

Academic Success by Helping Children to Have a Strong Start

Case for Action:

- The City of Rochester has one of the highest poverty rates in the country and the highest child poverty rate in NYS
- Rochester leads NYS in school drop-outs
- School 9 is located in the *Rochester Children's Zone*. The *Rochester Children's Zone* is comprised of factors that can have a negative impact on student learning: more than 97% poverty; more than 58% of the city's homicides; city's highest rates of childhood illness and lowest rates of doctor visits; high rates of unemployment, illiteracy and substandard housing.

Description:

- Strong Start, a United Way funded program, began in 1988 by the Department of Social Work, in partnership with the Rochester City School District. The goal of the program is to achieve the academic expectations and social competence in kindergarten students, and provides parents with the skills, knowledge and tools to help students at home.
- Kindergarten children at School 12 and School 9 are assessed by Strong Start staff at the beginning of the school year to identify those who will benefit from the program.
- Children receive enrichment services designed to meet individual needs during the important first year of formal education.
- Three types of services are offered:
 1. Academic support is provided by a certified early education teacher to develop listening, speaking, reading, writing and math skills in both English and Spanish.
 2. Psychosocial support is provided by a social worker to enhance a child's social skills, understanding of feelings, conflict management and self-control skills, academic engagement, school readiness, cooperation with teachers, empathy skills, self-esteem and self-confidence.
 3. Family support includes parenting support and education, free learning activities and materials, free parent/child enrichment activities, access to community resources and referrals to community agencies.

Partners:

- Strong Health Department of Social Work
- Rochester City School District
- Greater Rochester United Way

Outcomes:

The program is designed to help children and their families establish a positive connection with school early on so they can succeed during the more challenging years. The impact of this program includes:

1. Reaching over 135 students and their families each year with intensive services.
2. 9 out of every 10 children enrolled in Strong Start graduate from the program testing at, or above, average levels.
3. A majority of children enrolled in the program no longer remain academically "at risk".
4. Statistically significant improvement by Strong Start children in psychosocial skills in four categories (task-orientation, behavior control, assertiveness and peer social skills).
5. Demonstrated improved ability to listen and focus.
6. More than 55% of parents/guardians of children enrolled in the program participate in their child's school activities, compared to less than 10% in the general classroom.

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