



RIVER EAST COMMUNITY SCHOOLS INITIATIVE:

2003 PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluation Design

The evaluation framework for the River East Community School Initiative was
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River East Community Schools Initiative: Program Evaluation

Background

The past several years has seen an increase in the focus on early childhood development and the factors that impede or predict positive child outcomes. New evidence has shown that development from the prenatal period to age six is rapid and dramatic and predictive of well-being later in life. Among the key influences in shaping how children develop are the families and the communities in which they live (Ross et al., 1996). In response to this research, there is increased emphasis on the importance of supporting families and creating healthy communities to secure the future well-being of children.

In Manitoba, as a consequence of this focus on child development, communities have organized to better support families and promote early child development at the local level. As with any community development response to a need, the actions vary from one community to the next. This paper is an evaluation of the response in the River East community through the River East Community Schools Initiative (RECSI).

The theoretical foundation for the RECSI is based on an established best practice model of community schools developed by Epstein et al (1997). This community schools model recognizes the shared responsibility of family, school, and community for children's development and learning. The focus of the model is on the following six areas of family-school-community involvement:

- Parenting - Families must provide for the health and safety of children, and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and good behavior in school. Schools provide training and information to help families understand their children's development and how to support the changes they undergo.
- Communicating - Schools must reach out to families with information about school programs and student progress. This includes the traditional phone calls, report cards, and parent conferences, as well as new information on topics such as school choice and making the transition from elementary school to higher grades. Communication must be in forms that families find understandable and useful and it must be two- way, with educators paying attention to the concerns and needs of families.
- Volunteering - Parents can make significant contributions to the environment and functions of a school. Schools can get the most out of this process by creating flexible schedules, so more parents can participate, and by working to match the talents and interests of parents to the needs of students, teachers, and administrators.
- Learning at Home - With the guidance and support of teachers, family members can supervise and assist their children at home with homework assignments and other school-related activities.
- Decision-making - Schools can give parents meaningful roles in the school decision-making process, and provide parents with training and information so they can make the most of those opportunities.
- Collaboration with the Community - Schools can help families gain access to support services offered by other agencies, such as healthcare, cultural events, tutoring services, and after-school child-care programs.

In addition to the influence of the Epstein community schools model, in more recent years RECSI activities have been shaped by local funding opportunities

provided through a provincial parent-child initiative. This parent-child model aims to promote early child development (ages 0 to 6) by bringing multiple sectors of a community together to focus on the needs of children and their families in four areas of focused activity (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002a):

- Parenting – Activities to support and enhance parents’ ability to nurture the healthy development of their children.
- Nutrition – Activities to support good nutrition and healthy lifestyles through education, community supports and skills training.
- Literacy – Activities to support the learning success of children through opportunities to improve family literacy and numeracy.
- Capacity Building – Activities to support community capacity through leadership opportunities, volunteering and community service, community economic development and civic engagement.

The River East Community Schools Program Model

In keeping with the focal point of the Epstein model, central to the RESCI is the formation of an Action Team within a participating school. For the purpose of this evaluation, RESCI supports five Action Teams each with representation from school staff, parents, public health, child and family services, law enforcement, and other pertinent community organizations (e.g., community clubs). Chaired by the school principal, Action Teams meet monthly to identify school-community needs and solutions consistent with the six levels of community school involvement and relevant to the provincial parent child centre initiative. To this end, Action Team members share information, identify needs and solutions, coordinate and share resources, and evaluate progress.

In addition to the Action Team representation mentioned above, the RECSI staffs a community connector position for each Action Team and a community schools coordinator position to support the overall initiative. A community connector is a parent selected from the school community to assist with planning and implementing action team activities. Community connectors receive ongoing training in working with parents and community organizations. The Community Schools Coordinator position provides support to the ongoing operation of the model: assisting action teams in planning and programming, training community connectors, liaising with larger systems and evaluating progress.

In addition to the local action teams, the RECSI is supported by a steering committee comprised of individuals representing the larger community systems and the action teams. The steering committee exists to initiate and support broad-based activities that effect grassroots efforts and the larger River East community (for a list of activities supported by action teams and the steering committee see Appendix A).

RECSI Objectives

The RECSI model is designed to build on existing community capacities to better support families in raising their children. The potential areas for investment in supporting parents and creating healthy communities is vast, the RECSI has defined distinct areas of activity and desired outcomes to focus the work of the action teams and the steering committee (see Appendix B). The desired

outcomes can be separated into two types: a) outcomes related to the systems level work taking place as a result of multi-sector collaboration and b) population based outcomes associated with programming. The evaluation section will discuss each of these areas of activity and their indicators of success, in turn.

Evaluation Methodology

For the purpose of this evaluation, data is collected from a variety of sources. At the end of the 2002-03 school year, information was solicited through a focus group with teachers and phone interviews with action team members to measure outcomes related to systems integration and the implementation of this model (see Appendix C). Principals from the five RECSI schools were each asked to recommend two teachers to participate in a focus group. There was 100 percent participation in the focus group. Interviews with action team members took place in the month of June.

