

Maine Development Foundation Leadership Maine

Phi Class Green Team
Work Project

Building a Skilled Workforce for Maine



**Breaking Down Barriers and
Fostering Strong Relationships Between
Families and Schools**

Hello Educators, School Administrators, Parent Representatives, School Committee Members and Community Business Partners:

We are writing to you with the goal to assist you in the amazing work you do with the children and youth you serve each day. We are the 2014 Phi Class of Maine Development Foundation's Leadership Maine Program. Leadership Maine is a statewide program that trains individuals with tools needed for successful leadership throughout the State. As part of our training we are challenged to examine a critical issue within Maine and to provide potential solutions or innovative steps to push the needle in addressing this issue to better our State.

Our team was faced with the issue of "Skilled Workforce," which addresses the concern of an educated workforce. "Unfortunately, Maine has the lowest post-secondary degree attainment in New England and the lowest per-capita income." (MDF Annual Report) Our team was challenged to create an initiative that will address the comprehensive view of education at the pressure points – from early childhood to higher education – to improve Maine's workforce and increase personal incomes.

Recognizing the vastness of this topic, our team decided to focus on the area of parents and the educational system. We believe that by strengthening the relationship between parents and schools from early childhood through high school, we are providing more support to students in their educational journey. We chose to take the year to first identify the potential barriers for parents to connect with the schools their children attend and to do extensive research on these barriers. We identified five key barriers: Poverty, Parent Literacy, Cultural Dynamics, Food Insecurities, and Job/Time Constraints. We did extensive research in each area answering three key questions: *Why is this a barrier? What is needed to address or help combat this barrier? What are some innovative solutions to this barrier that are currently*

being implemented or what are studies that theoretically offer solutions to this barrier?

We are providing you this information with the hope it can assist schools and businesses in developing steps in building stronger relationships with the parents of your students. We know schools

provide many opportunities for parents to be involved through parent/teacher conferences and other events, but that many parents tend to not participate. The information attached in this pamphlet will provide insight to the challenges parents face in being more active in their child's education and hopefully will empower new ways for schools and parents to join together. We also hope by providing this information to business leaders, they can partner with schools in addressing some of these barriers thus providing a larger support system to families in our communities.

Sincerely,

Green Team

Phi Class ~ Leadership Maine, MDF



Parent Literacy Challenges

Why is this a barrier?

- A mother's reading skill is the greatest determinant of her children's future academic success, outweighing other factors, such as neighborhood and family income.— National Institutes of Health (NIH), 2010
- Low family income and a mother's lack of education are the two biggest risk factors that hamper a child's early learning and development.—National Center for Family Literacy
- A single year of parental education has a greater positive impact on the likelihood of a son or daughter attending a postsecondary institution than does an extra \$50,000 in parental income.—Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2011
- By the time children from middle-income families with well-educated parents are in third grade, they know about 12,000 words. Third grade children from low-income families with undereducated parents who don't talk to them very much have vocabularies of around 4,000 words.

The Barbara Bush Foundation cites experts who say reading to children early and often is the single most important thing parents can do to prepare them to start school ready to learn to read. Parents who lack basic literacy skills cannot experience the pleasure of reading to their children. The children, in turn, will not reap the educational benefits of being read to. If no one intervenes, this pattern is repeated in each new generation.

What is needed to address or help combat this barrier?

- Methods of reaching adults with literacy challenges that inspire them to learn rather than make them feel inadequate.
- Resources for parents that include child care while they are in learning sessions, flexible hours that accommodate working adults, and access to transportation to and from learning sites.
- Methods of supporting adults who struggle with physical or mental health challenges as well as substance abuse.
- Sensitivity and solutions to cultural barriers that affect new Americans.

What are some innovative solutions to this barrier that are currently being implemented or what are studies that theoretically offer solutions to this barrier?

- Literacy for ME (<http://maine.gov/doe/literacy-for-me/documents/literacyformeadult.pdf>): This site includes literacy tools for people of all ages and life stages. Key components of their adult learning initiative are: support adult learners by encouraging conversation, provide adults with a wide range of opportunities to build reading skills and encourage adult writers by offering safe and comfortable ways to practice.

Sources:

- Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy
- Maine Department of Education-Literacy for ME
- Oklahoma Department of Libraries
- The Wallace Foundation- Literacy in Libraries Across America.



Cultural Groups – Primarily focusing on Race and Ethnicity and including “New Americans”

Why is this a barrier?

- Institutional racism/stereotypes of the education system upon families of color and families with English as a second language.
- Diverse racial perspectives on the system of “Education” impacts parents’ relationship with the system.
- Being unable to speak America’s primary language of English presents various limitations and challenges for families to be involved.
- Being a “New American” in this country presents many challenges of understanding the various systems, including health care, judicial, and education.

What is needed to address or help combat this barrier?

