FOR THE SAKE OF ALL

Improving the health and well-being
of African Americans in St. Louis and
why it matters for everyone

Washington University in St. Louis

FOCUS St. Louis
Leadership for a Thriving Region

Community Action Forum: Investing in Early Childhood

Summary of key themes from small group discussions facilitated at the forum

What is the vision for the ideal community for our children?

1. Equitable access to services and supports (including universal access to healthcare and insurance) for all children, regardless of race or socio-economic status.
2. An appropriate level of support and compensation for early childhood development and childcare workforce.
3. The private/business sector becomes more involved in investing in early childhood development supports or opportunities.
4. That the community will provide comprehensive, coordinated early childhood services.
5. To provide a safe and healthy physical environment for our children to live in, for example:
   - Communities are free of violence.
   - Children and families have access to healthy choices (*e.g.*, healthy foods, places to be physically active and be social).
6. Increased stable funding and resources for early childhood development.
7. That all parents and families feel prepared and supported.

What is currently working or helping us to reach this goal?

1. Providing opportunities to engage in and encourage discussion around the issues and topic, such as the *For the Sake of All* Community Action Forums.
2. Using data to communicate the issues and inform decision-making. Participants felt this was important because there is an expectation to use data in these conversations. However, it is important that data be presented in a clear, concise manner.
3. Continue to make the business case for why early childhood matters for all of us (*e.g.*, what are the economic costs and benefits).
4. The recent push for more of a focus on pre-school and its importance and role in early childhood development.
5. When resources are limited, it helps us to reach our goal by targeting those with the highest need first.
6. Participants mentioned a number of **specific programs, policies, or approaches** they felt are helping us to reach this goal:
   - Community schools approach:
     - Northside Community School
   - Home visitation programs and organizations that advocate for pre-natal care and support, such as:
     - Nurses for Newborns
     - Parents as Teachers
   - Head Start:
     - More information on Head Start programs in Missouri can be found at the Missouri Head Start Association website
   - Local partnership development and collaborative, coordinated approaches, such as:
     - Ready by 21® St. Louis
     - Deaconess Foundation
   - Local program approaches identified by participants as helping to achieve this goal:
     - Big Brothers, Big Sisters
     - Adopt-a-Family
     - Child Development Accounts (CDAs)
     - Flance Early Learning Center

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What is missing? What do we need to do differently?

1. We are missing a strong, coordinated effort across the region in the area of early childhood development, specifically participants reported:
    - There are lots of great programs and projects, but lack of a clear, collective approach.
    - It may be beneficial to identify a single entity that is charged with facilitating collaboration, funding, and sharing information and resources across our region.

2. We are missing access to high-quality services for all children, regardless of race or socio-economic status.

3. We are missing adequate funding levels and resources to support all children, so there is a need to identify more stable funding and resources. A couple of specific strategies were identified, such as:
    - When resources are limited, target those most in need first.
    - Engage the private/business sector to provide funding and resources to support the children in our region.

4. There is a lack of adequate support, training, and compensation of childcare and early childhood workforce (*e.g.*, lack of funding and support for on-going professional development).

5. There is a lack of adequate level of support or resources provided to parents or primary caretakers. For example:
    - Give parents the resources they need to be good parents and role models.
    - Provide opportunities to involve and engage fathers, in particular.
    - Services and resources for parents should match the level of need.

6. There could be more advocacy and community engagement activities or efforts around the topic of early childhood development. However, resources are needed to help support individuals or organizations in these efforts, such as the *For the Sake of All* action toolkits.

7. The disparities that exist related to access and outcomes due to race or socio-economic status are often missing in the early childhood development discussions and should be better communicated.

8. We need to help foster an ideological or cultural shift towards valuing all children and promote the idea that children are everyone's responsibility.