Illinois’ Early Childhood Innovation Zones: Early Wins & Lessons Learned So Far

Part 3 of 3: Quality - Strategies for Improving Early Childhood Programs
Agenda

• Innovation Zone Overview
• Stories from the Innovation Zones
  – Aurora
  – South Suburbs
• Response from Office of Early Childhood Development
• Q & A
• Closing
All participants will be muted.

Technical issues: type your issue in the chat box or send an email to Maya.wilson@actforchildren.org

Type your question here, then hit “send”
Innovation Zone Overview

Leah Pouw,
Director of Program Innovation
Illinois Action for Children
Aurora Innovation Zone

Trish Rooney
Director
SPARK Aurora Early Childhood Collaboration
SPARK
Strong, Prepared And Ready for Kindergarten
Partner ★ Plan ★ Act
an Illinois Action for Children Community Systems Development Initiative
The mission of SPARK Aurora Early Childhood Collaboration is to empower our diverse families and children to attain full success in learning and life by ensuring all of Aurora’s young children have equal access to exemplary Early Childhood Care and Education.

**Executive Committee** - Guided by a Charter. Representation: Mayor, Fox Valley United Way, School Districts, Community Agencies, Child Care Programs, Head Start, Faith Base Program, Parent Liaison.

Strategically guides the direction of SPARK.

**Parent Council** has been incorporated into the SPARK overall structure to ensure that the Collaboration is better able to address the needs of families through the guidance of parent leaders that represent an “authentic parent voice.” Parent Liaison is chosen and appointed to the Executive Committee.

**Focus Areas**

**Family Outreach (Subcommittee)**
Ensure all families are aware of the importance of early learning and connecting them with programs and services.

Identify & Connect high needs children to early childhood services, i.e., Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Developmental Screening, Home Visitation, (HV) Preschool for All (PFA), Women Infant and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program, etc.

**Program Improvement (Subcommittee)**
Support quality improvement in early childhood education and care programs in Aurora by supporting program in their participation in the IL Excelerate Program (aka Quality Rating Improvement System).

- Development of Leadership Seminar
- Mentoring
- Cohort Participation

**Program Coordination (Subcommittee)**
Coordinate efforts among the school districts’ early childhood programs, Head Start, child care providers and other early learning programs to maximize both impact and efficiency.

Increase local agency cross-referral to maximize resources and supports for families through a deeper understanding of collective impact and community systems development.

Strategic plan outlines strategies and benchmarks for each of the SPARK focus areas (goals).
Aurora Innovation Zone: Program Quality

Project Goals:
Increasing participation in ExceleRate IL by targeting leadership development and creating ExceleRate cohorts to ensure more high-need children receive "quality" child care.

Project Objectives:
• Develop Leadership trainings and community of practice dialogues to support, develop and strengthen leadership skill of center directors and leadership team within programs.
• Develop ExceleRate Cohorts guided by Mentors and CCR&R Quality Specialist

Planning Team:
Carla Diez Barb Biles
Keri Anderson Melissa Letts
Margaret Hanly Jill White
Danette Connors Carrie Pierce

Outcomes:
Leadership Participation: 41 unique participants at 20 sessions. 20 participants attended more than one session.
Cohort Participation: 13 programs

Outcomes for ExceleRate:
Gold – Jugando Se Aprende, Aurora Early Learning Center, KinderCare #300884, #301501
Silver – Aurora Montessori School & Hometown Child Care
Bronze – Little Explorers Early Learning Center
Aurora Innovation Zone: ExceleRate Illinois

**GOLD**
- KinderCare Learning Center #300884
- KinderCare Learning Center 301501
- KinderCare Learning Center 301630
- Jugando Se Aprende
- Aurora Early Learning Center
- Brokaw Early Learning Center (D308)
- Todd Early Childhood Center (D129)
- Prairie Children Preschool (D204)
- Early Childhood Center (D131)
  - Gates Elementary School
  - Child Service Center (CSC)
  - O'Donnell Elementary School
  - Johnson Elementary School
  - Oak Park Elementary School

**SILVER**
- Aurora Montessori School
- Hometown Child Care

**BRONZE**
- Little Explorers Learning Center, Inc

For more information about ExceleRate visit: [http://www.excelerateillinois.com/](http://www.excelerateillinois.com/)
Aurora Early Learning Programs’ Movement through ExceleRate Illinois

July 2014
- Gold: 1
- Silver: 5
- Bronze: 0
- Licensing: 39
- Total # of eligible child care programs: 45

October 2015
- Gold: 14
- Silver: 2
- Bronze: 1
- Licensing: 34
- Total # of eligible child care programs: 51
Aurora Innovation Zone: Strategy Adaptation

**Leadership Academy**

**Academy Goal:**
To support early childhood professionals in their quest to become effective and empowered leaders who inspire others to achieve high quality early childhood care and education programs.

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**Community of Practice**

Aurora Early Childhood

**Community of Practice Goal:**
- Model
- Connect
- Involve
- Support
- Encourage


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**Partner • Plan • Act**
an Illinois Action for Children Community Systems Development Initiative
Aurora Innovation Zone: What have we learned

- Directors and staff need and benefit from the support of a mentor. To be successful at attaining a Circle of Quality, it has to start with the Leadership.
- Transitioning directors from Managers to Leaders is the key to moving a program through ExceleRate.
- Get out of the practice of just referring to Gold programs as “the quality” programs. All programs should be acknowledge as striving for Quality if they are actively participating in ExceleRate. All efforts should be acknowledge to build motivation and momentum.
- Quality Specialist provide support when programs are working towards Silver, this practice needs to actually begin as they move from licensing to Bronze. Typically programs at this level have directors with the least amount of leadership experience, therefore lack the skill to support and motivate their own staff. Furthermore they may not have a foundational understanding of “best practices.” We recommend that ExceleRate provide program support at all levels so that staff are continually moving from “concept to practice” right from the start.
Aurora Innovation Zone: Contact information

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- To learn more about SPARK visit www.sparkaurora.org
- Our recent power point about SPARK can be found here: