



## Stratford School Readiness and Child Care Advisory Council

### January 19, 2010 ~ Meeting Minutes

**Members present:** Melissa Daskam, Lynne Goetz, Sue Gottlieb, Sally Head, Shamain Johnson, Christina Kazanas, Priscilla Long, Pat Naylor, Myra Watnick, Elaine Watson

**Guests:** Lynnette Baroni, Chuck Lindberg

**Discovery Liaison:** Sonja Ahuja

- I. **Welcome and Introductions** - Chairperson Sue Gottlieb called the meeting to order and introductions were made.
- II. **Approval of November 2009 Minutes** – The approval of minutes was tabled until the next meeting because there was not a quorum present.
- III. **Presentation and Discussion: Stratford Public Schools (SPS) Kindergarten Literacy Initiative** with Evelyn Russo, PhD, Reading Coach and former Literacy Specialist from Haskins Laboratories at Yale University.

Evelyn Russo gave a Power Point presentation entitled: **Effective Literacy Instruction: Information on Research-Based Practices**. Dr. Russo began her presentation by explaining that even after getting a Masters degree in bilingual and bicultural studies, and a PhD in curriculum and instruction, she still wasn't sure how to unlock the secret of reading in all children. It wasn't until she went to Haskins Laboratories at Yale University that she learned what she needed to help all children read.

Through Haskins Laboratories, a Yale School of Medicine affiliated research institute, Russo learned that reading focuses on speech and language, and she discovered the importance of phonemic awareness. She explained that humans are hardwired to speak, but not to read – so children must be taught a code in order to “lift the words off the page”. Included in this code are phonological awareness, sound-symbol recognition, word meaning and letter recognition. All of these skills are developed in different parts of the human brain, and since all of the Haskins Laboratories work is based on research, classroom teachers must make use of research-to-practice instructional activities to connect all these functions.

Both Russo and Elaine Watson, SPS K-6 Curriculum Coordinator, report that Haskins and Russo's work with Stratford kindergarten children is showing success. Two take home messages from the Power Point presentation include: *(WE)...Cannot blame a child for not responding to an intervention which is not based on SCINCE or provided with FIDELITY and Cannot blame a teacher who is unaware of scientific based intervention, and in order for no child to be left behind – we must ensure that NO TEACHER IS LEFT BEHIND.* The Council enthusiastically embraced Russo's messages.



- IV. School Readiness Grant Report** – Priscilla Long, School Readiness Liaison, reported in Michael Fay’s absence. All of the additional five school readiness spaces are full, and there are several more full-pay children at each site.
- V. Discovery Grant Report** - Sue Gottlieb announced that the Executive Steering Committee (ESC) had voted on pursuing Option 3 on the next Graustein Discovery Grant. The ESC had originally thought that Stratford would choose Option 2a that focused on more planning. However, the group is experiencing “planning fatigue” and could not garner enough support/workers to continue that process. Option 3 is project focused, and provides up to \$7500/year in funding. Since Stratford has over \$30,000 in carry-over money, the community is not eligible for additional grant funding over the next four years. The purpose of Discovery Community Option 3 is to focus a specific project that might improve results for children birth- age eight. Priscilla Long spoke to Graustein Program Officer Carmen Siberon earlier in the day, and Carmen said there is a possibility that a community might work on more than one project at a time, spending more than the \$7500 yearly allotment that is in the grant. She will follow up on that point.

The SRACCAC members present were very enthusiastic about the Haskins literacy work and some expressed an interest in possibly working on a project focused on it. The SPS reported that they are doing more professional development in this area and are including their preschool partners. It was suggested that some professional development focus on the birth to three population – both parents and professionals. Time ran out before there was any resolution of the topic. This grant proposal is due to William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund on February 26, 2010. More discussion is needed to firm up potential projects and determine who will write the proposal.

- VI. Adjournment** – The next meeting of the Stratford School Readiness and Child Care Advisory Council is Tuesday, March 16, 2010, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. in room 110 at the Birdseye Municipal Complex.