

HRSA/MCHB 2007 FEDERAL/STATE PARTNERSHIP MEETING

Building Blocks for Promising Practice Models

October 14 - 17, 2007

The State Early Child Comprehensive Systems

Initiative (ECCS) as an Incubator for Best Practices

THEODORA PINNOCK: Well, what they did was they put a hyperactive pediatrician after lunch to talk to you. So I'm going to be your entertainment for the next 10 minutes. Actually, I want to talk to you about what's really important, I think, not only to everybody in this room, but I don't know--I don't remember if it was Dr. Peterson or Dr. van Dyck, one of the two said today, "The investment in our future are our children." And that certainly is true.

I try to use themes to tell stories and I'm going to use two themes that are really important to me. One is sports, and I know I'm coming to the Washington, D.C. area and the main sport is football, but we're going to use basketball today because I had come from a state that has the best women's basketball, college basketball team in the country. And the other theme is music. I had music taught to me for about 12 years. And I think music helps tell us stories, so I'm going to use the musical theme. And most of you remember the story of Michael Jordan and the cartoon characters were playing the aliens and the prize was planet Earth. And we're going to switch the players and the prize around, and I'm going to tell you a little about what we're doing in Tennessee. My Michael Jordan is

Governor Phil Bredesen and he is the owner of our team. The head coach, my head coach is Commissioner Susan Cooper. And she just came to be head coach in January and is already doing some incredible things. And I have an immediate offensive coordinator by the name of Dr. Cathy Taylor who has an MCH background. And I think the Department of Health which was going in some directions is really going to keep moving there. And one of the ways we're going to do it is with our ECCS system. The alien players that are trying to take over the prize, which are our kids, are obesity, poverty, racism, you name it. Those are the aliens and we're playing for our prize, and here we go. And I think you all remember this tune.

I'm going to give you some pre-game stats. I'm going to talk about game time and that's what ECCS is doing. We don't have Best Practices yet, but we have some very promising practices. And even though ECCS in Tennessee had a very slow start, I think we actually did a better job of convincing the folks outside of the Department of Health of the importance of ECCS. And then we had to go back and convince the folks inside the Department of Health what a good tool and a good organization ECCS might be for building that system and building those partnerships for our kids. And then I'm going to get you to dream with me to talk about where we want to get, which is winning for our kids.

Tennessee has some pretty bad stats to start our pre-game. We're 39th in the country for children in poverty, 37th for the percent of mothers receiving late or

no prenatal care, 29th for child deaths, 43rd for the percent of children in single-parent families, 42nd for low birth weight babies, 46th for preterm births, 43rd for infant mortality, and we just came up from 47th. I'm beginning to hate the 40s. I was so glad to be 40 and finally get there, but since I've been in Tennessee, and I came from Texas, I hate 40. And we rank 43rd overall for our overall health status.

The National Center for Children in Poverty has said that 55 percent of our Tennessee children under the age six are in child care and they're considered low income. Eighteen percent of our children use child care and the development fund subsidy and that's through our Department of Human Services as compared to the nation at 12 percent. Sixty-seven percent of all our children have two parents working outside of the home and 61 percent of our children under age six have two working parents which result in a high percentage of our kids in daycare.

This is the worst story I can tell you about in Tennessee. We have babies dying and babies of color died 2.5 times more. And you see that trend, there--we really lead in U.S., and even though we're finally moving down some in the right direction, we're near--we're not near that 7.0, which was an objective we set by our state to try to improve infant mortality, let alone the 4.5 for the Healthy People 2010. So we have a long way to go.

It's a great disparity in Tennessee just like Dr. van Dyck said earlier, and you can see the number 17.4 percent of our children of color per 100--per 1,000 live births versus 6.4 percent of their white counterparts. So, we have a problem. We, too, are big in Tennessee, unfortunately. Our kids are really big and the Surgeon General said childhood obesity has reached epidemic rates. He certainly must've passed through Tennessee before. He said that 11 percent of our low-income Tennessean children under the age of five were overweight. And the Department of Health has (inaudible) with the Department of Education to look at the body mass index of about 90 percent of our schools. And guess what we found, over 42 percent of our school children are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

For some of us that are in the room, I see a lot of you are too young to remember this cartoon, but for some of us in the room you see our friends Fat Albert and his comrades, and in Tennessee we'd had three Fat Alberts in that picture. And you see his friend on the other end on the opposite end of that picture. We'd have at least three of his friend in that picture. So that picture of eight would've tremendously changed in Tennessee.

