Community Connections: A Case Study

Instructions: Read the case study and answer the questions that follow.

Community Connections Head Start and Early Head Start program is in the third year of its five-year project period. One of the goals the agency identified at the start of the project period was to "improve the program-wide attendance rate to support improved child outcomes and promote habits for future school success."

This goal was identified based on data from the internal self-assessment and external community assessment. The self-assessment data from the last project period showed a decline in attendance rates at the agency's three Head Start sites and the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership site. Based on the agency's internal data tracking, a large number of children were absent more than 10 percent of the program year. External data from interviews with the local school department indicated there was a high rate of chronic absenteeism among students, particularly those from minority and low-income families.

While reviewing professional development as part of the self-assessment, the agency noted staff were not receiving training on family engagement strategies designed to foster parental confidence and develop parents' skills in promoting children's learning and development. In particular, there had been no training for parents about the importance of children's regular attendance, as required in the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). There also were no activities to support or acknowledge regular attendance.

Recommendations from the self-assessment led to the development of several objectives to support this goal. The objectives included the addition of training to educate staff on the importance of and program-wide strategies to support consistent attendance. Plans were made to train staff on the development of individual attendance plans that acknowledged families' individual challenges. Another objective outlined plans for working with community partners to identify and implement a community-wide attendance campaign. In accordance with goal objectives and the HSPPS, Community Connections also analyzed attendance data to monitor the reasons for health-related absences and provide preventive education and support to address these health concerns when appropriate.

Data from the community assessment and self-assessment also helped to strengthen the agency's coordinated approach to professional development. The program was able to ensure a range of training opportunities relating to family engagement, along with training in other areas that support goal attainment and positive child outcomes.

By the year-three self-assessment, the agency has found that all but one center had improved attendance, with both a higher average daily attendance and five percent fewer children absent over the course of the program year. The center that continues to struggle with attendance is also having difficulty maintaining full enrollment. Reviewing the accomplishments at the two centers with improved attendance will help identify promising practices that may be replicated in the center that is still struggling.

The recent community assessment update included information on a new manufacturing plant in a nearby town. A substantial number of employees relocated to this plant from one in a different state. Many of the workers are immigrants who have recently moved to the community with their families. The community assessment team identified local agencies working with these families that may be potential partners for Community Connections.

After reviewing this information, the self-assessment team recommended exploring opportunities to serve children in this neighboring town. The team was also eager to identify new potential partners that could support the services Head Start provides to currently enrolled and potential new families.

As part of the self-assessment process, the team looked at monitoring data with a focus on systemic concerns, identifying areas where additional problem-solving was necessary. The team reviewed child outcomes data showing improvements in comparison to the first two years of the project period. Team members also looked at professional development and family engagement activities for the past year, noting the new focus on supporting family engagement and partnerships with families. After reviewing progress on all of the program goals, the team was eager to move forward with recommendations for the upcoming year.

Questions

1. What are your general impressions of the way Community Connections has used its self-assessment and community assessment data?

2. What additional data do you think the agency needs?

3. What recommendations would you have for Community Connections?

4. What do you think the agency's first steps should be in following through on your recommendations?

5. What new goals or objectives might Community Connections develop based on this new data?

Optional Activities

1. Identify the data sources used in the self-assessment. Are they consistent with the data sources required for self-assessment in the HSPPS?

2. Classify the recommendations you have made for Community Connections, putting each one under "Progress on Goals and Objectives," "Systemic Issues," or "Innovations."