Solutions that focus on promoting community collaborations between schools and families; solutions that honor diverse racial and ethnic perspectives on family and education; solutions that support multilingual children and families; solutions that address institutionalized racism and prejudice that limit family involvement within education.

What are some innovative solutions to this barrier that are currently being implemented or what are studies that theoretically offer solutions to this barrier?

- King Middle School, in Portland, ME, is a very racial and culturally diverse school community that has engaged in a multitude of school systematic programs and approaches to creating a very rich and involved school community of parents, educators and administrators.

- “Cultural Responsive Schools” recognize the benefits of honoring the cultural diversity of the families they serve and build upon these assets within their physical environment, curriculum development, and overall school climate of community and partnership building amongst families, teachers, and administrators. An excellent resource for schools and businesses to examine is the Culturally Responsive and Parental Involvement

Tools which can be found at - <http://www.pacer.org/mpc/pdf/CulturallyResponsivePI.pdf>

Sources:

- *Why Some Parents Don't Come to School* – Margaret Finders and Cynthia Lewis
- *Culturally Responsive Parental Involvement: Concrete Understandings and Basic Strategies* – King, S.H. and Goodwin, A.L



Childhood Food Insecurity

Why is this a barrier?

Child growth and development requires a lot of energy. The lack of enough quality food (food insecurity) impacts how children grow physically and mentally throughout their lives. Of the physical health impacts, some (such as obesity) are visible, while others (such as higher rates of medical treatment) are invisible. The mental development of children that are food insecure is also impacted - resulting in poor academic performance, increased need for special education, and a decreased ability to understand and interact socially. Food insecurity, impacting 1 in every 4 children in Maine, is a huge barrier to fourth grade literacy rates.

Food Insecurity is often considered to be a result of poverty,

but there are close links to other issues including employment, educational attainment and on-the-job training of the parents.

What is needed to address or help combat this barrier?

- Understanding of the financial impact food insecurity has on our economy, and the opportunities that Maine offers to reduce food insecurity.
- An awareness of and acceptance that food insecurity is significant and exists in every community.
- Increased utilization of existing programs that provide nutritious foods to families and children during the school year, and expand the participation during vacation and out of school periods.

What are some innovative solutions to this barrier that are currently being implemented or what are studies that theoretically offer solutions to this barrier?

In Maine, the Good Shepherd Food Bank, under President Kristen Miale, are pressing forward with education about food insecurity and the impacts on children. In addition, the Good Shepherd Food Bank is strengthening the food pantry network throughout Maine to get fresh fruits and vegetables out to rural areas via a mobile food van.

In Presque Isle and other Maine communities, school systems own farms and work with students to grow fresh fruit and vegetables to feed students, and then sell extra produce to local restaurants and grocery stores.

Throughout Maine, gardeners and farmers participates in the "Plant a Row" program each year in which an extra row of a crop is planted to feed those within their communities.

In Iowa, a school now sources meats, fruits, vegetables and grain products from local farmers no more than 100 miles away via annual contracts, lowering the school food expenses and increasing the quality of the food. In addition,

many of the farmers then host school and educational tours to link the farm to quality food selection.

Sources:

- Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, William McFall and Mark Nord. *Food Insecurity in Households With Children: Prevalence, Severity, and Household Characteristics, 2010-11*, EIB-113, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, May 2013.
- Food Insecurity Affects School Children’s Academic Performance, Weight Gain, and Social Skills, Diana F. Jyoti, Edward A. Frongillo, and Sonya J. Jones, September 2005, The Journal of Nutrition.
- American Society for Nutrition website: <http://www.nutrition.org/>
- Kristen Miale, President- Good Shepherd Food Bank Presentation for MDF Dec. 11, 2013



Lack of Parental Involvement Due to Job Constraints

Why is this a barrier?

Student achievement suffers due to lack of parental involvement where parental work obligations prohibit engagement, or where parents are otherwise unable to connect with teachers and schools.

What is needed to address or help combat this barrier?

Research shows that when parents and teachers cooperate, students benefit academically. Funding is necessary for teacher visits to homes, as well as legislation that allows time off from work to allow for school-related obligations, in order to boost positive parent-teacher interactions.

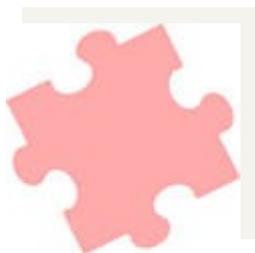
What are some innovative solutions to this barrier that are currently being implemented?

