

For Immediate Release

Chemung group designs system to prime young children for success in school

ELMIRA, NY– June 13, 2006 – The Chemung County School Readiness Project recently announced plans for an unprecedented initiative that will help every child start school with the solid foundation he or she needs to become a successful learner. The partnership is funded by the Community Foundation, Chemung County, New York State and the Elmira City School District. In addition to grant monies, the Community Foundation is providing a dedicated leader to manage the program. A governing committee of volunteers, known as the Readiness Council, is chaired by Carl T. Hayden. He brings more than 25 years of local and statewide involvement in student achievement work to this unique initiative.

The Chemung County School Readiness Project brings together representatives from the business, healthcare, human service, education and government sectors to tackle a glaring lack of pre-literacy skills in too many students entering Chemung County schools. Without these and other fundamental competencies they need to progress successfully as learners, children can become stuck in a hopeless effort to catch up. A full 39 percent of kindergartners entering the Elmira School District in the 2005-06 school year did not meet early literacy screening standards and, in the same district, 38 percent of 4th graders under-performed on English Language Arts assessments.

Decades of research shows that the foundation for success is built long before a child begins school. Positive relationships with adults, good health practices and developmentally appropriate play and learning in the first five years of life prepare children to thrive as students later on. These experiences literally exercise the brain, strengthening it for the growth and learning that lie ahead.

“The most important learning that occurs in the life of a child takes place between birth and age five (5),” remarked Mr. Hayden. “The Chemung County School Readiness Project is this community’s united effort to give every child born in this county an equivalent chance to succeed in school and in life. Nothing of its scope or scale has ever been attempted in New York.”

As it designs the ground-breaking system it envisions, the School Readiness Project considers the physical, social and cognitive factors that influence a child’s healthy development. Accordingly, four pillars provide the framework of the plan: quality early care and education, parent education, health care, and support for new parents provided in their homes by nurses. An implementation group driven by early learning experts, parents, health care providers and educators from the Elmira Heights, Elmira City and Horseheads School Districts will organize activities in each of these pillar categories. Staff responsible for advancing the tactics will be well-equipped with training and tools developed by the Cornell University Family Life Development Center. To ensure progress and results, an independent evaluator from Columbia University will assess the effectiveness of the initiative and recommend program modifications when necessary.

By addressing comprehensive early child development, the School Readiness Project will prime Chemung County’s young children to begin a successful journey of learning.

A complete list of funding and implementation partners is attached.

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The Chemung County School Readiness Project

Funding Partners

The Community Foundation of the Elmira-Corning Area
Chemung County
Elmira City School District
State of New York

Implementation Partners

Chemung County Child Care Council
Chemung County Department of Human Services
CIDS
The Community Foundation of the Elmira-Corning Area
Elmira City School District
Elmira Heights School District
EOP/Child Development Head Start
Family Life Development Center, Cornell University
Family Reading Partnership of Chemung Valley
Horseheads Central School District
Southern Tier Pediatrics
Teachers' College, Columbia University