The evaluation framework is designed to also examine population based changes as a result of programming; parent surveys provide baseline and, in subsequent years, outcome level data on: community capacity, parenting, school readiness, and social support. In order to establish a sample of parents, at the beginning of the school year, consent forms describing the study were sent home to a random sample of parents in the five participating schools. The sample was created by choosing every fourth family from a list of all families in the schools, 239 of 960 families. At the beginning and end of the school year, surveys were mailed to the 109 families that returned a signed consent form. The representation of families

in the sample varies from school to school, but remains fairly stable from round-one to round-two data collection (see Table 1; see Appendix D).

Table 1: Parent Survey Responses by School, 2002-2003

School	Round One*		Round Two*	
	Frequency	% of Sample	Frequency	% of Sample
Polson	14	12.8	9	13.6
Prince Edward	24	22.0	12	18.2
Sherwood	15	13.8	10	15.2
Lord Wolseley	25	22.9	13	19.7
B.E. Glavin	31	28.4	22	33.3
Total	109	100.0	66	100.0

* Round one data was collected September 2002; round two data was collected June 2003 (see Appendix A)

Data Collection

The challenge of any program evaluation is to select measures that will demonstrate program outcomes, in quantitative terms, and measures that provide relevant information for program planning. Standardized measures that yield numerical data are preferable when the goal is to draw a distinction between populations and to demonstrate quantitative change. The drawback in using such measures is that they often lack information relevant to program planning and the questions often deter parents if they do not seem directly relevant to the situation at hand (Edelman, 2000). This evaluation employs quantitative and qualitative measures in an attempt to gather the most relevant information for future planning and secure the opportunity to track, quantitatively, population based changes over-time.

To track changes in population level data, this evaluation makes use of the opportunity to compare River East's baseline and outcome data to provincial and national data on child development by utilizing measures from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). The NLSCY is a comprehensive longitudinal national survey that examines a variety of important factors concerning child development. Selecting measures from the NLSCY has several advantages for a program evaluation that aims to effect population based changes; the NLSCY provides performance indicators, a storehouse of comparable populations, and measures that are highly adaptable to the needs of different community groups (Chammartin, 2002). The parent survey for this evaluation includes three measures from the NLSCY: the Parenting Scale for children 2-11 years; the Literacy Scale for children 2-7 years; and the Social Support Scale (National Longitudinal Survey for Children and Youth, 1997).

Results: Multi-Sector Collaboration and System Integration

The idea of systems working together to integrate and provide greater coordination in their service delivery is an area of growing interest. It is generally accepted that multi-sector partnerships are an effective way to reduce gaps in service, improve sharing of resources, increase knowledge of other services and systems, and allow local planning to occur. Through the RECSI, it is expected that collaboration at the steering committee and the community level via the action teams will yield the following: (1) increase collaboration between systems, (2) strengthen community supports to schools, and (3) increase the number of parenting programs offered in the community.

1. Increased collaboration between systems - To measure the success of collaboration, it is expected that action team members will report an increase in collaboration between systems on community projects and report positive feelings about those partnerships. In responding to interview questions about the impact of the action teams on the communities, many interviewees spoke to the power of partnering at the local level to “better meet [the] needs of community by identifying needs and responding with the full force of multi-sector resources

‘They [the action team members] are positive peer pressure, they make me want to do more so I push [my organization] to do things we would never challenge ourselves to do’

Action Team Member

(community service provider).” Interviewees suggest that the action team as an operating model creates a synergy among the members to respond to issues. One interviewee posited: ‘[the action team] meeting sets in motion a situation where everyone at the table rallies to respond to a specific family or community need identified.’ In the absence of the multi-sector forum this provider reflects that the individuals representing systems fail to feel the pressure or the power to respond. The suggestion that the action team forum creates some pressure on a system was repeated by others. Another action team member aptly stated that “some of the players use the team to influence [her], but in a good way...they [the action team members] are positive peer pressure, they make me want to do more so I push [my organization] to do things we [the organization] would never challenge ourselves to do.’

In addition, over 80 percent of respondents identified that coming together through RECSI has improved their partnership with or awareness of other community services. Most frequently, interviewees identified greater awareness of programs, improved communication between service providers and improved knowledge about criteria for services. The most common examples of increased partnership were sharing of resources and sharing of space.

2. Strengthen Community Supports to Schools - The RESCI model specifically aims to strengthen community supports to schools thereby enabling schools to better support children and their families. An indicator of success is an increase in educators' knowledge and use of community resources. To determine the success of the model in reaching this objective, the evaluation draws on responses to open-ended questions from the teacher focus group.

Focus group discussions highlighted differences in teachers' knowledge of community resources; teachers that are members of an action team are more knowledgeable of community resources and more comfortable in accessing those resources than their counterparts not on action teams. Teachers on action teams easily recited lists of community resources, parenting programs, and other family supports while teachers not on action teams recalled few resources without prompts from their counterparts. That said, the teachers not on action teams unanimously agreed that the support and availability of the community connectors enables them to better access community resources: "help is closer;

our community connector is a positive person who is very willing to make phone calls, contacts, appointments, connections, when we ask (focus group participant).” However, in general, these teachers not on action teams still indicated less likelihood of asking for support from community resources.

