

Johnson County Empowerment Board

Tuesday, December 15, 2009 9:00 – 10:00 am

Correctional Services (Department of Correction) 2501 Holiday Road, Coralville, Iowa

Facilitated conversation between Iowa City Community School District, Neighborhood Centers of Johnson Co, and Johnson Co Empowerment

- Agenda: (For more information, please contact Annie Tucker at (319) 541-9434)
- Self-introductions
- Ground rules
- Listing issues and concerns
- What's next

Introductions: Annie Tucker asked that each person introduce themselves and state what they hope comes of this meeting. Each person in attendance responded.

- Johnson Co Empowerment Board (JCEB) Members Present: Sally Weyer, Lance Bolton, Cheryl Whitney, Nadine Fisher, Carol Nordquist, Justine Retz
- Johnson County Empowerment Board (JCEB) Staff Present: Laurie Nash
- Community Providers (CP): Iowa City Community School District (ICCSA) Staff Present: Jim Behle; Neighborhood Centers of Johnson Co (NCJC) Staff Present: Brian Loring, Diane Dingbaum, Sue Freeman, Andy Coghill-Behrens
- Shanell Wagler, State Technical Assistance Staff for Empowerment joined the group and participated by speaker phone at 9:15 AM.

Ground Rules: Ms. Tucker asked what ground rules are needed so people can speak honestly. The fact that this is a posted public meeting means that minutes will be taken by the JCEB secretary and will be posted on the Empowerment web site. None of the participants objected.

One of the JCEB members asked for recognition that we are all present because we share a common commitment to the well being of children. This EB member stated that she feels that certain providers have come to view the JCEB as the "bad parent".

A CP requested that the power differences be acknowledged. She expressed concern that this conversation could impact future JCEB funding decisions, and there is a fear of retaliation.

One of JCEB members stated that the providers have gone "over our heads" by contacting legislators. This member stated that legislators have confronted her about the actions taken by the JCEB.

A CP stated that when he felt they were not heard by the JCEB he spoke with a legislator. This person also stated that on one occasion he spoke with Kris Bell, State Director of Empowerment, and then Ms. Bell spoke with Senator Bolkcom. Another CP stated that after not receiving a response from the JCEB after he spoke at a meeting, he felt he had not been heard by the JCEB. He stated that he learned there was no appeal process available given the nature of his concern.

A CP stated that he and another CP met with a JCEB member and then received a phone call from a JCEB officer and was "dressed down" by that officer. He stated that he feels JCEB members have been disrespectful during board meetings and at other times. He stated that he observed JCEB members making disrespectful nonverbal responses such as eyes rolling. He stated that a JCEB member wrote to a legislator and said that funding should not be given to the ICCSD because it was their practice not to work with local agencies. The legislator shared that letter with school officials. The CP stated that the ICCSD has a long history of working with local agencies.

A participant stated that sometimes it is stated by a CP that "someone else" has a specific concern. She stated that it is hard to address concerns when they are not stated by the person with the concern.

Listing issues and concerns: Ms. Tucker asked the group to move on to the list of issues and concerns. She noted that we have just one hour for this meeting and 30 minutes had passed.

The ICCSD staff stated that when Empowerment was set up it was intended to coordinate services for young children and to address the fragmentation of services. He cited these concerns:

1) He stated that the recipients of the 4 year old preschoolers funding must go to 4 different agencies to seek funding for full day programming. He stated that he realizes that the school district is part of that process. He asked that the JCEB balance flexibility with state rules so access is easier for families. He stated that he wants the school district to be viewed as an advocate for 4 year old preschoolers, and at times he has felt that empowerment has acted to pit agencies against each other.

2) He stated that the JCEB has excessive reporting requirements. He recognizes the need for accountability but JCEB's requirements are more rigorous than the federal and state grants the school receives. He questioned the need for quarterly reports. Shanell Wagler spoke to this issue and stated that last year the state implemented a midyear reporting requirement so the fiscal picture would be available. She stated that the Annual Report which is due September 15 must include state mandated performance data on Empowerment funded programs.

3) He spoke to the recent policy changes which impose financial penalties. He stated that he understands the intent but stated that it lends a punitive nature to the relationship between the JCEB and providers.

4) He stated that the school seems to be viewed as biased and not willing to share funding. He stated that this is not the case and the schools are partnering with 10 agencies and have been in partnerships with agencies for many years.

A JCEB member stated that the Board was put on probationary status at the last Redesignation, and must be concerned with compliance. He stated that he is new to the board and has heard that enforcement was different in the past but the JCEB must evaluate each program on its own merits. He recognizes that the providers are competing for funding.

Ms. Tucker reviewed her posted key points:

- Fragmented services-disadvantages/barrier to families
- Local Empowerment Board-balance-make a user friendly system
- Agencies pitted against each other
- ICCSD perceived as biased and not a good partner with other agencies re preschool funding
- JCEB recognize provider needs as well as consumer needs
- Reporting by providers: balance accountability (frequency and rigor and time required); state requires 6 mo ck in; local board discretion re what and how frequent; end of year annual report due Sept 15.
- ICCSD noted that twice a year reporting is workable.

A CP stated that contracts have changed w/o discussion or chance for provider input. She stated that they feel they must search through all new contracts to discover what has changed from prior contracts. She stated that this has lead to them feeling set up to fail. She stated an example with the PREP contact which the NCJC just received from the JCEB office. She stated that PREP is an 8 week summer program, and the new contract requires reporting on Aug 1 and again on Sept 1. She stated they have had this contract 9 years, and suddenly the contract is different but there was no discussion about the changes. Laurie responded that contracts were sent out with changes highlighted. The CP stated that they found that not all changes were highlighted. Another contract change was with the Family Support Program which went from semiannual reporting to quarterly reporting.

