

BATON ROUGE, LA

Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome

CRADLE TO K – BATON ROUGE

In the 2017-18 school year, 56 percent of children entering Kindergarten were deemed “not school ready” in diagnostic assessments. It is well documented that early childhood development and education are powerful predictors of success in K-12 education and later in life, and that the two strongest factors influencing kindergarten readiness are access to high-quality early childhood education and supportive parenting practices. For Baton Rouge, agencies and programs such as the Louisiana Department of Education, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Head Start, and the Early Childhood Community Network are expanding access to and improving quality of early childhood education, but there has been a gap in coordinated programs to support parents.

Cradle to K – Baton Rouge was developed through coordination with over two dozen local stakeholders and child development experts, along with research into similar early childhood and parenting initiatives in other cities. After an initial pilot year, and reflection conversations with local experts in the fields of child development, education, and social work, the Cradle to K parenting program has been codified in a workshop curriculum that can be shared with other organizations throughout the community. The mission is to strengthen the culture of parenting in Baton Rouge; components aimed at that mission include:

- Cradle to K parent club meetings (Family Engagement) - these are open to all community members but primarily serve Head Start families. Here parents work with facilitators from our community partner organizations to work through our curriculum and develop habits around our parenting pillars of patience, curiosity, and conversation. This year, we are also making a documentary about the evolution of these workshops with parent testimonials.
- WIC Family Engagement Corners- A partnership between the Office of Public Health, Care South, The EBR Library System, LSU's Children and Family Studies program, and Cradle to K, this initiative allows service-learning students from LSU to set up family engagement corners at WIC clinics. These students then read to the children to model engaged reading strategies for parents and also share resources with the parents about services and opportunities in the community.
- Website and Social Media Campaigns- Cradle to K's social media page receives more engagement than any other page under the city government. Through this platform we record and promote videos with local parents discussing their parenting strategies as well as share information about resources and events that benefit parents with young children. We are currently driving a partnership with the Urban Congress to create a new media campaign titled #BlackDadsBR to help shift the narrative around black fatherhood in the community. Cradle to K's web page on the City government site also includes a resource directory for services relevant to parents of young children.

While turnout for Cradle to K events has been good, getting parents to come out is always a challenge and takes considerable resources. Helping some stakeholders understand that a focus on parents is a necessary complement to policies focused on child care centers can also be a challenge.

Over 100 parents have participated in Cradle to K programs. All of them agree that the sessions have helped them be more confident in their daily parenting decisions, with 77 percent of them 'Strongly' agreeing with this. Sixty-one percent of parents reported thinking about the specifics of their Cradle to K conversations on a daily basis when making decisions concerning their children; another 26 percent said they thought of the conversations

weekly. Nine out of 10 of the participants said the sessions helped them figure out the type of parent they want to be, with two-thirds of them 'Strongly' agreeing with this.

To keep up the momentum in 2019, Cradle to K is seeking \$73,000 – \$55,000 from DHDS and \$18,000 from the Office of the Mayor-President – to cover all staff, materials, promotion, and event costs. With more resources the program would increase its impact by training and compensating parents to become facilitators of future workshops, by creating online video tutorials for parents, and by expanding promotion resources and information.

Additional information is available from Dr. Tamiara Wade, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, at tlwade@brla.gov, or 225-931-4900.