

Early Learning Community Based Partnerships
ELCBP

Interim Process Evaluation Report

September 2009 - January 2010

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Note to Reader

This report is divided into four sections:

- Section I.** Background for the Evaluation
- Section II.** Methods
- Section III.** Evaluation Findings
- Section IV.** Summary and Recommendations

Acronyms used in this report are as follows:

- ELCBP** Early Learning Community Based Partnerships
- DECAL** Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
- GaDOE** Georgia Department of Education
- GaPTA** Georgia Parent-Teacher Association
- PEPI** Parent Engagement and Policy Initiative
- PLI** Parent Leadership Institute
- PSP** Parent Services Project
- PAT** Parents as Teachers
- RA** Research Associates
- SPARK** Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids
- TEG** The Evaluation Group
- UWMA** United Way Metropolitan Atlanta
- WKKF** W. K. Kellogg Foundation

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Executive Summary

The Early Learning Community Based Partnerships (ELCBP) is a school readiness initiative of Smart Start Georgia, the early learning division of the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta (UWMA). The ELCBP employs three strategies: 1) home visiting (Parents as Teachers program), 2) parent leadership, and 3) school transition, to ensure children aged birth to five are prepared for and successful in kindergarten and beyond.

This interim process evaluation report is submitted to Smart Start Georgia as an assessment of the first six months of development and implementation. The report focuses on the organizational context and infrastructure that support ELCBP, its products and methods for dissemination. This process evaluation is shaped by the questions outlined in the implementation grant provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF). The questions are as follows:

How has research and policy helped to build the infrastructure of ELCBP?

- The use of research-based programs and assessments helps facilitate replication and has contributed to stakeholder and community buy-in.
- School policies regarding the use of Title I and Title III funds are being expanded to include school transition and home visiting activities.

How and in what ways has Smart Start improved capacity and infrastructure to support the rollout of ELCBP?

- The Organizational structure has been modified and staff have been hired to support the rollout of ELCBP. Through ELCBP activities, national, state, and local partnerships have been established.

What products have been created to implement the home visiting, school transition, and parent leadership strategies?

- A hub coordinator orientation and training plan, county budget template, Little School guide and manual draft, county orientation PowerPoint, and a guide to the county early learning planning process have all been completed.

How has the peer-to-peer site visit process and protocol been used to guide program implementation?

- Peer-to-peer site visits have resulted in learning exchanges between hubs that have been shared and replicated. These learning exchanges are most helpful to newer hubs that wish to observe ELCBP processes and activities prior to implementation.

How has ELCBP integrated the UWMA strategic plan and Smart Start initiatives?

- ELCBP is being used by UWMA leaders as a vehicle to explore other areas that impact education such as income, homelessness and health.

How has ELCBP leveraged funding and sustainability?

- Through the use of partnerships and collaborations, ELCBP has leveraged diverse funding sources to sustain the initiative beyond initial support.

Findings from this process evaluation lead to the following recommendations:

- Refine information management and dissemination processes and consider developing initiative-level policy and operations manuals to increase efficiency and assist in replicating ELCBP processes.
- Consider additional training and technical support in school transition and parent leadership strategies to improve implementation at the hub level.
- Establish monitoring and accountability processes to ensure fidelity in the application of the three core strategies. Fidelity checklists should be used to monitor specific indicators related to parent leadership, school transition and home visiting activities.
- Provide additional assistance to hubs to assist with sustainability.
- Explore ways to assist hubs with recruitment and retention of ELCBP participants.

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Section I.

Background for the Evaluation

1.1 Introduction

The Early Learning Community Based Partnerships (ELCBP) is a school readiness initiative of Smart Start Georgia, the early learning division of the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta (UWMA), which provides technical assistance and resources to the 13 counties of metropolitan Atlanta. Through home visitation, parent leadership, and school transition strategies, children aged birth to five are prepared for and successful in kindergarten and beyond.

ELCBP grew out of the work of SPARK, Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids. SPARK began as W.K. Kellogg Foundation's (WKKF) national school readiness initiative for vulnerable children ages three through six who were most at-risk for being unprepared for school. In May 2003, Smart Start-UWMA was one of eight national sites awarded approximately \$5 million to implement SPARK. SPARK Georgia expanded on the goals of the national SPARK initiative of ready children, ready families, and ready schools by emphasizing ready parents and ready communities served by community-based agencies ("hubs").

1.2 The SPARK Georgia Model

During the five-year initiative, SPARK Georgia provided services to nearly 800 children and their families through the efforts of eight community-based hubs in DeKalb and Gwinnett counties. The three strategies of the SPARK model are home visitation, parent leadership and school transition.

The foundation of home visitation is the Parents as Teachers home visitation program (PAT). PAT uses the *Born to Learn* curriculum which provides education and training to parents to increase their knowledge of child development and enhance their parenting skills; links parents with resources and social networks; and conducts health and development screenings of children. Children who have not received any kind of school readiness services prior to Pre-K are the target population of PAT. For purposes of the evaluation of ELCBP, children are classified as either "Light Touch" or "PAT." Light Touch children are those who do not receive the full complement of PAT services but who are enrolled, receive at least two home visits, are invited to all PAT workshops and activities, and are linked with services. The primary difference between "PAT" and "Light Touch" children is that families of the children enrolled as "PAT" receive regular home/personal visits while those enrolled as "Light Touch" do not receive those services.

School transition focuses on establishing Pre-K and school transition teams made up of childcare providers, school staff, parents and community partners who develop transition plans and year-long transition strategies for children. School transition teams develop strategies to ensure children feel connected and bonded to the school. School transition strategies may include summer camps for incoming kindergarteners, orientations and workshops for Pre-K parents, dissemination of relevant literature, and recommendations for community based resources.

Parent leadership consists of training and supporting parents to be advocates for themselves, their children and their community. The curriculum of the *Parent Leadership Institute*, developed by the Parent Services Project, has been instrumental in strengthening the skills of parents and helping them to be better advocates for their children

Successful implementation of the three strategies of SPARK contributed to the early identification of health and learning issues; increases in early literacy skills; a smoother transition into kindergarten; increased parent participation and leadership in early education and schools; and improved parenting attitudes and practices. The SPARK Georgia Model serves as the foundation for ELCBP which has been enhanced by the Parent Engagement and Policy Initiative (PEPI), a planning grant received in 2007 from WKKF. PEPI is a component of and supports ELCBP by providing infrastructure, policy and advocacy efforts, evaluation, sustainability, products and training strategies. As a result of support from PEPI, ELCBP continues and builds on the success of the SPARK Georgia Model.

1.2.1 Replication and Expansion

Through the work of ELCBP, Smart Start-UWMA has committed to roll-out the SPARK Georgia Model approach in select communities in UWMA's 13 county catchment area. UWMA's catchment area consists of Butts, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, Rockdale, and Paulding counties. Three distinct cohorts have emerged from the development of ELCBP.

The first cohort consists of the four original SPARK Georgia hubs. These hubs serve as Learning Laboratories and are a part of the WKKF's national SPARK initiative. The hubs have been in operation for six years and serve as demonstration sites to support the replication of ELCBP throughout the 13 metropolitan counties. The second cohort began in 2008 and is the first group of hubs to be based on the SPARK Georgia Model. All of these hubs are supported by community-based initiatives. The third cohort began in 2009 and resulted from Smart Start-UWMA's partnership with two school districts. These school districts have embedded the three strategies of ELCBP, home visitation using the PAT model, school transition and parent

leadership, into their work. Table 1.1 displays the hubs by cohort, county and implementation coverage. Implementation coverage highlights which of the three ELCBP strategies have been implemented at the hub.