All teachers indicate an increase in volunteer support in the classroom and credit this increase to the RECSI. Teachers suggest that parent rooms and the addition of community connectors have had a significant impact on volunteer support. There was resounding enthusiasm at the level of volunteer support “Polson has ninety volunteers;” “our connector found eight seniors to read to the children.” Further evidence of increased volunteer support is substantiated by an increase in parent volunteerism, as measured on the parent survey (see Table 5).

While the teachers enthusiastically report on the volunteer support, there is agreement that the increase in the volume of parents in the schools

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Teacher

presents other significant challenges to teachers: “One of my volunteers comes with her special needs child. [Incorporating them into the classroom activities in a meaningful way] was hard and demanding, but we came through it and she is now the best and most reliable volunteer. Her children are growing by leaps and bounds (focus group participant).” Others identified challenges that primarily

involve parents not following school codes of conduct such as talking in the hallways, dress codes, or developing cliques in the parent room. Addressing these challenges adds to a strain teachers already feel on their time. However, the teachers from schools that have been with the RESCI model for longer all agreed that over time their schools were able to work through all of these challenges.

3. Increase in the Number of People Trained to Offer Parenting Programs -

The final objective that this evaluation measures related to multi-sector collaboration is its impact on the number of people trained to offer parenting programs. The identified indicator for success is an increase in the number of parenting programs available at the community level. Through the focus group and the action team interviews, interviewees were asked about the impact of RECSI on their community. This question solicited numerous responses related to an increase in parenting programs and their uptake in the community. One hundred percent of teachers in the focus group agreed that more parenting programs and resources are available because of the initiative. Teachers articulated the names of various programs, their target audience and spoke to their effectiveness.

The action team interviews also generated responses related to parenting programs. An increase in the availability of parenting programs appears to be the most easily identified outcome of the RECSI by teachers and action team members and the most valued; however, both action team members and teachers

identified that timely communication regarding programming availability remains a challenge that at times limits participation.

Population Level Data: Demographics and Baseline Data

This evaluation is designed to set in place a framework for a longitudinal evaluation of the impact of the RESCI model and related programming on family, child and community outcomes. There are four primary outcomes at the population level that RECSI aims to positively impact: (1) parental knowledge of child development; (2) parenting skills; (3) connection to school community and community health; and (4) increased parental involvement in children's' growth and learning.

For this evaluation, data on these variables was collected at two points in time: baseline data was collected in September 2002 and round-two data was collected in June 2003. In this short time frame, the only outcome variable where meaningful change is expected in these ten months is parents' connection to school and community. Parents' connection to school and community is an outcome that RECSI predicts being able to influence in the short term, the other objectives it is anticipated will take more time before measurable change can be demonstrated. In these sections below, following the section on demographic data, the baseline and round-two data is reported on each of the four outcome areas mentioned above. Round-two data is reported as a validation of the baseline data to which future measures can be compared.

Demographics - The parents that participated in this evaluation were selected from the five schools participating in the RECSI. The data below highlights the limited demographic data collected for this evaluation and only represents those parents that participated in the evaluation by returning their surveys.

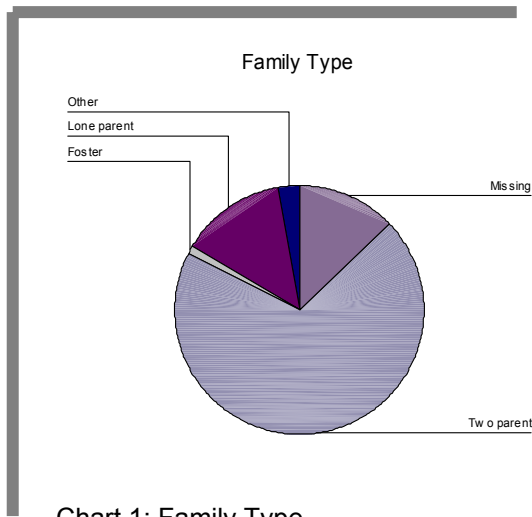


Chart 1: Family Type

The majority of parents involved in the RECSI evaluation are two-parent families with more than one child, 77.1 percent and 80.0 percent, respectively (see Charts 1 and 2). Over sixty percent of families have lived in the community

for six years or more despite that only half as many families have lived in their current residence for that same length of time. The data indicates that families are connected to the community and when relocating many have stayed within the

