

Appendix C

Readiness Questions

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Acting to *B*uild Our *C*hildren's Future: UW-Extension's ABC Project

Dear School District Administrators,

Oconto County UW-Extension invites the school districts of Oconto County to consider applying to become an ABC project community.

UW-Extension's ABC project will provide research-based systems planning assistance to Oconto County communities who desire to ensure that all their young children have all of the early health, family and education and care experience they need to enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

The ABC project systems planning will take place within the next year with the bulk of the workgroup meetings during the 2004-05 school year. The action plan resulting from the system planning process can be accomplished over the course of time.

Please review the attached background information and application.

School districts who would like to be considered for the ABC project need to evaluate their readiness by answering the questions in the attached application form and return it to Donna Doll-Yogerst by March 31, 2004. You can send it to Donna at Oconto Co. UW-Extension Office, 301 Washington St., Oconto, WI 54153, or donna.doll-yogerst@ces.uwex.edu
Phone: 920-834-6845; Fax 920-834-6853.

Acting to Build Our Children's Future: UW-Extension's ABC Project

Oconto County UW-Extension invites the school districts of Oconto County to consider applying to become an ABC project community.

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Our Children: Our Future

Wisconsin has about 70,000 children who are eligible to enter kindergarten as five year olds each year. Some of these children have never held a pair of scissors or owned a book. An increasing number speak English poorly. Some have lived in families that have had to choose between buying food and paying for health care. Many have spent years in unstimulating – or even unsafe – child care.

It shouldn't be surprising that kindergarten teachers report that only two-thirds of the children entering their classrooms are prepared to be successful students. And sadly, even our best schools aren't able to alter the course of many of these children who begin behind. By the third grade, only 4 out of 5 of Wisconsin's children read at a proficient or higher level. By eighth grade, the percentage of students who achieve at a proficient or higher level in reading is still only 83% and in math it's only 73%. One out of every ten Wisconsin students fail to receive a high school diploma.

This problem will have immediate economic consequences for our communities and our state. The national No Child Left Behind legislation requires that an increasing percentage of Wisconsin's school children read and do math at the proficient or higher level each year or face sanctions. By 2013, 100% of our children are expected to meet this standard. This is an admirable goal, but one that cannot be accomplished if we wait until our children walk in the kindergarten door.

And the problem of children arriving at school with vastly different levels of experience – and the resulting achievement gap - are likely to have important long-term economic consequences as well. In 2000, Wisconsin had almost five workers for every retired person. By 2025, as the baby boom generation retires and today's preschoolers join the workforce, it is projected that there will be fewer than three active workers to support the health care and other public assistance costs of each retired person. We truly cannot afford to waste the potential of any of our youngest citizens – our future workforce.

How can we ensure that all children succeed?

To reach their full potential, all young children need early and consistent health care, loving families who can guide them and advocate for them, and high quality early education and care opportunities. We need to begin early, with prenatal care. We need to find ways to support families in the important roles they play. And we know that focusing on ABC's and numbers isn't nearly enough – physical and mental health, social and communication skills and attitudes toward learning are at least as important.

There are no magic bullets. A single program alone, no matter how well designed and implemented, cannot provide children with all of these things they need. In order for all our children to start school ready to succeed, we need to plan, finance, implement, coordinate, evaluate and sustain high quality systems that connect diverse early childhood programs, services, and resources. These systems should be designed to reflect our best available scientific knowledge.

The ABC project systems planning will take place within the next year with the bulk of the workgroup meetings during the 2004-05 school year. The action plan resulting from the system planning process can be accomplished over the course of time.

Acting to Build Our Children's Future: The ABC Project.

UW-Extension's ABC Project will provide research-based systems planning assistance to Wisconsin communities that desire to ensure that all their young children have all of the early health, family, and education and care experiences they need to enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

ABC Project "communities" are the diverse population of people (within the geographical bounds of a school district) who have an interest in young children and their needs. Each project begins with the development of a local planning system by key stakeholders who will be able to ensure the long-term sustainability of the plan. This group helps identify a planning team that will develop a long-term early childhood systems plan for the community. The planning team will generate ideal subsystems of maternal and child health, parent education and support, and early education and care based on current research about optimal child development. They will then develop feasible recommended solutions. Each community will implement and evaluate the recommended system. Throughout this process, parents and other citizens participate in diverse ways. UW-Extension Oconto county-based faculty in the Family Living and Community Development program areas will act as consultants to local planning groups, with primary tasks to include education and facilitation of the planning process. They will receive research-based technical support from UW-Extension state specialists.

The ABC Project will have important impacts (The What's In It for You Answer):

- Better informed community decision-making
- Increased communication and coordination between community organizations and agencies
- Local investments in child and family programs most likely to yield the greatest benefits
- Improved ability of families to provide critical early experiences for their young children
- Enhanced development and later school success of Wisconsin's children, resulting in more responsible citizens and a stronger workforce

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ABC PROJECT APPLICATION

Assess your readiness for the ABC project.

The ABC Project “community” will geographically encompass a school district. It will contain the entire community with an interest in young children: families with children, diverse organizations, agencies and businesses, and other citizens.

1. **Identify potential community issues, organizations and collaboratives relating to early childhood systems.**

Consider concerns, problems, or issues you hope the plan will address? Include all programming already done related to early childhood systems: health, family and community. For example, are you aware of community programming with child care providers, health professionals, parenting resource center staff, and school personnel.

Consider any powerful vocal organizations related to any of the subsystems (i.e. esteemed preschool).

And are there any existing collaboratives related to any of these systems or to early childhood in general?

2. **Who are the key stakeholders in your community who should be involved in this effort?**
3. **Who will likely be the project sponsors?** Sponsors are individuals who legitimize the process. They are typically top leaders with prestige, power, and authority to commit individuals and resources and to hold people accountable. (mayor, school superintendent, physician, school board member, hospital administrator or board member, business leader, etc.)

4. **Identify potential project champions.** Champions manage the process. They provide the energy and commitment to follow through. They are usually the people who have primary responsibility for coordinating the planning process from day to day. They promote the process and model the kind of behavior they hope to get from other participants. (child care provider, early childhood education coordinator, head start director, public health nurse, parent of young children, parent educator, physician, etc.)

Please rate your ABC project community readiness on a 5 point scale.

High 5 4 3 2 1 Low

5. **Community leaders are aware of and understand ABC concerns**

High 5 4 3 2 1 Low

6. **Community leaders are interested in addressing the ABC concerns.**

High 5 4 3 2 1 Low

7. **Community leaders have good communication and cooperation and are willing to work together to address the ABC concerns.**

High 5 4 3 2 1 Low

8. **Extent to which the community has the resource capacity to address the ABC concerns (time, money, etc.).**

High 5 4 3 2 1 Low

9. **Extent to which the community has sustaining infrastructure systems (human, political, economic) and can likely do something to address the ABC concerns.**

High 5 4 3 2 1 Low

10. **Extent to which there is a lack of competing interests.**

High 5 4 3 2 1 Low

11. **Extent to which the project would have impact on a major number of stakeholders.**

High 5 4 3 2 1 Low