- California's Family-School Partnership Act allows parents, grandparents, and guardians, who work for businesses with 25 or more employees to take up to 40 hours of time off from work annually to participate in a child's school or child care activities. The law allows parents to use existing vacation time, personal leave, or compensatory time off to account for the time used for these activities. Individuals can also take time off without pay if allowed by their employer. The employee chooses from the available options -- the employer may not dictate what is utilized. Employers may not discriminate against their employees for taking advantage of these opportunities and can face civil penalties if they do.
- The Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project (originally started in Sacramento) pairs teachers' associations, faith-based community groups, and school districts in an effort to have teachers visit parents at home twice a year. Teachers who show up at home to inquire about a student in a caring, non-confrontational way can ease a parent's mind (even if they have unhappy memories of their own education), such that they are motivated to become more participatory in their own child's school work and education. The first five elementary schools in the District of Columbia that engaged in this strategy between 2011 - 2013 saw test results increase 7.5% in reading and 15.2% in math. The cost in D.C was \$34 per teacher visit.
- The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) is a nine-week class offered in a number of states (e.g., Arizona, California, Texas and Minnesota) that is free to parents and teaches them how to create a welcoming space for educational success in the home (including setting aside a dedicated homework area), how to encourage their kids to be academically successful; and how to discuss college expectations. Since 1987, over 475,000 parents have graduated from PIQE classes, and according to one California-based study, significantly more PIQE students achieve a higher GPA in high school English and math

courses than other students. PIQE offers additional core courses, including Family Financial Literacy, Parent Leadership, and Early Childhood Development.

Sources:

- *State Laws on Family Engagement in Education*, National PTA Reference Guide & DLA Piper LLP, available at: <http://www.pta.org/advocacy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2247>
- The Parent Teacher Home Visit Project, http://www.pthvp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=3. See also *Students Won't Learn? Go visit their Parents*, Jay Mathews, The Washington Post (January 26, 2014), available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/students-wont-learn-go-visit-their-parents/2014/01/26/a2519390-849c-11e3-9dd4-e7278db80d86_story.html
- Parent Engagement Education Program (PIQE), available at http://www.piqe.org/prog_parentengage.php.



Poverty as a Barrier to Parental Involvement in School

Why is this a barrier?

Every community in Maine has pockets of poverty. In some parts of the state, poverty is at a critical level. In Washington County, for example, 31 % of children are born into poverty. Even in Blue Hill, 44% of students in the region's public schools receive free or reduced lunch subsidies. This affects students' school readiness in many ways. This document discusses how poverty affects parental involvement with

their children's education and school activities.

- Access to safe, affordable housing is a problem for people living in poverty. If a family is “couch surfing”, living out of a car, or has no heat, attending a parent-teacher conference at school seems far less important than meeting fundamental and basic needs. Sometimes, there is no paper or place for doing homework.
- Reliable transportation is another issue for people living in poverty, especially in rural Maine, where there is limited public transportation and the distance from home to school might be great. If a family owns a car, it may be broken down, or there may not be enough money for gas to get to school or after school activities.
- A sense of being an outsider or not belonging may also play a role in keeping parents from attending school events. Many people in poverty report having a limited education or a bad experience during their own school years. As parents, they may not feel welcome at school, or may find it a very stressful, humiliating, or intimidating place.

What are some innovative solutions to this barrier that are currently being implemented or what are studies that theoretically offer solutions to this barrier?

- Some communities in Maine have come together to address poverty and its effect on children and families. The Community Caring Collaborative in Washington County is a grassroots system of care, dedicated to serving at-risk infants and young children and their families. This group of over 40 agency and community members came together about seven years ago, initially to address infants' exposure to opiates. The Collaborative is divided into three subgroups: an

Executive Council that establishes interagency policy, procedures and resource allocation; the Workgroup, who works directly with children and their families; and the State Agency Advisory Group, who tackle policy issues on a state-wide level.

- The Hope Fund is a tangible tool the Community Caring Collaborative uses to help people in poverty in Washington County. It is designed to provide one-time assistance for expenses that threaten a family's ability to care for their children and are not covered through other sources of community support. Last year, the Hope Fund spent \$9,000.00 in housing expenses; helping 12 families (60 individuals) avoid homelessness.
- The community of the Blue Hill peninsula has also come together to serve families living in poverty. Healthy Peninsula, a program of Child and Family Opportunities, was formed in 2001 with a mission to mobilize, support and collaborate with community partners to improve the health of the nine towns of the Blue Hill Peninsula, Deer Isle and Stonington region.
- On October 19, 2013, the third annual Healthy Peninsula Early Childhood conference, "The Poverty Hurdle: In Pursuit of Goals and Dreams for Every Family, Every Child" was held at the Blue Hill consolidated school. Conference attendees included local and regional non-profit and service organization staff, educators, medical providers, state legislators, church group members, parents, and concerned citizens – all interested in learning more about the effects of poverty on children and their families. Dr. Donna Beegle was the keynote speaker.
- Local experts, such as Rick Traub from the Tree of Life Food Pantry; Megan Granger, counselor at BHCS; and Barbara Royal from Open Door Recovery, also talked about the challenges many neighbors face daily to secure enough food, transportation, home educational support, and access to medical and mental health services. Many ideas sprung from the conference: increase awareness of the issues, mapping and integration of current resources including volunteer efforts, increase mentoring and

networking opportunities, and work together within the community for all families.

