

FOCUS AREA: Early Childhood Development

Issue Statement

Orange County is fortunate to have a large number of organizations and individuals that are actively engaged in providing quality early childhood services. Many of these programs are recognized as cutting-edge and best practice. Despite these exemplary programs and the effort of many individuals, Orange County lacks a cohesive and comprehensive agenda for improving early childhood outcomes.

The most recent Early Development Index data produced by the Children and Families Commission of Orange County points to a number of areas where our children are falling behind in their developmental paths. Additionally, in Orange County we only have enough licensed child care resources for 22% of our infants and toddlers and subsidized slots for only 5% of those ages 0 to 2 years old. We know that children who do not read at grade level by the third grade are 4 times less likely to graduate from high school. As with many social issues, our low income, vulnerable families bear the brunt of the burden in this regard.

Numerous studies have documented the critical nature of achieving early childhood success as a precursor for success as an adult. For Orange County's children to be successful in the decades to come, we must create a comprehensive system of care to support them, from offering early prenatal care to all mothers, to engaging families in supporting the health and development of their children, ensuring that all children receive age-appropriate screenings, making quality child care options available to all families, supporting parenting through enlightened business policies, and more.

For Orange County's children to thrive both intellectually and physically, we need the entire Orange County Community including business and political leaders to understand and appreciate the critical nature of early childhood success and be willing to mobilize the resources necessary to achieve that success.

Community Activities/Schedule

The Raising of America documentary screening resulted in a coalition of 20 organizations that work in the field of early childhood development. This group intends to develop a framework for early childhood success that will define the outcomes that we desire for our young children and present strategies necessary to achieve these outcomes. Once the framework is complete the committee will reach out to businesses, civic leaders and the political community to engender support for this effort.

The Raising of America Steering Committee is currently gathering information from the jurisdictions where a framework has been successfully implemented. The second stage will be for this group to formulate a framework specific to the interests and needs of Orange County. This work will be accomplished through monthly meetings of the Raising of America Steering Committee held September – December 2016.

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OCCP Involvement

Once the framework is complete, it will be presented to the OCCP. Specific requests of the OCCP to support the effort will be identified at that time.

Intended Outcome of OCCP Role

A more cohesive and comprehensive agenda for improving early childhood outcomes, supported through specific activities of the members/agencies represented on the OCCP still to be determined.

Reporting Schedule

September 2016 – Initial presentation to OCCP

January 2017 – Presentation of the framework and any specific “asks” for OCCP support, or next steps as appropriate