

FPG Child Development Institute



Transformation Zone Evaluation Update

6/1/2015

In Year 2 of the Transformation Zone (TZ) evaluation, evaluators are attending county and state level meetings, in person and remotely with groups and individuals. We are regularly communicating with state level partners (NIRN, NCPC, ABLe, and Grants Management) to provide developmental feedback related to implementation of evidence-based strategies and systems change processes at state and county levels. Finally, we are sharing findings — themes about what we have heard and observed — quarterly with TZ county and state participants via a newsletter, of which this is the second.

For this update, members of the TZ evaluation team attended 16 meetings to learn how implementation and systems change approaches are working in the TZ counties. Our observations and listening identified several themes: (1) efforts related to technical assistance (TA), (2) communication and practice-policy feedback loops, and (3) sustainability issues related to learning to use data, learning from transitions, and capacity building. In this update, you will find observations for each of these areas, and questions to consider as the TZ processes move forward.

Technical Assistance *“Nothing happens as fast as we like.”*

Evaluation team observations:

TZ technical assistance is designed to support learning by delivering data collection and analysis, and coaching around technical and adaptive challenges. This spring, counties have been simultaneously immersed in the initial implementation of strategies and becoming skilled at employing systems scans to garner community perspectives

and engagement.

Learning has been manifest by taking responsibility for team agendas; understanding how to identify and recruit new team members; learning to distinguish technical and adaptive challenges and problem-solve; and learning to make specific requests to stakeholders, local service providers, agencies, and funders. Grant TA specialists have met frequently and intensively to move from coordinating implementa-

tion science and systems change work to integrating the two frameworks. Their efforts have included considerations for balancing and blending work, and supporting coaches' workload. Learning takes time.

Question for consideration: *How might counties develop a plan for reduced reliance on TA over the next six months?*

Communication: Feedback Loops/Messaging

Evaluation team observations:

TZ structures and processes are held together by emergent feedback loops. Coaches are central, working with partners to develop communication processes regarding strategy implementation and systems change. Coaches have met regularly and frequently. NIRN, ABLe and NCPC met to discuss how implementation science and systems change could be integrated into a unified way of work and articulated to counties. Local teams are negotiating ways to keep members connected. Strategy pur-

veyor/local service providers are learning the importance of communication to optimize efforts. Still, while communications have improved, challenges remain in areas such as sharing data. Partners expressed a need for a clearly defined communication portal. “There is a need for a point of entry for feedback, one place where concerns could be triaged-out.” Messaging, “using the same set of words,” has emerged as an important topic. NCPC funded an initiative to help counties develop skills and plans on mes-

saging to stakeholders. Local leadership teams recognize the need to create messages that move their communities beyond the TZ to a new identity. Each county had conversations with NCPC Communications about what to convey to communities around efforts to support children and families.

Question for consideration:

How might counties and the state create comprehensive communication strategies for their communities?

Sustainability: Using Data, Transitions, and Capacity Building

Using Data *“Coaches are in tune to asking for data...”*

Evaluation team observations:

County teams, led by the coaches, have realized remarkable progress in the collection, management, and evaluation of data to understand needs and inform emergent decisions. As implementation has progressed, counties have asked for and received strategy-related data. Embarking on systems scans, counties will use focus group and survey data to establish priorities and plans for their early childhood systems. Even exploration, neglected in

the early stages of the TZ project, is emerging as counties consider which strategies will continue. Initial difficulty was manifest in data sharing between some providers and counties. Clearly, a data-sharing and communication plan is necessary. Counties will need skills to directly negotiate and share data with many service providers. Early on, NIRN facilitated relationships with purveyors and local service providers. Their role was to assist purveyors in model articulation, specification, and implementation. Now the challenge is to transfer

that relationship to the counties. Counties will eventually increase their ability to implement to fidelity in part when they have access to strategy data.

Question for consideration:

How might counties build on their use of data to help realize goals?

Transitions *“As the work transitions, who will do it?”*

Evaluation team observations:

Transitions in key personnel became an opportunity to better understand transformational structures and systems. Coach transitions have driven learning. Concerned with “not losing the momentum,” coaches have supported other coaches’ learning, and TA staff are

orienting and integrating new coaches and team members. Within-county turnover has driven the need to address learning implementation science and systems change. There are new local personnel including new members on county leadership teams. Sustaining beyond the TZ will require counties to learn how to plan for transitions and will require

cross-county sharing and planning. Local community systems’ connections need to extend beyond the central role of the coach.

Question for consideration:

Might counties consider documenting policies regarding transition?

Capacity Building *“We have a common vision.”*

Evaluation team observations:

Leadership teams are emerging as strong influences in the counties. For the last few months most TZ counties put forth much effort around creating an identity and vision and bringing the right people to the leadership table. Some teams reenergized their interest in implementation science, and had refresh-

er sessions to imagine going forward with TZ strategies and other work. The impetus for getting the work done still remains with the coaches. But with recognition that transformations will not be sustained by a system of “one,” coaches have been encouraged to begin considering the question, “Who is going to help you?”

Question for consideration:

How might coaches continue to help strengthen the local implementation and leadership teams and other stakeholders in their counties?

We welcome opportunities and invitations to listen and observe how processes are emerging. Contact us at TZeval@unc.edu with questions and feedback.

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