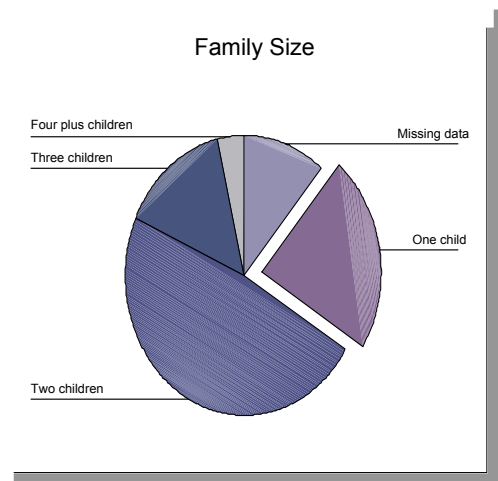


Chart 2: Family Size

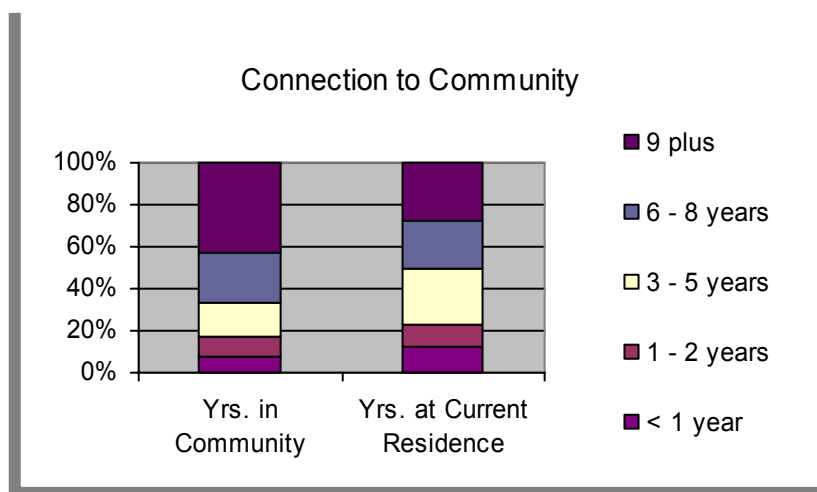


Chart 3: Connection to Community

area (see Chart 3) .

As a result, the responding parents on average have been with their current school for approximately four years (X = 3.9 and SD = 2.2).

1. Increased Knowledge of Child Development – An indicator of success is that parents demonstrate an improvement in their ability to identify experiences and resources that their children need to grow and learn.

To measure this outcome, a question was posed to parents asking them to identify three resources and/or experiences that their child needs to grow and learn. Responses were categorized based on their ‘goodness of fit’ with one of the four indicators of child-well being identified (that the provinces and territories have agreed to report on) in the Early Childhood Development Agreement (i.e., physical health and motor development, emotional health, social knowledge and competence, and cognitive learning and language communication; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002c).

At baseline 62 percent of 42 responses could be matched with one of the four indicators of child well-being; at the end of the school year 78 percent of 32 responses matched with one of the four categories. Most striking in this data is how few respondents identified a need for a resource or experience related to physical health and/or motor development (baseline 14 percent; round-two nine percent).

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2. Improved Parenting Skills – Parents have the most critical role in shaping how a child grows and develops (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002b). And so it follows that one of the factors most predictive of child outcomes is parenting style. The RECSI model strives to increase opportunities for parents to access resources and improve their parenting skills.

To measure the success of the program in achieving this objective the evaluation uses data from the NLSCY Parent Survey (cycle 2). Items on this survey are combined to create a ‘positive interaction’ score (range 0-20). A cut-off of ten is then used to compare the percentage of parents with a ‘low positive interaction’ score to the percentage of parents with a ‘not low positive interaction score.’ The RECSI baseline data is comparable to provincial and national data. Table 1 indicates that RECSI data on this measure has a similar distribution of parents in the ‘low positive interaction’ and ‘not low positive interaction’ categories as the

provincial and national data, with the majority of RECSI families doing well, 87 percent, in the ‘not low positive interaction’ category.

Table 1: Positive Interaction*

	RECSI	Manitoba**	Canada**
Not Low Positive Interaction	87.5 %	88.3 %	84.5 %
Low Positive Interaction	12.5 %	11.7 %	15.5 %

* For more details see Appendix E

** Source: Supplement to Investing in Early Childhood Development: 2002 Progress Report to Manitobans.

3. Increased Connection to School and Community – Parents connection and involvement in school is a predictor of children’s academic achievement, attitude towards learning and behaviour in school (Nelson, S. & Zuckerman, D., 2000). In addition, the research has also shown us that safe communities where residents trust and look out for each other and feel a sense of inclusion are a major protective factor for children (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002b). This evaluation employs five separate indicators to measure these objectives: (i) an increase in parent satisfaction with communication from school, (ii) an increase in parental comfort at school, (iii) an increase in feelings of neighborhood support, (iv) an increase in volunteerism, and (v) an increase in social support. These indicators were measured using related questions from the Parent Survey and the Social Support Scale from the NLSCY.

- i. The first indicator of increased connection to school assesses parents’ perception of communication from the school. Round-two scores on the

measure of ‘general school communication’ improve over baseline, with a three percent decline in the percentage of parents that rated communication as poor and a four percent increase in the percentage of parents that rated communication as good or better (see Table 2). Similarly, parent reports of school communication ‘regarding services and resources’ improved markedly with a 10 percent decrease and a 23 percent increase in the poor and good categories, respectively.

Table 2: Communication from School*

Question	Category	Baseline	Round-two
General communication	Poor	9.3	6.2
	Neutral	14.8	13.8
	Good / very good	75.9	80.0
Information regarding community services and resources	Poor	13.0	3.2
	Neutral	30.6	17.2
	Good / very good	56.5	79.7

* For more detail, see Appendix F

- ii. The second indicator measuring parents’ connection to school and community is parent reports of comfort when visiting their children’s school. The data indicates a marginal improvement in parents’ feelings of comfort with a slight increase in the percentage of parents that report ‘high-comfort’ and slight decrease in the percentage of parents that report ‘low comfort’ (see Table 3).

