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everything is achievable


Norwalk ACTS Early Childhood Development Initiative 2024 Addendum



REFLECTING ON
THE SUCCESS OF
NORWALK'S CQI
TEAM

History, Key Learnings and
Next Steps
January 29, 2020

Authored by Improvement Assurance Group, on behalf of the Grossman Family Foundation and Norwalk's CQI Team

The TAG logo is circular with a blue and orange gradient. The letters "TAG" are prominently displayed in the center in white. Below the letters, the text "Improvement Assurance Group" is written in a smaller font.

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Addendum

The purpose of this addendum is to add updated reflections, learnings, successes, and remaining opportunities to the [Reflecting on the Success of Norwalk's CQI Team Report](#) authored by Improvement Assurance Group, on behalf of the Grossman Family Foundation and Norwalk's CQI Team on January 29, 2020. *(Please note the COVID-19 global pandemic significantly impacted the Early Childhood Development work from March 2020 through summer 2021 and beyond.)*

History

On June 30, 2023, a long-term grant between the Norwalk community and United Way of Connecticut (UWCT), supported by the Grossman Family Foundation, came to its planned end. The Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) working group that had been the core planning committee throughout the length of the grant spent a year on a transition plan that included Norwalk ACTS taking the lead to sustain and scale the work at the conclusion of the grant period. Thus, on July 1, 2023, Norwalk ACTS took the official lead and the group was renamed the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI). As the backbone entity for Norwalk's cradle-to-career collective impact work, Norwalk ACTS re-organized to have a full-time manager overseeing the work of this initiative and the work of the long-standing CQI consultant, Marijane Carey, was phased out over the first quarter of the year.

ECDI developed two main areas of work.

1. Improve coordination of services across early childhood professionals and agencies through implementation of a community-wide system for screening, tracking, and promoting young children's development, using a common tool- the ASQ-3, a nationally recognized five-domain developmental growth assessment that was designed to be completed by parents. The goals are to
 - a. Build capacity/ understanding of parents of the importance of the developmental domains and empower parents with skills and resources to work with their children on activities that will promote developmental growth and discuss concerns with their child's pediatrician, if necessary.
 - b. Institute routine developmental screenings for all young children as early as possible and at each developmental touchpoint and identify children with developmental concerns and connect them to services as needed.
 - c. Work with system providers to ensure access to 0-5 services and resources for parents

2. Development of a strong Norwalk early childhood system so that all Norwalk children are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. A community of continuous learning and improvement between Pre-K and K teachers has been established to implement effective transition planning. The goals are to
 - a. Identify areas of alignment/misalignment between or within Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers' understanding of the skills and knowledge children need/should have at Kindergarten entry
 - b. Engagement of parents through tools and resources to ensure students enter school ready for success
 - c. Share Pre-K to K assessment information in a streamlined manner to inform early instruction and intervention

Update on Next Steps

Define messaging

- In 2023, the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) created the ECDI Ad Hoc Campaign Committee. The purpose is to create a 2024 early childhood development campaign to promote and increase awareness on the importance of early childhood development with parents/caregivers, early childhood providers, community members and decision makers. The Norwalk community has adopted The Basics public health campaign (and whole community strategy) to raise awareness about early childhood development and to build capacity throughout the community for engaging families around the Basics principles and other supports utilizing common language to support learning and brain development in children from birth to five years of age. The Basics principles include: 1) Maximize love, manage stress 2) Talk, sing and point 3) Count, group, and compare, 4) Explore through movement and play, 5) Read and discuss stories.

Further develop tiered interventions

- As a way to support early childhood partners in delivering tiered interventions, an Early Childhood Community Advocate (EC CA) Program was developed beginning in 2021. In 2024, Norwalk ACTS employed seven EC CAs for the ECDI. These diverse, multilingual community members work to increase awareness about the importance of early childhood developmental growth and share resources about services that are available throughout the community. Additionally, at early childhood organizations they facilitate community dialogue and participation through the Ages & Stages Questionnaire

(ASQ-3) screenings. Finally, the EC CAs have provided tiered intervention for children who score in the below and monitor on the ASQ-3 at preschools and with children who have registered for Kindergarten through the Norwalk Public Schools Family Center. EC CAs utilized the *Sparkler ASQ-3 Follow Up Action Information Summary form*. Norwalk ACTS has observed a 9% increase in children developmentally on track across the five domains of early childhood development – communication, fine motor, gross motor, personal-social and problem solving.

Engage the Housing Authority and family child care providers

- From 2022 to 2024, strategic partnerships have been developed with the Norwalk Housing Authority, All Our Kin family child care providers, and the Norwalk Community Health Center.

