

Ingham Impact Episode 6: Early Childhood

I was hired as an Early Childhood consultant for the Great Start Readiness Program, and Great Start Readiness serves about 1,500 kids here in the Ingham ISD area, and offers them a preschool program. The goal is that they would be ready for kindergarten when they finish that program. I get to go in and I get to work with the teaching teams in each GSRP classroom that is mine, and help them with implementation of the rules that have been setup by the Michigan Department of Education; help them to improve their teaching practices and work on some goals throughout the year to help them improve outcomes for kids. My role is a parent advocate and a parent educator, and when I say advocate that means that I look at the needs of a parent from my own personal point of view, as to when I was being a single parent or a parent with limited income and resources. I focus on the family well-being first and I connect them with resources because I feel that if the family has housing that's appropriate in place and nutrition that's appropriate and in place then they can work better with their children and prepare their children for school. There are several opportunities for home visiting services within the community and I am part of one of those home visiting programs which is Ingham Healthy Families. And some of what we do is we model activities around what the baby needs to be learning, or where their development is at. We also advocate for them in the community if they need additional resources, and we discover this through conversation and building that trusting relationship that we have with them. One of the things I think is a selling point of the program: Usually when I start out with a family or if I'm doing some outreach in trying to recruit families, I utilize our flyers and I explain that we have other services. If they're not interested in the home visiting piece, that there's also playgroups that they can visit. I don't just say home visiting is the only fit for you. I look at what's a best fit for the parents, because some parents are college students, some parents are working two jobs, and some parents are just a single parent home. And some times I've run into where there are grandparents who are parenting for the second time around. I am in classrooms as much as I possibly can be. So I go out and, sometimes it might just look like I'm playing or hanging out with the kids, but I'm in there observing teachers and kids and then doing some coaching and feedback afterwards so that teachers know what they can work on. We have to have data meetings and local advisory meetings, so we have those several times throughout the week; sometimes evenings, sometimes Fridays when the kids are not in session. And then for my MTSS position, I'm doing a lot of implementation meetings with teams and really working on specific behaviors and literacy strategies that we can improve for kids and it could be specific children, it could be within the whole classroom. I'm out in the districts pretty much every day of the week and we don't use our office very much around here so...(laughs) The real work happens in the home; when I'm sitting on the floor with moms and babies, and they're sharing with me their story, and I'm holding that respectfully, because every family is unique and I

want to respect that as a home visitor, invited into their home. The relationship building is huge. Not only because then we get to know each other and they learn to trust me but also that they're learning a way to do the same thing with their baby. And if a baby grows up in a home where there's good feelings and they feel that they can trust the adults in their life, it opens the door for learning in all areas. I see my role as helping parents understand that they are their child's first teachers, and that they promote learning in the home, and therefore the child feels comfortable in a preschool setting or childcare setting and beyond to kindergarten and first grade. I think what we do at Ingham ISD is look at the successes, the little small steps that build up to being an eight year old reader and reading for content and reading for fun. That's where I focus a lot times, you know, where we're going with elementary education, and how this is going to impact the children later on. Our work with the Early Years Projects and with the GSRP kids really sets them up for success later in life, and we really want them to be lifelong learners, so starting at three or four years of age is a great time to have that impact I think. By my visiting with families that are identified for our program that could use some help and some tools for their toolbox, as far as what they can do with their children, and to develop that relationship with their child. Then, even before birth, I know that that's going to make a difference. As long as I can continue getting up off the floor with families, I'm going to continue doing this beautiful work. You're not alone in parenting. You're not alone in educating your children, and I want my colleagues and coworkers to understand that too; We are a team and we're building a team that's surrounding these youngsters in our community to make them successful.

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