Table 3: Comfort at School*

Category	Baseline %	Round-two %
Low comfort	8.3	4.6
Neutral	22.2	20.0
High comfort	70.4	75.3

* For more detail see Appendix G

iii. The third indicator of connection to community is parents’ feelings of neighborhood support. Scores on this measure show a marked change from baseline. At round-two data collection, seven percent more parents agree that there are role models for their children in their community, 11 percent more parents agree they feel supported as a parent/guardian, and 13 percent more parents agree that their community is able to come together and solve problems (see Table 4).

Table 4: Neighbourhood Support*

Statement	Category	Baseline %	Round-two %
In my community, there are adult role models for my children.	Agree	77.7	84.6
	Don't Agree	22.3	15.4
It is safe to walk alone in this community after dark.	Agree	57.4	58.1
	Don't Agree	42.6	35.5
I feel supported as a parent/guardian in this community.	Agree	76.5	87.1
	Don't Agree	23.5	12.9
If there is a community problem, my neighbors would get together and deal with it.	Agree	62.6	75.0
	Don't Agree	37.4	25.0

* For more detail see Appendix H

iv. The fourth indicator of connection to school and community is a measure of parents’ volunteerism. Using the parent survey, parents were asked at baseline and round-two data collection to indicate whether or not they had volunteered in the past year and if so, how much. Round-two results show a fifteen percent increase in volunteerism over baseline with the majority of

parents indicating between two and five volunteer hours per week (see Table 5).

Table 5: Volunteerism

	Category	Baseline %	Round-two %
Volunteer	Yes	47.7	62.1
	No	52.3	37.9
If yes, how much	Less than an hour	31.4	36.6
	Two – five hours	52.9	53.7
	More than five hours	15.7	9.7

v. The final indicator of community connection is parents feelings of social support measured using the NLSCY Social Support Scale. Outcomes indicate no significant difference between the baseline and round-two data collection ($X = 2.81$ and $SD = 3.18$; $X = 3.01$ and $SD = 3.21$ respectively).

4. Increased parental involvement with their children – This objective is measured using the parent questionnaire and the NLSCY Literacy Survey. Indicators of success on the Parent Questionnaire are (i) increase in the number of school-based activities parents attend and (ii) an increase in the time parents spend involved in learning activities with their children.

i. At baseline and round-two data collection, parents are asked to indicate how many school based activities they participated in over the past school year. Changes in mean scores between baseline and round-two data collection indicate a significant improvement on this measure, with parents indicating

that on average they attended one more school based-activity in the most recent school year ($X = 3.20$ and $SD = 2.86$; $X = 4.19$ and $SD = 3.26$, respectively).

- ii. To measure an increase in time parents spend involved in learning activities with their children, data is collected using parents' self-report of the number of hours per week they spend involved in learning activities with their children and a question on the Literacy Scale about how often an adult reads to a child per week. There is no significant difference between baseline and round-two data collection on the number of hours parents spent per week in learning activities with their children ($X = 5.25$ and $SD = 2.85$; $X = 4.81$ and $SD = 2.99$, respectively). Similarly, data from the NLSCY Literacy Scale indicates no significant differences between round one and two data. This use of this scale permits comparisons to be made with national and provincial data, however, the low response rate to this questionnaire on the RECSI evaluation prevents any meaningful comparisons from these rounds of data collection (see Appendix I).

Evaluation Challenges

Response rate - The RECSI evaluation aims to track changes to population based indicators of child well-being for evaluative purposes and for comparison to provincial and national norms. To this end, in securing the parent sample, the baseline measures and the consent forms were sent to one in four eligible families. Unfortunately, the round-two data collection pool only drew on the

respondents that participated in round-one because only they had signed a consent form. In round-two, the response rate to the parent questionnaires was significantly lower (66 versus 109). The small n limits the ability to draw meaningful conclusions from some of the scale and category scores. In the future it is recommended that a larger sample size is targeted and that all outcomes measures along with new consent forms be resent to the entire sample pool.

Time frame – With respect to many of the RECSI objectives, this evaluation framework is designed to measure change over time. This paper examines change over a very short period of time: less than ten month. One would not expect to see population based changes on some of the objectives measured (e.g., parent knowledge of child development, parenting style, or parent involvement) in ten months. In these cases, the lack of any significant change in the data should be viewed as a validation of the baseline measure from which you can measure change year after year not a failure of the initiative.

Link between program objectives and measures – The data collected using the NLSCY scales links well with the desired outcomes in this evaluation. However, some of the other data sources did not provide data that could be easily linked to the program objectives. The focus group and action team interviews provided a rich source of data, but much of this data could not easily be linked to an identified program objective to be measured in this evaluation. Similarly, the parent questionnaire collects far more data than is presented here, but again cannot easily be linked to the articulated objectives.