A CP asked how /why did the changes occur. Laurie stated that there was a joint meeting with the Parent Ed work group and providers. Another CP stated that there was conversation between providers and the work group but no decisions were made at the joint meeting. Laurie stated that the JCEB made the decisions which resulted in changes to the contracts. She also stated that because PREP is provided in 2 fiscal years, it has the 2 report dates so we can have complete and accurate annual reports. Laurie stated that in the past we just included it in 1 annual report but that was technically not correct. Laurie spoke to the JCEB's difficulties with the Redesignation process last year and that the JCEB learned that if the annual report is not accurate/complete then all our programs are in danger of losing funding.

Shanell spoke to accountability changes during the last 2-4 years. She stated that at the state level they need to be able to say how the empowerment funding is making a difference. She stated that they are also asking more questions to ensure that information being reported is valid. She stated that the state has implemented a state-wide reporting tool for the Family Support Program.

A CP stated that he understands the need for accountability but that not being informed about contract changes has been difficult, and he believes that "trap doors" have been built into contracts which have resulted in financial penalties.

A CP stated that they have many other grants and contracts and they are very conscientious of contract details. She stated that they feel they are collecting data that is not being used to improve outcomes for kids and that the data is just a compliance requirement.

A CP stated that they feel they are being misrepresented at meetings. She has been reviewing minutes and found that inaccurate information has been stated about their agency's services. She stated that it is difficult to attend all the workgroup and board meetings but it seems to be the only way to ensure accuracy. She stated that she found inaccuracies in work group minutes and then went to previous meeting minutes and found a pattern. She gave an example that happened in March 09. She stated that Laurie had called and asked them about their Family Support Program funding and why they were under spending. Diane responded that they had hired staff and their projections indicated that they would spend their allocation. She stated that the minutes reported that Laurie stated that the NCJC would have \$35,000 left at the end of the year. A representative of the NCJC stated that he had looked at the JCEB fiscal reports and saw that their agency's spending was comparable to other agencies (in terms of % of dollars expended). The CP stated that her response to finding their agency misrepresented in the minutes was to attend all the meetings so she could ensure that JCEB and workgroup members were given accurate information. This person also stated that she was worried about how the JCEB was viewed by consumers. One of the workgroup minutes made reference to the "Great unwashed". She expressed concern that persons affiliated with the JCEB would use this type of language. This person stated that the common vision seems to have been lost and that the focus is on whether there is a need/reason for fiscal penalties. She attended workgroup meetings when the quarterly reports were discussed and the question was not whether the service was effective but if there was any reason to impose a fiscal penalty.

Laurie stated because we were given Conditional status at our Redesignation, we feel we must focus more on details.

A JCEB member asked for a review of the reasons for the Conditional status. Laurie stated that the plan did not include the actual dollar amounts for non JCEB funded services provided in our community and that in a couple places the plan did not have information in the correct format.

Shanell stated that the state office was viewed as not consistently applying the Iowa Code (in prior years of doing recertifications). She stated that she recognizes that the local board may feel similar to how providers are feeling.

A CP asked what the Conditional status means for our Empowerment project. Shanell stated that they had no concerns about our project and she knew the board would address the items that lead to the Conditional status. She stated that they plan to move to a different process for future redesignations and use Levels of Excellence.

Laurie stated that the State's Redesignation process results in one of 3 levels: Not Designated, Conditional Designation, and Full Designation. She stated that if we had been undesignated we would have lost all our funding. A participant asked if there had ever been a board that had been undesignated. Shanell stated that Decatur Co did become undesignated after about a 3 year corrective action process. She stated that the state office worked with local providers so that critical services could continue. A new board was formed and providers were not allowed to be members of the new board.

A CP asked if the JCEB was actually doing well. Shanell stated "yes". Shanell stated that if the state office had serious concerns they would be attending every board meeting and would follow up with written correspondence to the board.

Ms Tucker reviewed her key points:

- Recent policy re: financial penalties harms relationships with providers and is viewed as punitive
- Contract changes with no discussion
- JCEB be respectful when people speak
- Contract changes no notice and penalties added makes providers feel as supplicants, not partners
- Is data used to make changes to benefit children?
- Meetings: we (CP) feel we need to represent ourselves due to misrepresentation in work group minutes.
- Concerns about how our consumers are being referred to "the great unwashed"; public record/disturbing tone
- What is the vision
- Committee meetings focus on errors/data/money rather than positive outcomes for kids

- JCEB issues with state: at redesignation did not have actual dollar numbers coming into agencies from other sources and annual report must include reporting on outcomes
- Shanell suggests cc'ing other agencies/board

What is next: A CP stated that Action Steps should be identified and a document identifying key points should be developed. A CP asked if the JCEB secretary would create a document that could be used to create a mutually acceptable action plan. The JCEB members agreed that these minutes would be shared with the providers and would be posted on the web site per usual procedures. The JCEB members stated that they will discuss next steps at the Executive Committee meeting on January 11 and at the Board meeting on January 21.

In wrapping up, Ms Tucker asked each participant to make a comment regarding their current feelings about the issues and process.

Participants thanked Ms. Tucker for her contribution to this process. (She typically charges \$150 for mediation services but agreed to facilitate this meeting as a contribution.)

The meeting concluded at 10:30 AM.

Minutes submitted by Cheryl Whitney, JCEB secretary. cwhitne@gmail.com