Our kids in our system of care will depend on one group of folks, and I'm going to use some music to tell you who that group is. ECCS would not work if we don't do something for our kids. If we don't build that system of care, if we don't build those partnerships, our kids will really do--will lose that basketball game.

Again, as Chris and others have said, we have five core elements of ECCS. And in Tennessee, we have worked to utilize those five elements to really put something together. And both Joe and Chris know that our ECCS Advisory Committee is really big, and when I say really big, it has 140 members. And you said you'll never get anything done. That was wrong. We actually started out with about 80 members and we asked at our beginning meetings who was not at the table that should be at the table. And our folks told us about 60 other organizations. So we said everybody has to be at the table. Now, we've called it down some to an executive committee of about 30, but that's how we get things done. But the real, I think, foundation of our partnership is that mostly everybody is already at the table for ECCS. So they are already included and when we get ready to work together on different initiatives, we have some of the main decision makers already there. We also started out with all the commissioners of the child serving departments saying upfront that they would commit to this effort. And so that's where we started. We have done collaborations with our SIDS program in our state and we are with ECCS taking SIDS information or safe sleep practices to all our 54--over 5,400 child care. And unfortunately, in Tennessee, our day cares don't seem to know the difference that kids should be asleep on their backs any more than our parents. And so that's very important. Over the last three years we've lost at least three children in day cares that were asleep on their stomach. So this is an--a very important effort. Our home visiting programs have been growing in Tennessee, because, I told you, we have very bad infant

mortality, and ECCS is an integral part of that program to not only make referrals as it partners with the other child care serving agencies. So, it's been our big advocate outside of the Department of Health to get people or to get families in the home visiting. It's partnered with Head Start. We were part of a national team last January and we have worked with Head Start to put together a little preventive dental practice tool kit for the day cares and for the Head Starts and that came out of the state team.

ECCS recently helped win a grant through Robert Wood Johnson and the National Governors Association--excuse me--and we called it our Gold Sneaker Initiative. And again, it's to help make those over 5,400 day cares a Gold Sneaker Day Care. And they can utilize what it is will be policy--specific policy that has physical activity guidelines, and if the agency meets those guidelines, then they'll become a Gold Sneaker Agency. And if the kids--we also have individual benchmarks for the children and the staff. If the children and the staff meet their individual benchmarks, they'll be Gold Sneaker kids and Gold Sneaker staff. So we're really excited about this.

We have collaborated with our governor to place, and also Dolly Parton, who many of you know, started a foundation to place books in children's homes and essentially every child born in Tennessee has the possibility of getting a book a month from the time they signed up until the time they're five years of age. And

ECCS has put that word out among its partners so that we can get books and improve our literacy rate.

One of our new opportunities is we will become the lead agency, along with our Department of Education and Department of Human Services partners, in a Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning Grant. We're applying for that grant as we speak. And that will also bring specific training to daycare centers on social and emotional learning. And even though ECCS doesn't necessarily have the people or the staff, we were actually asked by our sister partners to be the lead agency, because it seemed to make sense to them that we are helping coordinate that system of care. So we're excited about that.

We have also had a major reform in our early intervention, our Part C program in our state. And we helped both in the service, part of that reform committee, and now helping to implement the new structure. So ECCS, despite the fact that we're slow in starting, and I know Joe and Dina and Chris can smile at that, it's really coming into its own in Tennessee.

Well, this is where we want to get--you heard that swoosh in the basket. I'm going to borrow a little Winston Churchill and I'm going to put this Texan, and now a Tennessean, with it and I will tell you that never have so many needed so much from so few. And I'll ask you that question. A lot of people are playing in

the game, but if we do what we need to do with ECCS and our other child serving programs, guess what we'll get to do in a few years.

We will big hit time when the kids are not dying and we see children not socially and emotionally scarred, when we see our kids achieving what they are able to achieve. And I want to be here to celebrate with you and we could be dancing in that, but we really won't need any other ECCS program. Thanks very much.