

Bright EYES (Early Years Education Stewards)—A Longmont Community Early Care and Education Collaboration

Background

In 2003, a local ad hoc group of representatives from the City of Longmont, the St. Vrain Valley School District and several Longmont health, human service and children’s service agencies formed to focus on ways that the Longmont community could work together to expand and improve early education opportunities for Longmont families. The catalyst for this effort came from Mayor Julia Pirnack, who was interested in examining ways in which the City of Longmont could participate in the National League of Cities Strengthening Families project, which was focused on early childhood issues. Since that time, the group has reviewed the results of studies prepared by the Early Care and Education Council of Boulder County (ECECBC), as well as a series of state and national studies, and engaged in discussions about actions it could facilitate to help ensure that all Longmont children have a healthy start in life and are ready to learn when they enter school.

Current members of this group, known as *Bright EYES* (Early Years Education Stewards), include:

Julia Pirnack, Mayor	John Caldwell, Board of Education
Mike Butler, Police Chief	Merrill Bohaning, Board of Education
Andrea Kutscher, St. Vrain Valley Schools	Dr. Gregory Jaramillo, Salud Clinic
Nancy Driscoll, Longmont United Hospital	Leann Earl, Longmont Headstart
Amy Ogilvie, Longmont Children/Youth Resources	Jean Werner, OUR Childcare
Don Horton, Boulder County Public Health	Karen Rahn, Boulder County Early Care/Education
Karen Roney, City of Longmont	TeeDee Keister, Tiny Tim
Glenda Faus, St. Vrain Family Center	Paula Aven Gladych, <u>Longmont Daily Times-Call</u>
Pam Ford, Front Range Community College	Janet Gutman, St. Vrain Valley Schools
Kari Ditta, Bella Vita School	

Purpose

The purpose of Bright EYES is to work with the community and families to bring together resources that result in young children being ready to learn and ready for life. The overall goals for this effort include:

- 1) increase the availability of comprehensive school readiness programs,
- 2) enhance community awareness around the importance of early care and education,
- 3) provide enrichment activities for families and their young children,
- 4) provide opportunities for parental and community engagement,
- 5) enhance awareness and opportunities for children to develop cognitive and language skills, and
- 6) improve the social/emotional development and health of young children so they are ready to learn when entering school.

Progress Report

- The City of Longmont has recently received two grant awards that will assist Bright EYES in achieving some of its goals. First, the National League of Cities awarded the City a technical assistance grant to assist Bright EYES in developing its community awareness campaign and efforts to enhance parent engagement. Second, the City was awarded a State Tony Grampsas grant that will bring the “Incredible Years” program to Longmont Head Start classrooms and to St. Vrain Valley School District preschool classrooms.
- Bright EYES has contracted with a marketing consultant to develop compelling messages and community education strategies.
- The City of Longmont has two funded capital projects to renovate its Meeker Center (839 Meeker Street) and former Fire Station #3 (next to Centennial Park) facilities that will house additional programs and services to Longmont children, youth and families. The Meeker Center will be transformed into a Family Resource Center that will house additional comprehensive school readiness programs, as well as resources and activities for the adjacent Kensington neighborhood. The former Fire Station #3 “living quarters” will be remodeled into flexible space that can accommodate a variety of activities for children, youth, families and adults living in the surrounding neighborhood. Both of these renovation projects will be initiated in 2005 and will involve community input.
- Bright EYES has identified several programs it would like to implement:
 - √ Offer a Mayor’s Book Club program which encourages 4 and 5 year olds and their parents to read a new book together monthly. As part of this program, the Mayor will appear on public access TV to read the book to children who have not had the opportunity to read with their parents.
 - √ Hire a Cultural Broker position within the Longmont City government to help parents with young children connect with community resources available to them.
 - √ Partner with local groups providing information kits to parents of young children to expand and enhance resources available. This might include working with businesses to provide information to their employees on the first six years of life and/or connecting parents directly to resources in the community.

Early care and education is a community issue--not just a family issue or a government issue. Everyone benefits from children who are prepared to go to school and succeed in school. To learn more about the Bright EYES project and to become involved in this community-wide effort to ensure that all Longmont children are ready to learn and ready for life, contact Amy Ogilvie, Children and Youth Resources Manager at 303.651.8580.