



BUTLER COUNTY SUCCESS PROGRAM

August 18, 2015 Testimony

Cari Wynne, Supervisor

Butler County Educational Service Center Success Program

The Butler County Success Program currently partners with eight school districts in Butler County and one school district in Preble County. The program employs 20 staff members, who are referred to as liaisons and serves 53 school buildings across Butler and Preble Counties. Liaisons are housed in the partnering school buildings and are viewed by their school building staff as crucial team members. The Program is funded primarily by TANF dollars from the Butler County Department of Job and Family Services and by partnering school districts. In Preble County, the Program is funded by shared dollars from the National Trail Local School District and Preble County's Job and Family Services, Mental Health Board and Juvenile Court.

The Success Program served 1784 children in need within Butler and Preble Counties this past school year. Obviously, children who are better equipped to learn once they reach the classroom setting are more academically successful. It was with this thought in mind that the Success Program was created. The Program has been in existence under the direction of the Butler County Educational Service Center since the 2005-06 school year, 10 years. The mission of the Success Program is to remove non-cognitive barriers to learning in order to promote school success. The Program addresses factors which interfere with children being able to concentrate and focus when they are in the classroom. You can imagine how difficult it would be for students to learn if they arrive at school hungry, if they are homeless, if they have unmet medical or dental needs, etc. The Success Program removes these barriers so that students have more of an equal playing field with their peers, and a better chance of being successful in the classroom.

The Success Program serves families who are at the 200% of the Federal Poverty Guideline or lower. Referrals to the program are received from school staff. Many families have heard about the Program through "word of mouth" and take the initiative to contact the Program on their own. Once a referral is received, liaisons contact the parent or caregiver of the home to set up a home visit. Home visits are the preferred method for contact as they allow the liaison to understand a child's home environment. The liaison can then communicate any challenges of the home environment with school staff. A plan for meeting the child's needs is developed with the caretaker of the home and the liaison.

Liaisons help families to access community resources. However, liaisons not only connect families with resources, but more importantly they form relationships with families they are serving. These relationships are the key to the “success” of the Success Program. The relationships which are developed help support and move families toward making positive, effective changes. Liaisons go the extra mile by accompanying caretakers to places such as food pantries, mental health agencies, Job and Family Services, etc., so that parents will feel encouraged and supported. Accessing resources can often be scary for families, and having the support of a liaison helps families to move toward the point where they can access resources on their own. Liaisons are able to provide transportation for families to get to important places, such as doctor appointments, food pantries and school meetings. The Success Program does not offer a “cookie cutter” approach to serving families. The needs of families are very different; therefore, it is necessary for liaisons to address the unique needs of each family.

In addition to helping families connect with resources, liaisons provide support to families within the educational setting. Many of the parents served by the Success Program do not have positive memories of their own school involvement. These negative experiences often result in them not feeling comfortable within their child’s educational setting. The school setting can often be very intimidating for families, especially when they are faced with a team of professionals who use acronyms, a language they may not understand. Liaisons encourage parent involvement by ensuring them how important their input is in their child’s education. Liaisons will often attend school meetings with parents, will help them ask questions, and help them decipher the outcomes of meetings.

The Success Program has established numerous partnerships with community agencies, places of business and faith-based entities. These relationships have helped the Program meet the needs of families more comprehensively. Often, faith-based agencies can “fill in the gap” where social service agencies are not able to provide the services. For example, church partnerships offer things to Success families such as personal care items, school supplies, after school programming, rent and utility assistance, etc. Partnerships such as these are numerous and exist throughout Butler County.

Miami University conducts a program evaluation each year to determine if the Success Program is demonstrating effective outcomes. Results consistently show that behavioral referrals for Success students decrease. In addition, Success students have increased access to healthcare and show improvement in their reading, cognitive and social competence. Success parents increase their access to food, child care, and transportation, and also have more involvement and communication with school staff. Further, evaluation results show that Success students have demonstrated significant growth on a standardized academic assessment.

The Success Program is well respected by the partnering school districts. To quote one teacher, *“Year after year this program continues to make a difference in the lives of our students and families. This program provides the resources and support that we cannot provide through the classroom. It is so valuable in times of reductions within school districts to have this extra help.”*

I would like to conclude my testimony by sharing one example of a family which was served by the Success Program:

A liaison worked with a family of four children, in which the father had always worked and the mother had stayed home with the children. The father became ill and eventually passed away. The family had no family support, and their emotional and financial situation deteriorated significantly. To further complicate things, the family’s vehicle broke down and the school that some of the children attended did not offer bus service. As things spiraled out of control, the mother and two of the children became depressed. The liaison helped the family apply for benefits, so that they could have food and insurance coverage. She helped the mother enroll in grief counseling, and she helped the children receive therapy during their school day. Through a partnership with a church and a busing company, transportation was provided for the children to get to school, and through a partnership with a mechanic, mom’s vehicle was eventually repaired. Over time, mom began to work for a temp agency and now is employed full time doing clerical work. The family is also now functioning well from an emotional standpoint. One of the children who had been depressed will play football on his school team this year, and the family is now often seen at school events. The mother views her liaison as an “angel,” and is so appreciative of the help she received. She is grateful for the resources which she had assistance accessing but more importantly, she values the relationship she has had with her liaison. The relationship is what motivated the mother to keep going, even when things were difficult.

Again, relationships are the cornerstone of the Success Program, and what are so powerful when leading to positive changes for families.