

ECFE Annual Report

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0577

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Willow River

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5. How did you identify new and underserved populations? What were your key findings?

The Willow River Early Childhood Program Coordinator conducted a community needs survey that addressed 15 different areas. This anonymous survey was sent home with all students, Willow River School Staff, and was made available to community members in a variety of locations. This survey identified past and present participants, their living arrangements, the number of people in their home, their age group, financial stability, and their experience with the Willow River Early Childhood Programs.

More than 70 surveys were returned and the key findings were: Families in the Willow River School District are being affected by or are struggling from substance abuse and addictions, poverty, parenting issues(single parenting/ co-parenting), employment/ unemployment issues, transportation issues, medical costs and the availability of medical care.

What we have found is that many of our families are unable to attend programming because they are unaware of program availability, unable to transport, unable to participate because of work schedules, and many families feel forced to participate in out of district programming because of free transportation and more classes are available.

Parents and families in this community are struggling with substance abuse, addiction, and poverty because of this, many children are not able to attend programming until all day, every day kindergarten where transportation is provided. Through the completion of this survey, we learned that we are underserving working families and families without transportation. We also learned that there is increased need for families with high risk factors.

- Families and community members want MORE early childhood programming –More frequent than 2-2 ½ hour a week, more often than 1 to 2 times a week.
- Families and community members would like Transportation available to children in order to attend preschool/ ECFE classes.
- Families would like to see an increase in classes, information, and support for high risk families. Topics that were recommended covered a wide variety of parenting topics, resources to address substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, housing, technology, medical care, and transportation.

6. How did you identify child and family risk factors? What were your key findings?

Each family was asked to fill out anonymously the areas that they felt their family struggled with and the areas that they felt the community struggled most with. The family struggles that were addressed were: clothing, food, transportation, housing, children's behaviors, disabilities, parenting, employment/ unemployment, adult basic education, parenting education, medical care/ insurance, substance abuse, preschool education, childcare, domestic violence, technology access, counseling, and divorce. Survey participants were asked to address the struggles within their own home and the struggles that were prevalent within our community.

Families reported that within their own home the biggest struggles were: Employment/ unemployment, Medical care/ insurance, technology access, transportation, children's behaviors, and childcare.

Families also reported that they feel the biggest struggles in the community are:

- Employment/ Unemployment- lack of jobs, low wages, commute and gas prices, and the lack of work ethic.
- Parenting- Many single parent homes, the inability to co-parent, lack of parenting knowledge, and the high divorce rates.
- Substance Abuse/ Addiction- High prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse! The lack of available treatment and support resources for families and individuals being affected by addiction. Also, domestic violence was noted as a concern, and that there were correlations between the substance abuse and domestic violence.
- Medical/ Insurance- The high cost of insurance and medical care, and the limited availability of care providers.
- Food / Housing- Lack of resources in the area, many low income families, the housing and food are too expensive.

Many participants felt that the district's population's struggles are easily and highly underestimated. Many of the parents and community members that are willing to fill out the information, represent families that are somewhat stable to completely stable. These participants expressed that the nonparticipating survey families are often those in the most need, and those with the most struggles and risk factors. Some have noted that in the past, information has depicted an unfair representation of the true population; the impoverished families, the cultural and socioeconomic diversity, and the true number of families being directly or indirectly impacted by substance abuse and addiction. The Willow River Early Childhood Program would like to increase services to underserved and newly identified families. It is the hope that we will be able to identify more families with risk factors and work to address the family's needs and the needs of their children prior to kindergarten entrance.

7. How did you assess family and parenting education needs? What were your key findings?

Family and parenting education needs were assessed through the use of the community needs survey and through feedback forms of current program participants.

- Families repeatedly expressed the need for an increase in early childhood programming. Currently, school readiness programming is available to four year olds for 2.5 hours, twice a week. Preschool programming is available to three year olds once a week for two hours. Early Childhood Family Education Classes are available to families once a week, providing either a morning or an evening class. Families have reported that transitioning from a twice weekly program, to an all day, every day kindergarten class can be a struggle for the children.
- Families expressed the need for an increase in education and support to parents in regards to their child's learning, behaviors, and parenting styles. Many parents are single parents or they are working to co-parent their children.
- Families and community members have voiced the need for transportation to and from classes. Most families work throughout the school day and do not have the option to leave work or to transport their children to programming, other families reported that they do not have any means to transport their children.
- Families and community members would like to see an increase in programming times, classes, and options. Community members have expressed their concern over families and students feeling they have to attend programming outside of our district, due to limited class options, transportation, and hours.
- Families and community members expressed interest and desire to see classes and programming to meet the needs of families in areas such as: parenting styles, children's behaviors, parent support, and teaching parents and children that choices have consequences and how to make choices that will benefit our children and our community.

As early childhood programs, we build the foundation for lifelong learning. It is imperative that we teach the families, children, and community members the importance of education. By providing more early childhood programming we are also able to identify more children that would be eligible for early intervention services. By providing families and children support, we are building stronger communities and stronger home school relationships. It is our wish to provide both children and their families with the support and education that they feel will meet the strengths and the needs of their family.

8. How will your programming and services be tailored to the needs of families and parents prioritized in the community needs assessment?

Based on the community responses that were received, we are looking for ways to:

- Increase programming options, so that we are better able to meet the needs of the families in our community.
- Increase classes and availability of transportation to meet the needs of the families.
- Serve as a resource to families, and to further assist them with the struggles they face in daily life including education, food, shelter, employment, and substance abuse.

- Provide the option for parent only classes and events where parents can support one another.
- Increase outreach opportunities to make families aware of program availability and to work with families to identify and address their individual needs.
- Continuously monitor, assess, and address the strengths and needs of children and families in our community in order to provide a strong foundation for lifelong learning.
- Create smooth transitions from early childhood to elementary.
- Strengthen the home and school connection.

The Willow River Early Childhood Program is continuously working to address the needs of our community; we demonstrate this by asking parents and family members to complete feedback forms identifying our program strengths and our program needs. Past participants were asked to describe their experience with the Willow River Early Childhood Program, some of the responses were that the program was: "Excellent! Beneficial! Good! Great! Wonderful! Enjoyed learning in a fun environment! Small classes, caring staff! Awesome!" and more.

When families were asked why they did not attend Willow River Early Childhood Programs, families responded that: "Times were inconvenient to the family, transportation was an issue, both parents were working, or that they did not have children early childhood aged", and some families simply had "no interest in attending."

The feedback forms, as well as the community needs assessment are used to learn how we can better support our children and our community. However, the larger struggle comes not in simply knowing the needs of the community, but in having the funding to adequately address the programming needs and wishes of the community.