



South Suburban Innovation Zone 2015

Building Pipelines, Comprehensive Services

The South Suburban Innovation Zone has a population of more than five thousand children living at or below the 100 percent Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The South Suburban community is one of eleven Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Innovation Zones in Illinois, selected based on the level of concentrated need, presence of providers with a demonstrated interest in quality improvement, a history of collaboration and strong local support to strengthen early childhood systems and kindergarten readiness.

During 2015, the South Suburban Innovation Zone (IZ) focused on two specific goals: 1.) increasing the number of quality early learning centers in the community by moving existing childcare centers through the ExceleRate process and engaging centers that had not started the ExceleRate process; and 2.) building pipelines and comprehensive services.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN LEARNING PROGRAMS

Achievements during 2015 include:

- Hosted a training for Community of Practice participants to build knowledge of ExceleRate Illinois
- Conducted a training with Illinois Action for Children mental health consultants and providers about how to work with children with trauma.
- Visited childcare centers and school districts to build partnerships.
- Connected 15 childcare centers and school district in the Innovation Zones to their Innovation Zone quality coaches and other resources available through Illinois Action for Children.

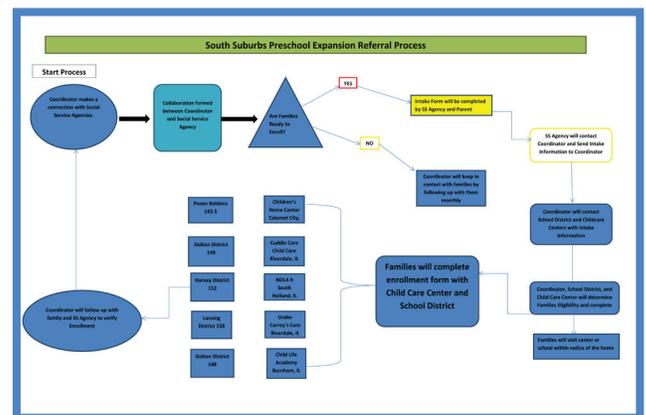
Moving forward, the South Suburban IZ continues to serve as a support and mentor to child care centers that are going through the ExceleRate Illinois, including hosting an information session for newly recruited child care centers to learn

more about the ExceleRate Illinois process, quality accreditation and the readiness questionnaire. The South Suburban IZ also will host additional training for Community of Practice members on data.

BUILDING PIPELINES AND COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

The South Suburban Innovation Zone was one of 18 Illinois communities to receive a Preschool Expansion Grant to serve those four-year-old children with the highest needs in the community, as a part of an overall community system designed for all families with children from pre-natal through third grade. At a minimum, these community systems include a pipeline for enrollment and development of comprehensive services.

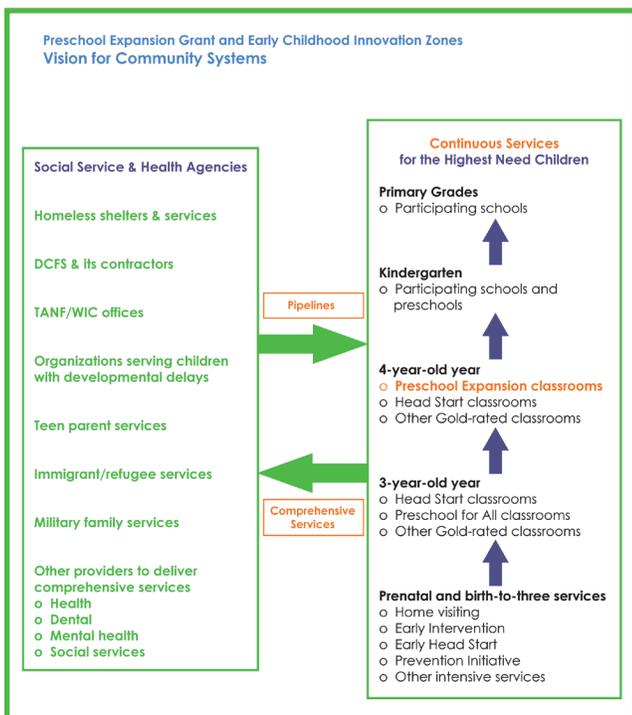
The South Suburban IZ is increasing the number of the target population enrolled in early learning and development programs through a referral pipeline. To create a referral pipeline into early learning centers and school districts, the South Suburban IZ met with school districts and child care centers to discuss the referral and intake process for enrollment of the high need, priority population children. In a monumental stride, the team, school districts and centers agreed on how the process of coordinated referral would work and standardized the intake forms.



Contact Us: Aimee Washington
 Partner Coordinator
Aimee.washington@actforchildren.org
 773.564.8866 (office number)

The South Suburban IZ has identified social services agencies with which to partner to obtain information about children from the priority population. The South Suburban IZ finalized a referral process between the core team and the social service partners and is in the process of collecting data on the priority population. Additional key agencies serving priority populations include homeless shelters, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and its contractors, TANF/WIC offices and organizations serving children with developmental delays.

The Preschool Expansion program envisions establishing strong working relationships with social service and health agencies in the community, going far beyond the traditional Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). In many cases, the “pipeline” agencies that refer children can also serve as the “comprehensive services” agencies supporting their families.



Currently, the team is working with the Illinois Action for Children mental health consultants to develop training that will provide directors in the South Suburban area, along with South Suburban IZ members, with the opportunity to learn more about and discuss mental health and other issues.

Utilizing DCFS data and analyzing a recent data survey, the South Suburban IZ, in partnership with Children’s Home + Aid, are identifying opportunities to improve enrollment rates of children involved in the welfare system from infants to age five in early childhood education programs. Six focus group discussions will be conducted this spring to gather information about stakeholder experiences with finding, referring to and enrolling in early learning programs. The findings will be used to develop support resources for caseworkers and help child welfare-involved families overcome barriers and access early childhood education. By including caseworkers, supervisors and different parent groups, a comparison of each group’s experiences and ideas will be used to design a more effective, targeted strategy

AN ABLe CHANGE

PILOT COMMUNITY

In May 2015, the South Suburban IZ joined the first cohort of ABLe Change pilot communities to build statewide capacity in systems change using common language. The ABLe Change Framework helps communities effectively address significant social issues affecting children, youth and families. Over the last nine months, the South Suburban IZ has participated in six face-to-face training sessions and additional coaching sessions to understand targeted problems and design system process improvements. Using powerful design and implementation principles, the IZ is working to improve data sharing about children with disabilities in centers and schools funded through Preschool for All.

ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD

INNOVATION ZONES

Illinois Action for Children supports each Innovation Zone in planning and implementing activities, while the Illinois Education Research Council will evaluate the success of the strategies chosen by each Zone. The Innovation Zone model uses action learning cycles, an iterative process, to quickly learn and adapt strategies for immediate use in each community. The federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant and local philanthropies provide funding.

www.actforchildren.org/for-providers/innovation-zones/