Program Challenges

Understanding the Focus of the Initiative – In the focus group, all teachers cited an increase in parent involvement in the schools: more parents in the classroom and parent rooms. Yet, there was a split in teachers' opinions on the effectiveness of RECSI activities at engaging high-risk families. Half of the teachers believe that the community connector and the parent rooms only engage those parents that would already be involved while other teachers were sure that their schools had been successful in engaging families that would otherwise not participate in school based programming. In the phone interviews, these thoughts were echoed by some of the action team members as well. The challenge to RECSI is that interviewees that did not see an increase in 'high-risk' families' participation considered the RECSI initiative to be a 'failure' to some extent, because many interviewees believed the focus of the initiative is to target high-risk families. This evaluation did not explore interviewees' definition of 'high-risk,' but clearly many interviewees did not see merit in pursuing a universal approach to engaging families in schools.

Conclusion

The evaluation results indicate positive changes to the systems and population based measures as a result of RECSI. At the systems level, the results indicate that the initiative is working well and has achieved its primary objectives: an increase in collaboration among service providers, an increase in support to schools and an increase in parenting programs. The evidence suggests that

improved collaboration between systems is leading to improved service delivery. The data from Action team interviews illustrates that the model of bringing multiple sectors together to address community issues related to early childhood development and to support schools has improved awareness of related community services and a synergy to respond to issues. In addition, educators report a greater awareness of community services, improved access to services, and an increase in classroom support. The data indicates that the systems level work is accomplishing the desired objectives and should be maintained as RESCI evolves.

The challenges at the systems level appears to be largely around communicating RESCI activity to a broader audience. The outcomes related to improving teachers access to community resources is only partially successful, clearly teachers on action teams are more aware of community resources and therefore more likely to make use of these resources. The number of teachers on actions teams is limited. The success of the model can be enhanced by addressing communication challenges specific to educators.

At the population level, the RECSI aims to have a positive impact on the following objectives: knowledge of child development, parenting skills, connection to school and community, and parental involvement with children. At this time, the results indicate positive outcomes on the measures of 'knowledge of child development' and 'connection to school and community.' The data on the other measures serves as a baseline measure for future comparison.

Initiatives to educate parents about those types of activities that impact on healthy child development have been somewhat successful. Parents are more likely at the round-two data collection than at baseline to identify programs, resources, or experiences related to measures of healthy child development that would be of benefit to their child. As the school year went on, parents placed less emphasis on the importance of activities related physical and motor development and more emphasis on cognitive development. Regardless, the baseline and outcome data in this area of child development are surprisingly low.

This evaluation illustrates positive change on the measures related to ‘connection to school and community’ as evidenced by a number of separate indicators. The indicators of general school communication, communication regarding community resources, and parents’ comfort in the school show a slight improvement over baseline suggesting efforts in this area have had an impact. Many of the initiatives (e.g., parent rooms, newsletters, website development) that would impact on this outcome have only begun in some of the schools, so more significant change on these variables should be expected in the future. With respect to ‘school communication regarding community resources,’ a large number of responses remain in the neutral category; continued work in this area could impact on the perceptions of this large group. Finally, initiatives to engage parents in school and community through volunteerism were very successful, as parents’ level of volunteerism increased substantially over the year.

Recommendations

1. Develop a communication strategy specifically designed to target educators – A key rationale for building an early childhood development initiative using a community schools model is that schools are positioned to gain universal access to children and their families. For this reason, educators are a primary referral source for early childhood development community programs and resources. Yet, the model breaks down when educators are not aware of the resources and programs available in the community. In this evaluation, the focus group results illustrate that teachers on action teams are more likely to refer to community resources than their counterparts not on action teams. For the most part, this is because teachers on action teams are more aware of the community resources (by virtue of their participation) and therefore make better use of these resources. While teachers recognize that much of the information is communicated to them in newsletters, a lack of timely communication of these events and an overabundance of information to sort through in newsletters is cited as the reason for their limited use of these materials. A communication strategy for educators should bear these comments in mind.

2. Revisit and communicate to all key stakeholders the RECSI vision – There is evidence from the interviews that some stakeholders are not clear on the goals and objectives of the model or the research that supports proceeding in these ways. As a result, the buy-in of these stakeholders may diminish over-time. For example, the focus group discussion as well as action team interviews captured some stakeholders' uncertainty about the success of the model in reaching 'high-

risk families' and cited its failure to do so as a failure of the initiative. Yet, the need to support all families as they raise their children is an important concept supporting the rationale to invest in early childhood development. We know from the research that a greater concentration of vulnerable children live in low income families, but we also know that a greater number of vulnerable children live in higher income, two-parent families (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002). We miss the opportunity to support the vast majority of vulnerable children when we narrowly target programming to high-risk families.

In addition, initially, the RECSI model was shaped and informed by the Epstein community schools model. More recently, other factors such as quality Canadian data on child development and provincial early years initiatives have shaped the evolution of the RECSI model. These influences are compatible, but different in focus: the Epstein model has a focus on school age children while the Parent Child Centre initiative and Health Baby programs focus on the early years, age 0-6 years. Over time, RECSI has evolved a unique model to meet the needs of the River East community. It is important to revisit the vision that provides the rationale for moving forward, articulate clear objectives, tie the activities of the action teams and the community coordinator to the objectives, and ensure all stakeholders have a clear understanding of this vision so the activities they plan contribute to animating this vision.

