



Bridging the School and After-School Days

Northwest Indiana creates major data-sharing initiative to bridge school days and after-school activities.

Boys & Girls Clubs of Northwest Indiana, along with the Foundations of East Chicago, Lake Area United Way, and the Legacy Foundation have partnered to create South Shore Connection. The partnership is the first of its kind in the country, working with nFocus Software to implement data-sharing strategies throughout the region by linking together multiple cities and their school corporations to promote success for Indiana youths.

This initiative will coordinate and monitor the implementation of an integrated community-wide data management system related specifically to youth educational activities and outcomes. With current participation of Gary, Hammond, Merrillville, and Lake Station School Corporations, as well as 19 youth and family serving organizations, this might be the first multi-school district and service provider data-sharing collaboration of such magnitude.

The intent of the multi-community data sharing strategy is to address identified challenges and actively promote success for over 33,000 children in the Gary, Hammond, Lake Station, and Merrillville school districts. The availability of an integrated data management system will enhance the ability of schools and out-of-school providers to:

- * Identify education-related gaps, needs and problems individual students might have.

- * Align services, interventions and resources across the various school and service provider sites, all for the benefit of youths and their families.

With plans to have systems in place during the 2010-2011 school year, the overarching goal is success for our communities' children, both in their school careers, and as future productive adults. The opportunity to share data in a "real-time" environment provides tremendous potential to address the needs of children. Data sharing of this magnitude will support our communities in being more effective and enhance our ability to make a real difference.

What is equally exciting is that multiple Northwest Indiana cities, funders, school districts and nonprofit organizations are coming together to create meaningful change.

By using data as a common language, the South Shore Connection is working toward solutions in schools and communities, using a shared framework and collective set of goals and objectives. The South Shore Connection data management system will lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery through the dissemination of best practices, greater awareness of existing resources and a broader view of the educational needs of the community.

Over time, South Shore Connection partners will expand, bringing together various institutions and entities through collecting, sharing and analyzing data making the potential capacity of this initiative unlimited. This promises to be a prototype that could impact our region, state, and country connecting data from various social and human services sectors in order to provide comprehensive resources to improve the lives of our youths and their families.