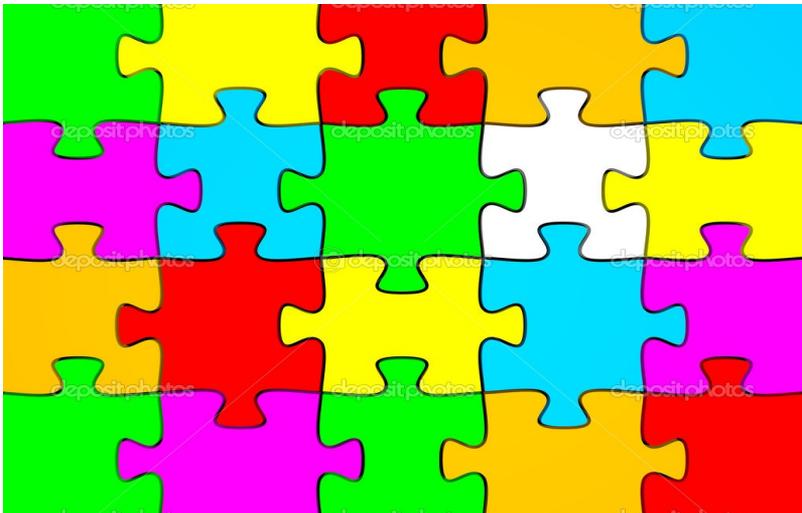
- One tangible tool used on the Blue Hill Peninsula is a program called, **Ready by 21**. In 2010, Amy Vaughn, then Director of Healthy Peninsula, and local community leaders launched **Ready by 21** to rally community members, teachers and school staff, families, and students to improve outcomes at their schools after *The Portland Press Herald* had singled out Deer Isle/Stonington High School as one of “10 schools branded as lowest-achieving in Maine”. The **Ready by 21** mission is ‘Working together to ensure all children and youth are fully prepared for a healthy life, productive work, and lifelong learning.’
- In February 2013, *The Bangor Daily News* reported “a meteoric rise” in the high school’s graduation rate to 94% last year. Although new educational strategies and hard work on the part of the teachers and school staff are the greatest factors in the positive changes at the high school, **Ready by 21** has played an important role in developing improved communication venues and mobilizing ongoing community support for the teaching staff and students.
- A third community in Maine that is tackling poverty head-on is Dover Foxcroft. Helping Hands with Heart is a collaboration of local service providers that offer support and resources to children and families in the Highlands region of Maine. In October, 2013, Helping Hands with Heart partnered with the Maine Highlands Senior Center to bring Dr. Donna Beegle to Dover Foxcroft for a seminar on poverty. This seminar is one step in gaining community understanding of poverty and its effects on children and families.

The above examples show that there are innovative and collaborative activities occurring today in Maine to address the many issues related to poverty. Though the task of addressing poverty may seem like a mountainous challenge, Mainers have a fundamental core value of neighbor assisting neighbor during times of need. All Mainers have the

opportunity to get involved in their community and ensure that our children have access to their most basic needs and, in return, all Mainers will benefit as these kids become our next adults.

Sources:

- Marjorie Withers, Director, Community Caring Collaborative, Washington County, Maine
- Healthy Peninsula's Third Annual Childhood Community Conference Report, 2012
- Overcoming the Silence of Generational Poverty, Donna M. Beegle, National Council of Teachers of English, Talking Points © 2003
- www.cccmaine.org
- Gil Tenney, Community Organizer, Blue Hill, Maine
- <http://healthypeninsula.org>
- Portland Press Herald, March, 2010
- Healthy Peninsula's Third Annual Childhood Community Conference Report, 2012
- Sue Mackey Andrews, Volunteer, Helping Hands with Heart, Dover Foxcroft, Maine



Maine Development Foundation
Leadership Maine
Phi Class Green Team

Devin Dukes
Berry Dunn
Portland, ME

Tim Smith
UNUM
Portland, ME

Virginia Dearani
One Tree Center
South Portland, ME

Julie Chase
Southern Maine Community College
South Portland, ME

Angela Dostie
Finance Authority of Maine
Augusta, ME

Andrew McNeally
Emera Maine
Presque Isle, ME

Jennifer Peters
Sunrise County Economic Council
Machias, ME

Nancy McBrady
Preti Flaherty
Portland, ME

Matthew Chandler
State of Maine, DHHS
Augusta, ME

Andi Jackson-Darling
Falmouth Memorial Library
Falmouth, ME

Patricia Foden
Encore Leadership Corps
Yarmouth, ME