Conduct outreach to the pediatrician community

- In 2023, Norwalk Community Health Center (NCHC), Norwalk ACTS, and Family & Children’s Agency collaborated on a federal grant opportunity and were awarded only one of four grants in CT to establish a partnership between NCHC and Early Childhood Community Advocates (EC CAs) to share early childhood resources with parents in the pediatric waiting room. It has expanded developmental screening initiatives in health care settings, ensuring broader reach and accessibility.
- The NCHC has now adopted an overarching project goal to increase developmental screenings for children ages 0-5, facilitating follow-up within 30 days of identifying a developmental concern. As of March 2024, as a percent of all the children screened, 88% self-designated as Hispanic, 11% not Hispanic or Latino and 1% declined to specify. By focusing on the 36% of children living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, NCHC is projected to serve 911 patients in 2024 with 2,718 annual visits.

Hold balance between quantity and quality, especially as the focus on expansion increases.

- As the ECDI work has expanded over the past few years, there has been a focus on increasing tiered interventions of children who show delays or risk of delays in a screening. There is systemic tracking of both the number and percent of children who are screened as well as the number and percent of children who demonstrated a delay

or risk for delay that were provided with a tiered intervention. Finally, tracking and reporting on the longitudinal developmental and kindergarten readiness outcomes of children who have been screened has occurred. In 2024, a pilot project tracking and reporting the longitudinal developmental and kindergarten readiness outcomes of children who have received interventions will be initiated.

Develop a two-year action plan

- In the fall of 2022, as part of a larger Norwalk ACTS strategic plan, ECDI created a three year strategic action plan detailing the goals, objectives, community level outcome indicators and the ECDI work.

Update on General Recommendations

- **Clearly define the notion of “full scale.”**

There are approximately just under 6000 children ages 0-5 (under 6) in Norwalk per the Census. Approximately 800 children enter Norwalk Public Schools kindergarten each year. These numbers do not include private and charter schools. All children entering NPS are required to take the ASQ.

As we continue to use the ASQ at more touchpoints (preschool, home visiting, pediatricians, and individual families using Sparkler), there will be an increase in the need for tiered intervention before reaching kindergarten.

The ECDI project is working on a longitudinal study of ASQ screenings, looking deeper into the results over time of multiple screenings. Preliminary analysis indicates that a large percentage of children that take an early ASQ and have repeated screenings tend to move upwards from monitoring and below results.

We are also looking at comparing results of ASQ and KEI (Kindergarten Entrance Inventory), as well as DIBELS assessments and SBAC testing to determine if there is predictability.

The language that we are leaning towards is “Of the XX% of students that met or exceeded benchmark on the SBAC, XX% scored above on the ASQ”

- **Further build CQI team capacity for managing adaptive change** by understanding Dr. David Rock's SCARF Model.

Since 2021, we have had a 60% increase in the number of early childhood community partners within the Norwalk ACTS Early Childhood Development Initiative. In addition, we have built a team of Early Childhood Community Advocates, a group of diverse, multilingual community members, who work to increase awareness about the importance of early childhood developmental growth and share resources about services that are available throughout the community.

We have incorporated a few of the SCARF Model domains of human social experience including status, autonomy, relatedness and fairness. In order to create open and trusting collaboration, we have consistent monthly team meetings and bi-weekly one-on-one meetings to:

- Develop trust, safety and belonging - move at pace of community
- Provide opportunities to communicate and listen to feedback from EC CAs to incorporate into lessons learned and pivot engagement (qualitative data)
- Train EC CAs about community resources including Sparkler – a mobile app created by CT OEC that helps parents to check in on how their 0-5 year old child is doing against key milestones — and provide activities to spark early learning
- Create connections including social justice & racial equity work
- Make introductions to community organization liaisons and resources
- Integrate The Basics into conversations with parents and community partners

Presently, the Early Childhood Community Advocates (EC CAs) work side-by-side with the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) Community Manager, ASQ Community Liaison and the Norwalk ACTS Early Childhood Development Manager. In 2023, in order to build capacity, the ASQ Community Liaison was elevated to the new position, ASQ Community Manager. Also, someone was hired to be the ASQ Community Liaison to assist with expansion of early childhood development outreach and pilot programs in different sectors of the community.

- **Explore a variety of means to strengthen the connection between early childhood development efforts and the school district.**

Norwalk ACTS emphasizes the importance of seamless transitions from pre-K to Kindergarten, first by establishing working groups to streamline assessment information sharing. Second, by providing kindergarten summary reports to teachers

and aligning data structures, Norwalk ACTS ensures informed decision making and support for incoming students. Third, in 2023, early childhood community advocates connected with over 100 families who registered for Kindergarten at the NPS Family Center and whose children scored at monitoring or below on the Ages & Stages Questionnaire. 95% of these families were connected with at least one community resource and 16% of these children received special needs services or were waiting for an evaluation.

