Listening to Parents, Youth and Teachers:
3 Tools for Community Learning and Engaging

Community Indicators Consortium Impact Summit 2013
October 18, 2013, Chicago, IL

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Because All Children Are Our Children

The Children's Trust

Welcome everyone! I will be sharing with you three tools my organization is currently using, but in various stages of implementation, to listen and learn from our community members in anticipation of engaging them in further conversation.

About The Children's Trust

- A <u>Florida Children's Services Council</u> - independent countywide special district, created by voters, funded via local property tax
- <u>Mission</u>: To partner with the community to improve the lives of all children and families in Miami-Dade County by making strategic investments in their futures
- <u>Reach</u>: Annual budget of $103 million, reaching nearly 200,000 Miami-Dade children

First I think it important to provide you with idea of who The Children's Trust is and what our reach is to better understand our role in the community.

We are a children's services council that provides <u>funding</u> to improve the lives of children and families in Miami-Dade County through prevention and early intervention services for children and families focused on health, family/community support and school readiness/success.

Miami-Dade has a population of 2.5 million people (larger than 14 states) of which 550,000 are children, and the child poverty rate is nearly 25% – we have a lot to learn, people to engage and changes to accomplish.

The Trust's Strategic Plan identifies four broad goals that provide our touch points for everything we seek to do. Not unlike probably all other communities, we want all our children to be :

- Healthy Physically and Emotionally

- Supported by Safe, Nurturing Parents and Communities

- Ready to Succeed when Entering School

- Succeeding in School and Society

Major initiatives include out-of-school programs; health suites in public schools, and a quality rating and improvement system for early care and education programs (professional development, career advisors, program quality assessment and on-site technical assistance). We also invest in parenting and youth development programs as well as advocacy.

Learn From Communities to Engage Them

Use Tools to Collect Data
Turn It into Information

Connect with Community
Spur Conversations

Creating Awareness
Leading to Action

In order to fund programs that address what we seek to accomplish, The Trust conducts countywide research to assist in:

- planning investments to meet child and family needs

- identifying areas of inequity where strategic investments are likely to make a difference

- differentiating approaches according to neighborhoods and populations

A quick pitch - Related to our interest in community research data, The Children's Trust is a member of the **National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership** whose 37 members, and growing, are dedicated to building neighborhood-level information systems using local data. The point is to get available information used - whether for policymaking, community building, or program planning.
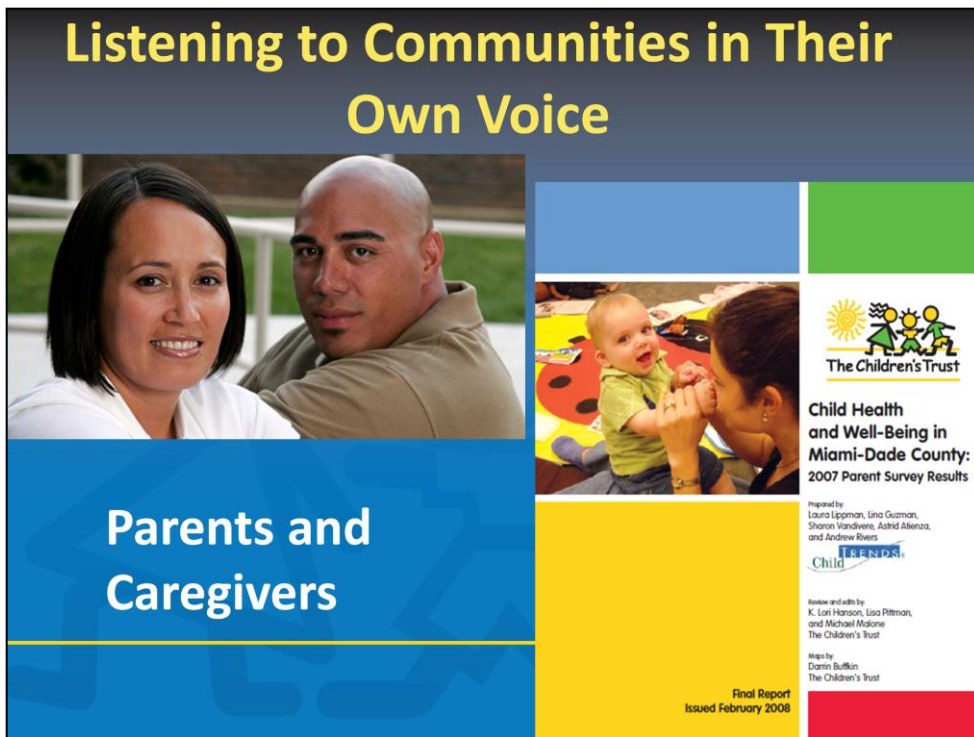
There is great benefit to gathering data from across the community as it is one of the major ways in which we learn – DATA ARE SIMPLY PACKAGED EXPERIENCES!
The Trust learns from our community work, specifically from using 3 different tools that broadly collect experiences from different perspectives – parents, kindergarten teachers and high school youth - by means of surveys.

