

# Bridging Child Welfare and Education Systems

Minnesota professionals provide creative strategies for improving collaboration across systems

## Who

Social service and education professionals working with children and families.

## What

Eight focus group conversations in fall 2014 held across Minnesota.\*

## Why

To gather professionals' expertise and recommendations on collaboration across child welfare and education systems.

\*All quotes from focus group participants

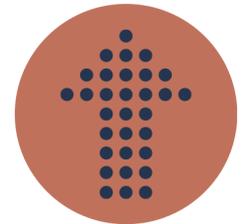
## Common Challenges

Time • Money • Hierarchy • Rules and Regulations  
• Data Reporting and Sharing

## High Quality

Professionals work long and hard to provide the highest quality services for children and families, despite numerous obstacles.

"Relationship-building amongst professionals is so important...we all have different perspectives, and we all have different roles, but how can we all work together to make that happen?"



## System Barriers



Child welfare and education system structures, rules, and regulations hinder high-quality social services and education for children and families.

"It doesn't have to be perfect, we know that, but just some of the systems have to change to really, truly meet the needs of the people that we [serve] in our communities."

## Data, Data, Data

Data reporting and sharing practices serve as barriers rather than resources to professionals. Reliable up-to-date information is a valuable missing piece of high-quality practice.

"I've always wondered if there's a way that school professionals...can get a heads up...if we would have known, we might have set up some different structures."



# Creative Solutions



Professionals have developed creative, functional strategies for addressing the complex problems facing child welfare and education systems. Many of the strategies involve building relationships within and across systems.

"It's not about how educated you are, it's about how compassionate, how empathetic, and how patient and supportive you can be."

## Tips for New Professionals

### Make connections, always

When starting a new job, reach out repeatedly to people across organizations and systems to get the lay of the land. This aids in gaining knowledge about different systems.

"One of my first [recommendations] would be making lots and lots of phone calls. If you sit in your office and wait for connections to happen they're not going to."

### Figure out who has the information you need

Sometimes the person at the front desk has the information you need.

"You need to know who to talk to in every school. In one school it may be the principal; in another school it may be the social worker or counselor; in another school it's the [person] sitting at the front desk."



### If at first you don't succeed, try, try...and try again

Sometimes you won't get through to other professionals right away. Keep trying and remember that others are doing the best they can.

"A big piece of the communication is making sure that in my head I am trusting that the other [person] is doing their very best...I think sometimes it's really easy for us just in our frustration to jump to 'they're not doing anything' or to start pointing fingers."

### Learn about other professionals' roles in your families' lives

Often misunderstandings about roles can lead to increased tension and frustration. Talk to professionals from other systems about what you can and cannot do in your social service role.

"I think there's some misconceived ideas once in a while about what each system can do; you know, [people say things like] 'I think the school system should be able to do ABC and D' and 'I think they think social services can do ABC and D.' Without having those conversations you've got those preconceived ideas [about what] they should have done."

### Join social service collaboratives

Collaboratives are a great way to meet and build relationships with other professionals working with children and families in your area.

"Have communication. Seek them out. Don't wait for them to seek you out. Go introduce yourself. Go ask people how you can be helpful as a new person as part of a collaborative."

To read the full focus group report, visit <http://z.umn.edu/cwelcFGreport>  
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