3. Reinforce the importance of physical health and motor development – Physical health and motor development refers to a child's general state of health

and gross motor development (Healthy Child Manitoba 2002). The relatively few number of parents that indicate this as an area of importance for their child's development deserves further exploration. While it is possible that parents believe that the physical health needs of their children are being met, new research indicates that this is an area of child development that is not receiving enough attention (reference). It is recommended that RECSI explore opportunities to reinforce the importance of this area of child development.

4. Redesign the Evaluation Framework – Following on recommendation number two, to revisit the vision, it will be important to revisit the evaluation framework. Important data has been collected that can serve as a baseline for future comparison (literacy scale, parenting data), but other objectives could be measured more directly (e.g., connection to community and parents knowledge of child development). It is recommended that RECSI outline their vision, their activities to support that vision, and what would be considered measures of success. And then redesign the evaluation framework, accordingly.

With respect to data collection, it is recommended that the target sample size be increased from 250 to 500 parents to permit more meaningful comparison between schools and cycles of data collection. In addition, for future rounds of data collection, it is recommended that data be collected at the same time in the school year each year data is collected. While it is not necessary to collect data annually for the RECSI evaluation, for meaningful comparisons to be made it is important to collect the population level data at the same time in the school year.

It is also recommended that the RECSI evaluation incorporate additional measures of school readiness to inform community early years programming and planning. Currently, the only school readiness measure in this evaluation is the NLSCY literacy scale, other indicators of school readiness should be considered.

5. Recognize population based change take time – This evaluation did not detect significant changes on many of the population based measures nor did it expect to at this time. Targeted programming would produce outcomes in the population it targets, but RECSI aims to impact the larger parenting community as a whole and in keeping with this goal aims to measure change in the larger parenting community. Change at the population level takes time and programming should not be altered because few changes were seen in the ten months between baseline and round-two data collection. These measures will serve as points of comparison in the future to measure change.

Appendix A

RECSI Activities and Level of Activity / Participation: 2002-2003

Community Capacity	Parenting Support
<p>Resiliency Workshop (175) Communicating Across Cultures Workshop (25) Early Learning Canada Train the Trainer (14) Rock & Read Training (8) Mother Goose Training (15) Clear Communication Workshop (12) Volunteer Management Course – McLeod (18) Reaching Out to New Canadians (8) Reaching Out to the Aboriginal Community (9) Reaching Out Using Computers (25) Community Newsletter (10,000) Website (millions & millions!!) Healthy Baby Program (?) Local Community Needs Assessments (1100 families surveyed) Local Action Team Development (7 plus 1 “super” action team: 3 communities) Site Volunteer Programs – all sites Clothing Exchange Program Lighthouse Program (45) Recreation Programs (summer; after school) Community Connectors (7 schools with total student population of 2049) Community School Coordinator</p>	<p>Nobody’s Perfect - Pending Pregnant & Parenting Teens Support Project Growing & Learning Events (4 per year; attendance ranging from 16 – 25 each time) Roots of Empathy (200) Parent Resource Book (4000) Family Rooms/Resource Areas in Schools (6) Ongoing Family Room Presentations/Sessions (organized locally eg “How to Talk so Kids will Listen”; Anger Management 8-10 per session) Birth – 4 Program (30-35 per week) Lighthouse Program (45) Recreation Programs Summer After School</p>
Literacy	Nutrition
<p>Literacy Links Summer Program (43) Early Development Instrument Family Literacy Olympics (16) Rock & Read Programs (30; waiting list) Mother Goose Programs (23; waiting list) Birth – 4 Program (30-35 per week)</p>	<p>Breakfast/Snack Program – (222) Growing & Learning Events (4 per year; attendance ranging from 16-25 per event) Healthy Baby Program</p>

Appendix B

RECSI Activities and Objectives

Goal: To build on existing community capacity and form partnerships between schools, families, and community resources in order to support River East families in raising children who are resilient and healthy.

COMPONENT 1 System Level Objectives



Objective 1A

Partnerships are established between systems involved



Objective 1B

Increase in the amount of people trained to offer parent programs



Objective 1C
Schools are working more collaboratively with other organizations



Objective 1D
Community needs are being identified and supported

COMPONENT 2 Population Level Objectives



Objective 2A
Increased parental knowledge of child development



Objective 2B
Parents have more opportunities to develop skills and to access resources



Objective 2C
Parents feel an increased connection to their school and community



Objective 2D
Increased parental time spent involved in children's growth and learning



Objective 2E
More children ready for the transition to school

LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES

1. Children in River East are achieving healthy development
2. Positive parenting is being supported
3. Good connections exist between schools and the community
4. Community capacity is being built and supported

Appendix C

Data Collection Overview

October 2002 – Round one Data Collection

- Two hundred thirty nine of 960 parents from the participating schools were sent the Parent Questionnaire, the NLSCY questionnaires and a consent form to participate in the evaluation.
- One hundred nine parents (45.6 percent) return the signed consent form and the questionnaires.

May 2003 – Focus Group

- The principals from the five participating schools are asked to each send two teachers to a focus group. Ten teachers attended the focus group.

May – June 2003 – Action Team Interviews

- Phone interviews were conducted with action team participants.