I'll also touch on how we are using what we learn and what we have found to be challenges – our lessons learned….so far.

First, I'd like to get an idea of how many of you have or are using survey tools in your community to gather information. Raise your hand if you have been involved in a developing or fielding a

survey in your community – perhaps we all could share and learn from each other. There are, of course, other methods to gather information about our communities such as focus groups and expert interviews – but that's for another presentation.

Listening to Communities in Their Own Voice

Parents and Caregivers

The Children's Trust

Child Health and Well-Being in Miami-Dade County: 2007 Parent Survey Results

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Final Report
Issued February 2008

The first tool is our **Household Survey**

This is a countywide survey representative of children 0-18, and their parents – first done in 2007, repeated in 2011/2012. While the surveys we used were developed by us to serve our specific needs, there is no need to create your own questions as there are an amazing number of national surveys with questions that have been tested and validated – and another benefit is they often have results by State and Nation with which you can compare your community.

We are interested in understanding whether there are significant differences in our county - whether families' attitudes, beliefs, practices, use of resources varied by children's age or race/ethnicity or geographic location within the county.

One thing we learned is where people live is related to their race/ethnicity – Miami-Dade typically uses three – roughly, Hispanic (63%); black, non-Hispanic (20%); white, non-Hispanic (15%), with another 2% "Other" (jump to Slide 5 map, then back)
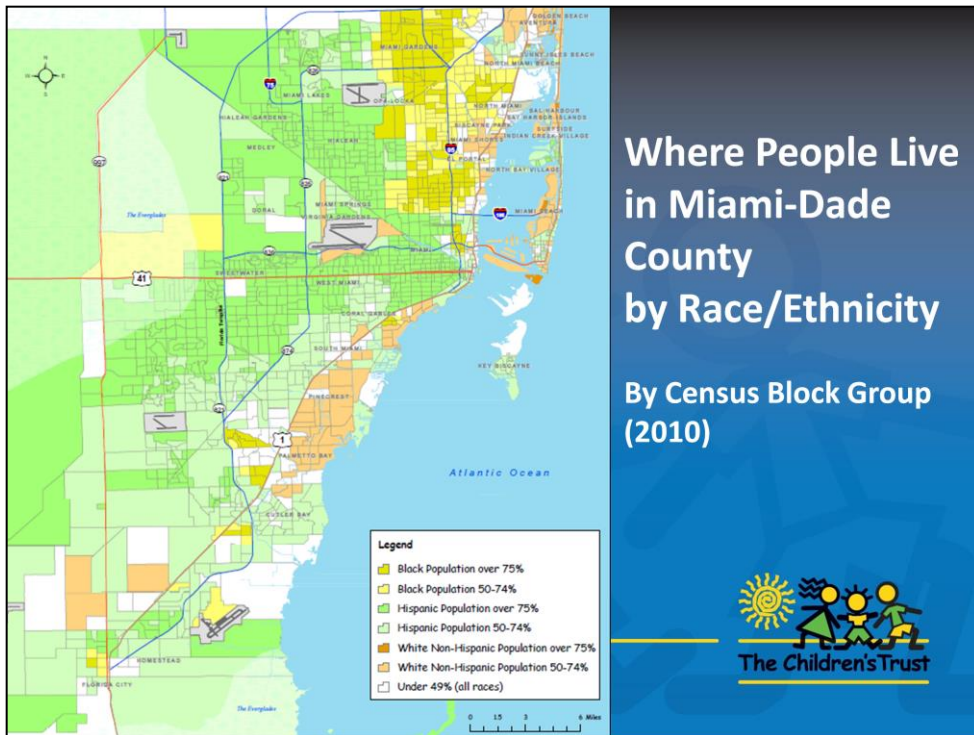
What we are learning from these surveys is important to us in order to be able to understand the needs of our different communities, and guide our programming – such as,

