

*Enhancing Collaborative Relationships*  
*between*  
*Schools, Partner Agencies & Families*

**20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Advancing School  
Mental Health  
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# Learning Objectives

- \* Provide an overview of the barriers and challenges that impact effective collaboration between school, partner agencies and families.
- \* Provide an overview of strategies and techniques to support relationship building/enhancement between schools, partner agencies and families.
- \* Provide a forum for participants to share their experiences and best practices in relation to collaboration between schools, partner agencies and families.

# Wediko Children's Services, Inc.

- \* **Wediko Children's Services** is a non-profit organization committed to improving children's lives.
- \* Using a **strength-based approach**, Wediko responds to the needs of children who face repeated obstacles to development due to emotional, behavioral, learning, and environmental, issues.
- \* Through a **continuum of flexible services** and multi-disciplinary training programs, Wediko develops enduring partnerships with children, families, and schools.
- \* Wediko strives to **capture success** and restore a sense of **competence and hope**.

# Wediko (cont.)

- \* Wediko Children's Services provides a continuum of flexible services in NH, MA, and NYC:
  - \* NH Summer Program founded in 1934
  - \* School-Based Program established in 1980 (MA) and 2011 (NYC)
  - \* NH Wediko School established in 1990
  - \* Home Based Solutions in MA, 2012
  - \* Community Based Programs Department, July 2015

# About MassSTART

- \* Established in 2007 out of Columbia University
- \* Funded by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (DPH) Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS)
- \* Aims to reduce substance use and violence and to promote academic achievement
- \* A school-based, community-centered program
- \* Provides 2 years of intensive case management services to 60 Boston area students between the ages of 8-13 years old and their families
- \* Is free and Voluntary

# Boston Public Schools

- \* 57,000 students in 128 schools
- \* 77% Black and Latino
- \* 78% low income
- \* Nearly 1 in every 2 students speaks another language at home
- \* Students come from over 100 different countries
- \* FY15 proposed budget \$974.93 mill

# MassSTART Schools

## Dorchester

- \* 583 Students
- \* 87.8% Low income families
- \* 24.9% African American
- \* 62.3% Latino
- \* 3.3% White
- \* 7.55% Asian
- \* 14.1% Special Education
- \* Located across the street from a mixed income housing development

## South Boston

- \* 248 Students
- \* 88.7% Low income families
- \* 44% African American
- \* 35.1% Latino
- \* 11.7% White
- \* 4.4% Asian
- \* 12.9% Special Education
- \* Located in a public housing development

# MassSTART Services

- \* Staffing – Reflective of client population
  - \* Cultural Capacity – Employ people of color and those from the communities served
  - \* Language Capacities – Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole
- \* Focus – Family, School, Community
  - \* Student Engagement – In school and at home
  - \* Family Engagement – Guided by Family Support Plan
  - \* School Collaboration – Consultation and information sharing
  - \* Community Collaboration and Integration – Link family to relevant services and promote the connection with natural resources



# The Value of Collaboration

- \* We agree - Collaboration between families, schools and partner agencies is valuable
  - \* Parental involvement is especially important for the economically disadvantaged and ethnic minorities
- \* All parties are invested in positive outcomes
- \* Collaboration is connected to higher academic performance and school improvement

# What Makes Collaboration Hard (The Barriers)

They are common for us all – Family, School and Partner Agencies

- \* Misunderstanding and lack of trust
- \* Expectations – You're the expert/professional/family, you should...
- \* Perceptions – You're hostile, uncaring, only call when something is wrong
- \* Resources are limited - Time, energy, juggling multiple demands
- \* Unsure of how to effectively engage– Language, culture, comfort, expertise

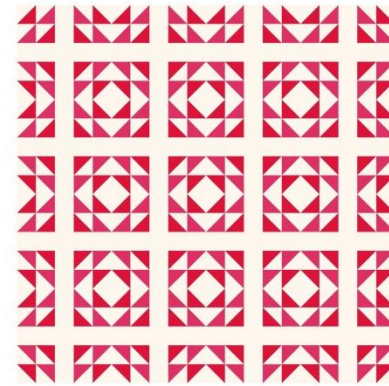
# Examining Our Mindset (The Value)

**Activity**



**Checkbox**

**Attitude**



**Fabric**

# Strategies for Collaboration

- \* Weaving into the fabric – Indicates collaboration is integral and valuable
- \* The foundation - All parties are EQUAL partners
  - \* How would you treat a partner?
    - \* Listen
    - \* Share information
    - \* Respect expertise, perspective, ideas and opinions
    - \* Share planning and decision-making
    - \* Willing to address conflict
    - \* Don't find fault
    - \* Commit to sharing successes

# Rules of Engagement

- \* Strengths based approach
- \* Inform and include, don't control
- \* Variety is the spice of life... and family engagement
  - \* Opportunities for engagement
  - \* Day and evening
  - \* Potluck, Parent Council, box of tissues
  - \* Communication options – In school, out of school, phone, text, notes
  - \* Communicate – Balance, don't wait for a crisis
  - \* Rapport build, i.e. invest time

# Rules of Engagement (cont.)

- \* Create a welcoming environment
  - \* How are people greeted?
    - \* Create warmth - Smiles, pictures, mints, etc.
- \* Humanity - Room for individual consideration

# Increasing Expertise In Working with Families

## Make family engagement a priority

- \* Provide professional development for staff on family engagement
- \* Support and encourage staff to engage families
- \* Acknowledge staff efforts, flexibility and creativity around family engagement strategies
- \* Incorporate family engagement into staff meetings and planning
- \* Celebrate successes and examine failures
- \* Persevere
- \* Dollars...

# MassSTART Engagement

- \* “Do For, Do With, Cheer On” National Wraparound Model
- \* School initiates student referral – Includes strengths and needs of student/family AND makes first contact with family concerning the referral
- \* For Families
  - \* Structured family work guided by a family driven plan
  - \* Advocacy and support with systems navigation and service acquisition
  - \* Family events/workshops – Activities, childcare, food and transportation
- \* For Students
  - \* Social skills lunch groups
  - \* Individual check-ins and classroom support for students



# Take Aways

- \* Weave collaboration into the fabric of what you do
- \* Collaboration must be valued
  - \* On all levels
- \* You have what it takes to begin
- \* Look for small opportunities and build from there

# References

- \* BPS Communications Office. (Apr. 2014). *BPS at a Glance 2013-2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/domain/24>
- \* Boston Public Schools. (n.d.). *REPORT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING: SCHOOL REPORT CARD SCHOOL YEAR 2014-2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/Page/628>
- \* Christenson, S. (2003). The Family-School Partnership: An Opportunity to Promote the Learning Competence of All Schools. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 18(4), 454-482.
- \* Ditrano, C.J. & Silverstein, L.B. (2006). Listening to Parents' Voices: Participatory Action Research in Schools. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37(4), 359-366.
- \* National Education Association Education Policy and Practice Department. (2008). *An NEA policy brief: Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education*. Washington, DC.

# What are you doing? Can and will you start doing tomorrow?

Ideas and best practice sharing