Finally, beginning July 1, 2024, the Connecticut General Statute required that children turn five years old on or before September 1 of the school year in order to enroll in kindergarten. Because of the timing of this change and the challenge that this may cause families, Norwalk Public Schools developed a transition plan for the 2024-25 school year and any child who does not turn five years old on or before September 1, 2024, but celebrates their fifth birthday on or before January 1, 2025, and may be eligible for Kindergarten admission. Part of the eligibility process and assessment included partnering with the Norwalk ACTS Early Childhood Community Advocate team. From April to August 2024 Early Childhood Community Advocates and the Norwalk Public School Family Resource Center representatives would work in partnership to provide the ASQ screening to incoming registered Kindergarten 4-year-old students. This would be part of the gathering of information about the child and their family, which will assist schools in providing better support for the students. The Norwalk Public Schools would continue to support all students according to their academic, emotional, and social needs with the understanding that students are unique regardless of age.

- **Consider how the team will prepare the system to receive children who are on track and ready to learn.**

Partnerships with educational institutions and researchers enable longitudinal analysis, highlighting the correlation between developmental readiness and reading proficiency. These collaborations allow for targeted interventions and early literacy campaigns.

Researchers at the Center for Social Research (CSR) at the University of Hartford provide continued consultation and technical support to the Initiative as a partnering member of the Data Quality Workgroup. The CSR works collaboratively with all other Workgroup members in using project data for informing ongoing planning and implementation, tracking progress and effectiveness, and will specifically focus on designing and conducting research and data analyses.

- **Define channels and strategies for bringing knowledge of developmental readiness to the whole system.**

The Norwalk ACTS ECDI ecosystem includes at the minimum:

- Parents/caregivers
- Early Childhood Community Advocates
- Early childhood providers
 - State funded programs including school readiness & child day care contracts
 - Federally funded programs including Head Start
 - Family child care programs
- Norwalk Public School District
- City of Norwalk Early Childhood Department
- Home visiting providers
- Healthcare providers
- State partners including:
 - CT Office of Early Childhood
 - CT United Way
 - Help Me Grow
 - Sparkler
 - University of Hartford
- Early Childhood Funders

The 2024 ECDI Marketing Campaign Framework below shows how knowledge of developmental readiness will be communicated to the ECDI ecosystem:

1. Outcome Objective Setting

- **Primary Outcome Objective:** Raise awareness and engagement about early childhood development and resources/supports available to parents/caregivers
- **Secondary Outcome Objective:** Raise awareness and engagement about early childhood development and resources/supports available to EC providers
- **Third Outcome Objective:** Sustain the ECDI Campaign

2. Target Audience Identification

- **Primary Audience:** Parents, especially parents of children aged 0-3 years old.
- **Secondary Audiences:** Educators, childcare providers, healthcare professionals, anyone working with children aged 0-5.

3. Key Messaging

- **Emotional Appeal:** Emphasize the importance of early childhood development for a child's future and the critical role that parents/caregivers play as their child's first teacher.
- **Educational Component:** Provide insights into child development stages and resources/supports available in Norwalk and statewide
- **Call to Action:** Clear, compelling and easy actions for caregivers to do with their children

4. Brand Positioning

- Establish the Basics as a trustworthy and expert resource in early childhood development and utilize the Basics principles (common language) throughout the year (1) Maximize, love, manage stress, 2) Talk, sing and point, 3) Count, group, and compare, 4) Explore through movement and play, 5) Read and discuss stories)

5. Marketing Channels

- **Digital Media:** Social media (create connections, email campaigns, and websites).
- **Traditional Media:** Videos in waiting rooms, radio, and print ads.
- **Community Engagement:** Workshops, webinars, and local events. (tabling events-talking to parents/caregivers, giving out reminders like magnets)

- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with schools, hospitals, the city of Norwalk including policy makers and the Resource Hub, local state legislators and child-centric businesses/agencies.
- **Text Messaging:** using Basics insights with a pilot group to start. (for example: parents in home visiting, the library storytime groups or caregivers in Norwalk parent support groups).

6. Content Strategy

- **Educational Content:** Articles, infographics, and videos about early childhood development.
- **Testimonials:** Stories from parents, educators, and children who have benefited from the ECD resources.
- **Regular Updates:** Progress of the initiative, success stories, and upcoming events.