- our Hispanic children are very challenged when it comes to eating sufficient amounts of vegetables and fruits – this has led to targeting some nutrition programs in these neighborhoods;
- parents' educational expectations for their children significantly decrease as their children age – how do we as a community encourage parents to continue to encourage and have high

expectations for their children?

- Young Hispanic children are least likely to spend time in non-parental care, and at the same time Hispanic parents are least likely to read regularly, tell stories, or teach their young children letters, words or numbers – how might we engage parents to encourage them to do so early on, and not wait for formal school for their children to begin learning these skills?

- All children are more likely to be interested in arts and sports activities after school – these are most likely to be the most popular after school and summer programs.

Where People Live in Miami-Dade County by Race/Ethnicity

By Census Block Group (2010)

The Children's Trust

Legend
- Black Population over 75%
- Black Population 50-74%
- Hispanic Population over 75%
- Hispanic Population 50-74%
- White Non-Hispanic Population over 75%
- White Non-Hispanic Population 50-74%
- Under 49% (all races)

Miami-Dade County typically examines itself in terms of 3 race/ethnicity combinations: Hispanic; black, non-Hispanic and white, non-Hispanic. About 2% of our population does not identify with any of these three categories.

The darker shade of each color represents census block groups where 75% or more of the population is one race/ethnicity; the lighter shade is where 50 to 75% of the population is one race/ethnicity; and the white areas indicates the greatest integration where no race/ethnicity has a majority.

So, you can see the white, non-Hispanic population is concentrated along the coastline and beach areas; the black, non-Hispanic population is primarily in the northeast of the county; and the Hispanic population is everywhere else.

Listening to Communities in Their Own Voice

Kindergarten Teachers

Transforming Early Childhood Community Systems
THE SCIENCE FOR A BETTER START

The second tool is the **Early Development Instrument** which is used in conjunction with **Transforming Early Childhood Community Systems,** a national initiative developed by a partnership between UCLA's Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities and United Way Worldwide (see map). The goal of TECCS is to improve the school readiness of young children in a community by measuring and mapping the developmental progress of young children at a population level and engaging diverse stakeholders in using this information to advocate for young children. This partnership offers supports and tools to guide local community efforts that help children reach school healthy and ready to succeed. (toggle back from map)

The EDI is a research-based tool that is helpful not only in describing how children are developing, but also in predicting health, education, and social outcomes.

- Used to raise the interest level of the community in children's developmental progress

- Community is committing to a long process

- Takes school system "off the hook" for expectation it is responsible for children's academic and developmental progress, and places responsibility on community and parents

- Supports teachers' interests and hopes children will come to school ready to learn

- Conducted after children in classrooms for 5 months (min of 1 month), teachers are in a position to know the children in their classrooms; they rate children with respect to their developmental status (5 classic domains) as opposed to their academic abilities

       Physical Health and Well-being >16 Qs

       Social Competence > 58 Qs

       Emotional Maturity >

       Language and Cognitive Development > 40 Qs

Communication Skills and General Knowledge >

- Scoring is done in sum, i.e., children are either developmentally ready or not ready (developmentally vulnerable) overall as well as on each domain

> Provides interesting information for community to consider such things as "why are most of our children ready physically but not socially?"

