Our longer-range goal is that all parents and early care providers in Erie County will know and understand what their children need to be prepared for kindergarten. Over

200 children in the Erie City, Corry, Wattsburg, and Union City school districts are part of this transition pilot project.

A \$15,000 grant was obtained from The Erie Community Foundation to fund training in developmentally appropriate practices and other topics to family providers. Success By 6 worked closely with Head Start staff who created the curriculum and provided the training for over 60 licensed or registered providers.

The Parent Education and Community Awareness Committee conducted three community events, “Food, Fun and Free Stuff...A Learning Fair.” See cover article for details.

Success By 6 volunteers, PA Pathways, and the local PA Pathways training organizations (Edinboro University, Penn State Cooperative Extension, and WQLN Education) coordinated a “training needs” daylong event that provided child care centers the opportunity to voice their training needs, as well as the training agencies an opportunity to formulate better scheduling practices. Formal communication procedures between the two were established. WQLN has even launched a monthly “Success By 6 Training Newsletter,” with the latest information from all three training organizations. The free newsletter is sent via e-mail to providers in Erie County who request it by e-mailing cbelski@wqln.org.



What is developmentally appropriate practice?

Developmentally appropriate practices result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information or knowledge:

1. **What is known about child development and learning** — knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions within an age range about what activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and also challenging to children;
2. **What is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child** in the group to be able to adapt for and be responsive to inevitable individual variation; and
3. **Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live** to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families.

Professional Gives Perspective

by Nancy Anne Kalista

"What is so important about early care and education?"

"Do kids really learn anything before they start school?"

"I didn't go to preschool and I've done fairly well in my life, so is it really needed?"

Good questions. . .

Early care and education focuses on young children from birth through age eight. Although early childhood education has existed since the creation of kindergarten in the 1800s, we learn more everyday about the very important subject of early education for young children.

And why is it so important?

At Success By 6, we believe that from the time of birth, all children are ready to learn. Children learn at different paces and in different ways. They are greatly influenced by their environment during those early years. However, what we do or don't do as individuals, and together as a society, can influence whether a

child succeeds or fails in learning.

As documented by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, every \$1 invested in quality preschool returns \$2 in social savings through reduced special education costs, dropout rates, unemployment, and welfare dependency. A quality preschool that provides early care and education, in combination with parent education and support, demonstrates to be critical to the success of young children.

Early childhood professionals collaborating with parents help to ensure that our children are learning through developmentally appropriate practice.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children asserts, "We must develop an integrated system of early childhood care and education that includes comprehensive approaches that directly involve families and communities in program design, implementation, and evaluation. We can invest

now in our children and families and enjoy long-term savings, with a more vibrant nation of healthy, achieving children and more stable families. Or, we can fail to make the investment and pay the price: increased delinquency, greater educational failures, lowered productivity, less economic competitiveness, and fewer adults prepared to be effective, loving parents to the next generation of children. Federal, state and local government,



communities, parents, and the private sector must share in the responsibility of ensuring the well-being of children and families."

So, is this important? Does it make a difference?

Absolutely it does!

The United Way Success By 6 initiative is based on long-term research on brain development, quality childcare and early intervention. According to medical and scientific research, the experiences of young children in the first six years have a lasting impact on later success in school and life. This research provides the rationale for Success By 6 and propels communities in their efforts to mobilize young children and families.

Success By 6 attains broad, community-level change by addressing system barriers that negatively impact children and families in areas such as health, childcare, and early childhood education. Success By 6 brings key community partners together and helps parents obtain the support they need so more children enter school healthy, confident and prepared to succeed in school – and in life. It is making a difference today that

will continue to impact the lives of young children as they grow to adolescence and on to adulthood. It is a focus vital to the health and well-being of our community.



Nancy Anne Kalista, executive director of Early Connections, Inc. since June 2002, directed a large early childhood education and social service agency in Minneapolis, MN. While there, she served on the Governor's Task Force on Early Intervention. She also served on the Nurturing Children and Youth Vision Council for United Way of the Twin Cities Success By 6. Nancy has a bachelor's in education and a master's in organizational leadership.

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Thank You!

Thanks to these wonderful people and organizations who have made the many achievements of this past year possible. Who is Success By 6? Read on . . .