June 2003 – Round Two Data Collection

- The 109 parents that returned the signed consent form in October 2002 were sent the same Parent Questionnaire and NLSCY Questionnaires.
- Sixty-six parents responded.

Appendix D

Parent Survey Response Rates by School, 2002-2003

School	Number of Families Surveyed	Response Rate by School – Round One		Response Rate by School – Round Two	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Polson	35	14	40.0	9	25.7
Prince Edward	46	24	51.2	12	26.1
Sherwood	27	15	55.6	10	37.0
Lord Wolseley	37	25	67.6	13	35.1
B.E. Glavin	94	31	33.0	22	23.4
Total	239	109	45.6	66	27.6

Appendix E

Positive Interaction

Jurisdiction	Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Baseline – measured September 2002				
River East	Not Low Positive Interaction	77	70.7	87.5
	Low Positive Interaction	11	10.1	12.5
	System Missing	21	19.3	
	Total	109	100.0	100.0
Outcomes – measured June 2003				
River East	Not Low Positive Interaction	53	80.3	85.5
	Low Positive Interaction	9	13.6	14.5
	System Missing	4	6.1	
	Total	66	100.0	100.0
Manitoba*	Not Low Positive Interaction	70,351	84.5	88.3
	Low Positive Interaction	9,344	11.2	11.7
	System Missing	3,590	4.3	
	Total	83,286	100.0	100.0
Canada*	Not Low Positive Interaction	3,291,762	84.0	84.5
	Low Positive Interaction	606,043	15.5	15.5
	System Missing	22,194	0.6	
	Total	3,919,999	100.0	100.0

* Source: Supplement to Investing in Early Childhood Development: 2002 Progress Report to Manitobans.

** Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), Primary File, Parents Questionnaire; Cycle 2 – Release 3 (1996-97).

Appendix F

Parent Satisfaction with Communication from School

Communication from School

Question	Category	Baseline frequency [%]	Round-two frequency [%]
General communication	Poor	10 / [9.3]	4 / [6.2]
	Neutral	16 / [14.8]	9 / [13.8]
	Good / very good	82 / [75.9]	52 / [80.0]
	System missing	1 [*]	1 [*]
Total		109 / [100.0]	66 / [100.0]
Information regarding community services and resources	Poor	14 / [13.0]	2 / [3.2]
	Neutral	33 / [30.6]	11 / [17.2]
	Good / very good	61 / [56.5]	51 / [79.7]
	System missing	1 [*]	3 [*]
Total		109	66

** Percentages for all outcomes variables are computed using valid percent; that is, system missing cases are not factored into the computation of percentages.*

Appendix G

Comfort at School

Comfort at School

Category	Baseline Frequency / [percent]	Round-two Frequency / [percent]
Low comfort	8 / [8.3]	3 / [4.6]
Neutral	24 / [22.2]	13 / [20.0]
High comfort	76 / [70.4]	49 / [75.3]
System missing	1 / [*]	1 / [*]
Total	109 / [100.0]	66 / [100.0]

Appendix H

Neighbourhood Support

Neighbourhood Support

Statement	Category	Baseline Frequency / [%]	Round-two Frequency / [%]
In my community, there are adult role models for my children.	Agree	80 / [77.7]	55 / [84.6]
	Don't Agree	23 / [22.3]	10 / [15.4]
	System Missing	6 / [*]	1 / [*]
Total		109 / [100.0]	66 / [100.0]
It is safe to walk alone in this community after dark.	Agree	62 / [57.4]	40 / [58.1]
	Don't Agree	46 / [42.6]	22 / [35.5]
	System Missing	1 / [*]	4 / [*]
Total		109 / [100.0]	66 / [100.0]
I feel supported as a parent/guardian in this community.	Agree	78 / [76.5]	54 / [87.1]
	Don't Agree	24 / [23.5]	8 / [12.9]
	System Missing	7 / [*]	4 / [*]
Total		109 / [100.0]	66 / [100.0]
If there is a community problem, my Neighbours would get together and deal with it.	Agree	62 / [62.6]	45 / [75.0]
	Don't Agree	37 / [37.4]	15 / [25.0]
	System Missing	10 / [*]	6 / [*]
Total		109 [100.0]	66 [100.0]

Appendix I

Literacy Survey Results

Reading with Children

Jurisdiction	Category	Frequency Frequency / [%]	Percent Frequency / [%]
Baseline – measured September 2002			
River East	A few times a week or less	6	30.0
	At least daily	14	70.0
	System missing	35	*
	Total	54	100.0
Outcomes – measured June 2003			
A few times a week or less			
River East	A few times a week or less	5	41.7
	At least daily	7	58.3
	System missing	21	*
	Total	33	100.0
Manitoba**	A few times a week or less	12,738	24.0
	At least daily	40,340	86.0
	System missing	30,209	*
	Total	83,286	100.0
Canada**	A few times a week or less	429,701	30.4
	At least daily	986,049	69.7
	System missing	770,526	*
	Total	2,186,276	100.0

* Percentages are computed using valid percent; that is, system missing cases are not factored into the computation of percentages.

** Source: Supplement to Investing in Early Childhood Development: 2002 Progress Report to Manitobans.

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