



***Spark NH Vision:** All New Hampshire children and their families are healthy, learning, and thriving now and in the future.

***Spark NH Mission:** Provide leadership that promotes a comprehensive, coordinated, sustainable early childhood system that achieves positive outcomes for young children and families, investing in a solid future for the Granite State.

Director's Report – April 23, 2015

Thank you to Ellen Wheatley

As many of you may know, Ellen Wheatley is leaving her position as Administrator of the New Hampshire Child Development Bureau (and as member of Spark NH Council) to move to Washington, D.C. to become the Deputy Director of the U.S. Office of Child Care. Spark NH and the early childhood community here will miss her greatly.

Ellen was a founding mother of Spark NH, serving on the initial Planning Committee for the Council as well as serving as the Council's first Chair for 2 years and on the Executive Committee for 3 years. Ellen is a visionary whose leadership was critical to the creation and development of Spark NH. She stewarded the Council from the days when it was solely funded by federal stimulus dollars, to the current diversified mix of federal and private foundation grants. Ellen's willingness to commit CCDF quality dollars to support the council was critical to leveraging other funders. This is just one example of the many efforts to strengthen the early childhood system in which Ellen has been instrumental.

Under Ellen's leadership (along with Co-Chair, Pat Cantor), the Spark NH Workforce and Professional Development committee has grown to be the largest committee with a membership of over 30 people. Since the Committee's launch nearly 4 years ago, it oversaw the creation of a PORTAL (Professional Opportunities, Resources, Trainings and Links) on the Spark NH website for early childhood professionals to look for jobs and professional development opportunities. The committee also supervised the creation of 2 inventories: one of early childhood education programs in higher education and the other of early childhood health and family support programs in higher education. More recently, the committee has nearly completed cross-sector early childhood competencies and a cross-sector professional development blueprint. All of this work will provide support for providers of early childhood programs and services and will strengthen their work for children.

Ellen has been a great source of support in guiding the continued development of the Council's work. She is a brilliant systems thinker who is always seeking to better the lives of early childhood providers as well as those of young children and their families. The only consolation in losing Ellen in NH is thinking about the change she'll be able to make in Washington to benefit not just New Hampshire's children, but the nation's. We wish her all the very best.

Council Equity Work

I recently had the opportunity to hear a keynote speech by Dr. Allan Johnson about "Power, Privilege and Difference" at the Endowment for Health's annual meeting. He spoke powerfully and eloquently about structural issues that keep us from reaching racial equality in our nation. You can view the speech at <http://www.endowmentforhealth.org/our-priorities/advancing-health-equity-for-racial-ethnic-and-language-minorities/power-privilege-and-difference>. He argued compellingly that by failing to discuss disparity in our culture we are perpetuating it. Dr. Johnson's speech underscored for me the need for the work we have been doing at the Council level to ensure that we bring an equity lens to the Council and all committees of Spark NH.

With the help of Trini Tellez and Amy Parece-Grogan from the Office of Minority Health and Refugee Affairs at DHHS, we have been answering the “What’s Race got to Do with It” questions from the Race Matters Institute. The first phase of our work was to look at whether there are disparities by race or ethnicity in early childhood. Amy and Trini brought some New Hampshire data to the group: racial and ethnic differences in third grade reading and math scores as well as in out of school suspensions. (There is no New Hampshire data on suspensions and expulsions these broken out by age, but national studies show very concerning disparities in suspensions and expulsions from preschool by race and ethnicity). We then brainstormed the likely causes for these disparities. From this we created a “back map” of factors that lead to those causes. At our last meeting, we separated issues of diversity from those of equity and structural causes from individual ones.

The next step in the “What’s Race Got to Do with It?” process is to ask, “What does this discussion suggest for possible investments or actions to reduce racial disparities and disproportionality in and for black communities and other communities of color.” At our next meeting, we will look at the causes on the back map that are about equity and are structural and assign them to Spark NH Committees to look at how we might begin to address them and report back to the Council. These discussions are not necessarily easy and certainly take time. However, I feel strongly that if we want to realize our vision that New Hampshire children and their families are healthy, learning and thriving now and in the future, we must continually discuss and address disparities until we’re certain that our vision really includes all New Hampshire’s children.

Endowment for Health Public Awareness Grant

In February Spark NH was encouraged by the Endowment for Health to apply for a grant to further our “Children: the Bedrock of the Granite State” public awareness work. I wrote the grant to support a consultant to help us to do more Bedrock presentations and better follow up with those who agree to take further action. (See grant in the Council meeting materials). I am pleased to announce that the grant was awarded in late March. I am thrilled that we soon will be able to reach many more leadership groups in the state and help them to understand the importance of the early years.

Spark NH Schedule

April

Thursday, April 23, 9-11.....Spark NH Council (4th Thursday of every even month)
 Friday, April 24, 9-11.....Workforce and Professional Development Committee (Every 4th Friday)

May

Friday, May 1, 2-4.....Evaluation Committee (1st Friday of Every Other Month)
 Monday, May 4, 9-10:30.....Policy Committee (1st Monday of Every Month)
 Monday, May 4, 2-4.....Data Committee (1st Monday of Every Month)
 Thursday, May 7, 10-11:30.....Communications and Public Awareness Committee (1st Thursday of Every Other Month)
 Wednesday, May 13, 1-3.....Executive Committee (2nd Wednesday of Every Month)
 Thursday, May 21, 1-3.....Quality Committee (3rd Thursday of Every Month)
 Friday, May 22, 9-11.....Workforce and Professional Development Committee (4th Thursday of Every Month)

June

- Monday, June 1, 9-10:30.....Policy Committee (1st Monday of Every Month)
- Monday, June 1, 2-4.....Data Committee (1st Monday of Every Month)
- Monday, June 8, 9-10:30.....Family Partnership and Engagement Taskforce (2nd Monday of Every Other Month)
- Wednesday, June 10, 1-3.....Executive Committee (2nd Wednesday of Every Month)
- Friday, June 25, 9-11.....Workforce and Professional Development Committee (4th Thursday of Every Month)

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Milliken,
Director, Spark NH

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." - *Helen Keller*