Angela Adams	Keystone University Research Center	Barb Gainer	Barb's Care-A-Lot	Lori Parmenter-Leonetti	United Way of Erie County
Kelly Armor	Erie Art Museum	Kathy Gilbert	School District of the City of Erie	Alan Perez	United Way of Erie County
Jodi Askins	Early Connections, Inc.	Barb Hickey	Martin Luther King Child Care	Dawn Polaski	Montessori Children's House of Erie
James Barker	School District of the City of Erie	Gwyn Horner	Union City School District	Anne Prince	GECAC / Head Start
Tammy Bartasavich	Penn State Erie CORE	Bill Jackson	United Way of Erie County	Valerie Quinn	Affordable Day Care by Valerie
Renee Basile Bearse	Union City Family Support Center	Anna Jeffress	Martin Luther King Child Care	Steve Redrup	YMCA of Corry
Kathleen Bastow	Dr. Gertrude Barber Child Care Center	Jeanette Jordan	Hispanic American Council Child Care Center	Donna Roesch	Achievement Center
Mike Batchelor	Erie Community Foundation	Christine Joy	Little Beavers Preschool - Corry	Peter Russo	GECAC / Head Start
Karen Bauer	Edinboro University Elementary Education Dept.	Nancy Kalista	Early Connections, Inc.	Gretchen Schlosser	Red Balloon Child Care Center
Mark Beary	Mercyhurst Civic Institute	Nancy Kelley		Rita Schmitt	School District of the City of Erie
Jeanne Bender	City of Erie School District	Kathryn Kwiatkowski	School District of the City of Erie	Mary Lou Seidler	Saint Benedict Education Center
Charlotte Berringer	Erie County Department of Health	Mary Lakari	PA Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics	Cathy Shabtai	Early Connections, Inc.
Leslie Bohrer	St. Martin Early Learning Center	Jacqui Lanagan	Strategy Solutions, Inc.	Ed Sitter	Greater Erie Community Action Committee
Frank Bova	Wattsburg School District	Cindy Lewis	Erie County Child Care Information Services	Carol Smith	Wattsburg School District
Elaine Buckel	WIC	Debi Liebel	Erie County Office of Children and Youth	Sharon Stasiewski	International Institute Small World Child Care
Amanda Burlingham	United Way of Erie County	Carol Lubiewicky	School District of the City of Erie	Debbie Sturm	Union City School District
Tina Carter	YMCA	Colleen Masi	Erie Family Center	Frances Thompson	Fran's Crayon Club
Lynn Clint	Penn State University Cooperative Extension	Sharon McCracken	St. Paul's Child Care Center	Shelley Thompson	YMCA
Marila Coates	Achievement Center	Kathy Mehler	ION Health, Inc.	Debbie Thompson	Strategy Solutions, Inc.
Ferita Collins Dawson	United Way of Erie County	Becky Mercatoris	Child Care Resource Developers of Western PA	Courtney Tirak	St. Martin Center, Inc.
Mike Cox	Erie County Child Care Information Services	Nicole Miller	YMCA of Corry	Dennis Valone	Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit
Shirley Crockett	Shirley Crockett Family Day Care	Eunice Moore	Penn State Behrend Child Care Center	Marilyn Varasso	St. Thomas Preschool - Corry
Amy Cuzzola-Kern	Community Volunteer	Susan Moorehead	Mercyhurst Child Learning Center	Doris Walker	Family Daycare Provider
Amy Danzer	Mercyhurst Civic Institute	Thomas Muckinhaupt	Greater Erie Community Action Committee	Sue Whitaker	Erie County Child Care Information Services
Elsie Diduch	Union City Family Support Center	Sam Myers	Union City School District	R. Benjamin Wiley	Greater Erie Community Action Committee
Ellen DiPlacido	Erie County Assistance Office	Del Niggel	Erie County Department of Health	Diane Williams	North East Alliance Christian Child Care Center
Maureen Donnelly	Saint Benedict Education Center	Chris Olson	Corry School District	Darlene Williams	Retired from Child Care Information Services
Donna Douglass	Erie Community Foundation	Margie Olszewski	Erie Family Center	Debbie Wisniewski	Mercy Center for Women
Corrine Egan	WQLN	Connie Osborne	Gateway Health	Christine Wright	International Institute
Kim Fabrizio	School District of the City of Erie	Lori Pallsin	Safe Horizons		

We have made every effort to list everyone who participated in Success By 6 over the past year. If we have omitted anyone, please accept our apologies.

There is a role for everyone and anyone who is interested in participating. If you care about young children in our community and the early care and education agenda, please consider taking part.

For more information, please call Lori Parmenter-Leonetti at 456-5346, ext. 21.



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