- Results are mapped and shared back with communities if at least 70% participation rate is obtained

- Communities can identify where and what assets need to be addressed; what to promote to enhance children's developmental readiness

- Provides a lovely interaction of empiricism/data-informed reality with community action – without anyone specifically being blamed if children collectively are identified as developmentally vulnerable in one or more areas.

- Cohorts are used over time (every 2 to 3 years) to gauge neighborhood progress

> British Columbia has longest historical use of EDI – their second cohort scored less than their first, even with community action – caution that external events (in this case a recession) can influence results too

- Traditional needs assessments and risk analysis can be inadequate for identifying where to put resources to address limitations

> some communities have been surprised by their children's vulnerabilities exposed through the EDI – for example, quite possible for affluent neighborhoods to experience a large proportion of children with vulnerabilities in emotional maturity or communication skills

> A reminder to look at the entire community and not make assumptions as to where and what children's vulnerabilities are

The Children's Trust is working with our school district Miami-Dade County School District to pilot this tool just last year with kindergarten teachers in about 30 schools who assessed each of their students (2,000). This year our efforts are tripling, expanding to nearly 100 schools and 6,000 kindergartners (we have about 24,000 total kindergarteners each year).

It can be difficult at the start to gain the minimum 70% participation rate for a geographic area unless done on a very large basis – particularly in school districts with a lot of school choice options like Miami-Dade County because the number of children attending neighborhood schools has been diminishing. The EDI results are associated typically with children's home neighborhoods, which is not always that of the school they attend. Total results are shared with the schools attended by the children, but ultimately the work in addressing vulnerabilities is expected to occur in the communities. We are just starting on this journey, but other communities have many positive experiences with TECCS and the EDI.

Transforming Early Childhood Community Systems (TECCS)
National Learning Network 2012-2013
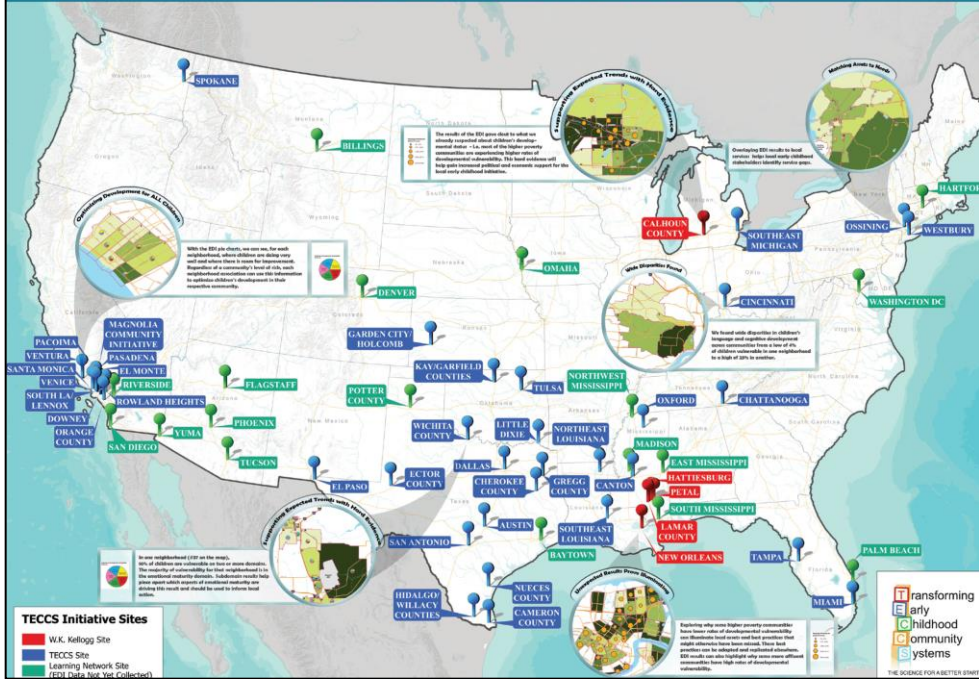
Lastly, the **YouthTruth Survey** of high school students – a project of the Center for Effective Philanthropy – is also available for middle school students and piloting a tool for 3rd-5th grade students.

