

courant.com/community/middletown/hc-middletown-childplan1224.artdec24,0,7157438.story

Courant.com

MIDDLETOWN

Middletown Plan Aims To Help Children

By MONICA POLANCO

December 24, 2009

MIDDLETOWN —

A coalition of educators, community leaders and parents has pledged to seek greater support for low-income children from birth to 3 years old and for their families as part of an effort to close the achievement gap, according to a new report.

The Middletown Early Childhood Plan — created by Opportunity Knocks, the Middletown School Readiness Council and Middlesex Coalition for Children — outlines 16 steps that the community must take to produce healthy children and thriving families, including expanding early literacy for children through 8 years old and recruiting, training and retaining high-quality early education teachers.

The plan builds on the Middlesex Coalition for Children's 2003 report, which identified the needs of children from infancy to 8 years old but did not include an action plan, said Betsy Morgan, director of the Middlesex Coalition for Children. The new report, the product of 150 participants working over 18 months, was created using state money that's allocated to closing the achievement gap. The work also builds on the group's efforts over the last 12 years to improve such areas as health and emotional development among children, Morgan said.

Devoting more attention to children from birth to 3 is essential because that's when children's brains develop the fastest, Morgan said. Also, the problems that hold children back, including hunger and maternal depression, can't be solved by simply focusing on individual children.

Early childhood education helps children acquire the linguistic, reading and social skills they need starting in kindergarten, experts said. Low-income parents often can't afford such programs, and as a result, their children suffer academically.

"Without these skills in place, they really start off behind their peers," said Christine Fahey, the school district's school readiness coordinator. "We know that, typically, they just don't catch up."

About two-thirds of the report's recommendations are already underway, but the balance will require



Milton: Local Mom Makes \$77/hr Online!

Unemployed mom makes \$6,495/month working online. Read how she did it. [Read More](#)



Milton - Mom Lost 46lbs Following 1 Rule

I cut down 46lbs of stomach fat in a month by obeying this 1 rule [Read More](#)

additional funding, Morgan said. She estimated that implementing all of the recommendations — which include expanding quality preschool and aligning its curriculum with K-3 education and improving the quality and supply of early child care and education — would cost millions.

"Obama, here we come," she said.

Still, having the plan will help Middletown's early education advocates spread the word about their efforts and gives them a document they can use to apply for private and public funds, said Monica Belyea, interim program manager of Opportunity Knocks, a collaborative of early child care, health and education providers.

One of the collaborative goals — improving access to early education — is coming to fruition, thanks to \$522,998 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The money is part of a \$3.1 million package to six Early Head Start programs in Connecticut.

Area Cooperative Educational Services will run the Middletown program, which will serve 70 families, including pregnant women. In addition to education, this program, like all Early Head Start programs, provide health, nutrition and social services.

The cooperation educational services' program — which serves residents of Middletown, Portland, Cromwell, Old Saybrook, Clinton and Westbrook — will receive another federal grant for \$824,827 in 2011 for the program's second year, said Alice Torres, the organization's director of early childhood services.

Torres, whose group has also received about \$460,000 from other sources, said she expects to begin enrolling families in April and to work with existing providers rather than creating a new stand-alone program.

- For information on Early Head Start services that Area Cooperative Educational Services will offer, call 203-407-4441.

Copyright © 2010, [The Hartford Courant](#)