The Children's Trust worked with the Miami-Dade County School District to . Again, this is a nationally used tool with an organization that provides great resources and tools for sharing findings back to school administrators, students, and teachers – separately and collectively.

The YouthTruth student survey translates students' unique perspective into actionable data and insight to help districts, schools and teachers improve.

The **school-wide survey** gathers student feedback about their overall experience, and takes on average 20 minutes to complete. Key themes include:
- Student Engagement
- School Culture
- Students' Relationships with Teachers
- Rigor of Classes and Instruction
- Preparedness for the Future

Potential to tailor with ten optional modules:
- Learning Styles
- Student Voice and Leadership

- Project Based Learning
- Student Ownership
- STEM
- School Safety
- General Health
- Emotional and Mental Health
- Drugs and Alcohol
- Diet and Exercise

Results are now available on-line with interactive controls to be able to see:
- Analysis by Grade Level, Race and Gender
- Local and National Comparisons
- Indexed Student Comments (School-Wide)
- Report Designed Specifically to Share With Students (School-Wide)

YouthTruth has great resources and a learning community to assist schools with how to share their results, giving voice to their students, in making changes at their schools. Though often there is clamoring for better food choices at lunch and disagreement with school uniform requirements, there are also thoughtful suggestions about course selections, concerns about school and neighborhood safety, opinions about the helpfulness or disinterest of teachers in preparing them for their future that come as surprises to administrators and teachers.

I also want to mention the **Gallup Student Poll** (grades 5-12) as another tool in this area that is focused on positive indicators of youth with questions to assess youths' hope for the future, engagement in school and general well-being. For those of you who are familiar with the Youth Risk Behavior Survey which focuses on risky behavior and negative indicators, the ability to gather information on the positive aspects of how our youth are doing and their outlook on the future offers a different perspective that has been largely missing until recently. Interventions focusing solely on academic grades and test scores can be seen as treating symptoms rather than causes which are often students' feelings of hopelessness or lack of engagement and general sense of well-being.

Being able to focus messages on positive aspects of child and youth development is much more refreshing and uplifting for community conversations.

So why is all of this important? How are we using what we are learning? Communities and the people who populate them love to learn about themselves, see data and reports specific to them – they can relate to it! Learn how they differ from others, talk about it, decide if it is a good thing, or something that might need to be addressed, and then take ownership. Together create strategies to transform the neighborhood or community into what neighbors, schools, civic leaders want.

Again, once you have what you need in terms of data, don't forget to share it back.

Everyone can use tools such as these to learn about their communities. But it is critical to bring it full circle. You may have gathered this information for a specific planning or action purpose, but much of its benefit will be lost if you do not share what you learn with those who taught you about themselves!

Hold community conversations. It can and does invigorate populations and can identify neighborhood champions, but how to engage communities is a topic for a whole other presentation.

For example, with the EDI, the whole purpose of this tool is ultimately to engage communities in understanding developmental readiness or vulnerabilities among their children and then using this information to better prepare their young children, for them to be ready to enter school ready to learn. Even well-resourced communities have had a preponderance of their children who are developmentally vulnerable in some areas – perhaps in terms of their emotional maturity or social interactions – while being advanced in language skills or physical prowess.

Challenges are primarily resource-related: **funding** (a representative population sample for a phone survey requires a lot of phone calls, not just because of a targeted population in our case, but also due to the increasing numbers of cell-phone only households), **expertise** (statistical for both creating representative samples and for appropriate data analyses, as well as for community engagement – a topic worthy of a dedicated presentation), and of course **time**. And in the case of surveys of students and teachers, coordinating efforts with schools – critical to find champions within the school district that understand.

While The Children's Trust is fortunate to have a direct source of funding through local property taxes, we are getting to the point where we have more data than we can fully analyze on our own and are seeking ways to leverage the use of our universities and colleges to provide learning opportunities / practical experience for students to assist us with both data analyses and community engagement efforts.

Here are weblinks for more information on the tools I've talked about today.