

Accepting the Challenge:
Supporting Early Childhood Education in Greenville, MS
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the Greenville Early Childhood Collaborative

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THE FAMILY LEADERSHIP DESIGN COLLABORATIVE

The Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC) is a national network of over 40 scholars, practitioners, and family and community leaders who seek to center racial equity in family engagement by catalyzing an expansive national research agenda and developing “next” (beyond current “best”) practices, measures and tools. We envision family and community wellbeing and educational justice as core aims in this work that begins from non-dominant family and community ecologies, creates ongoing transformative possibilities, and builds solidarities towards collective action for racial equity, from early childhood to secondary education.

We mobilize inter-disciplinary and experiential forms of expertise and see families and communities – particularly those marginalized by race, class, language, or immigrant status – as learning experts, co-designers, collaborators, and fellow leaders in the work. For more information, visit our website at www.familydesigncollab.org or email us at uwfldc@gmail.com

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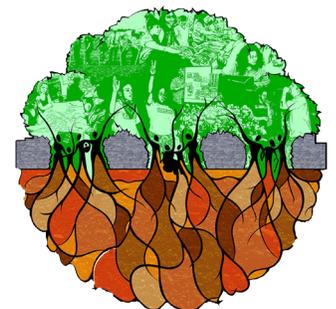
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Accepting the Challenge: Supporting Early Childhood Education in Greenville, MS

“I accepted this challenge because ... I want us to be a single collective that’s doing something.” (Barbara Thompson, daycare provider)

INTRODUCTION

This research brief describes an early childhood education collaborative in Greenville, Mississippi. Formed to raise early childhood education (ECE) participation rates and support high quality ECE programming, the collaborative consists of participants representing a variety of stakeholder groups: the public school district, the district-run pre-kindergarten and kindergarten schools, Head Start, daycare centers, and Mississippi Valley State University. The collaborative is convened by Citizens for a Better Greenville, a community group supporting student and parent organizing for strong and equitable public education, and supported by the Family Leadership Design Collaborative, a network of community organizations and researchers partnering to co-design change processes focused on educational justice.

Drawing upon analysis of collaborative meetings and participant interviews, this research brief describes Greenville and its ECE challenge and the collaborative and its purpose, and then explores themes related to its key elements and the changes it has produced. These summaries and themes are illustrated with representative quotes and examples from interviews and collaborative meetings.

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Greenville, the Delta’s largest city, is tucked into the curve of an oxbow lake on the western edge of the state. Widely known for its blues history, the city is now dependent upon agriculture, tourism, and gambling—though many of the jobs these industries offer are low-wage and increasingly scarce. Nearly 80 percent of its 34,000 residents are African-American, and most of

the remaining population is white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Greenville is a poor city: the median household income is nearly half the national average, while the poverty rate, at about 37%, is almost triple the national rate. This poverty hits the city’s children hard. Greenville has the highest child poverty rate in the country (Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative, 2016). But this rate masks deep racial divisions: 51% of Greenville’s black children live in poverty, while only 16% of white children do. The city’s educational system is deeply segregated, as white families have left the city and its public schools, and currently the student population is nearly entirely African American, as are most teachers and administrators. The schools have also struggled with underfunding and critical teacher shortages—limitations that impact teaching and learning, with dire consequences for black students and Greenville’s black community (Southern Echo, 2014).

Yet Greenville has a long history of community activism, organizing, and solidarity. Throughout the civil rights movement, black residents joined together to dismantle the Jim Crow system, and Greenville was one of Mississippi’s first towns to desegregate its schools. Black churches were particularly important sites for organizing, and today a wide array of community organizations and institutions—Citizens for a Better Greenville, the Delta Foundation, Mississippi Valley State University—represent and serve the town’s black community. This community, too, has a legacy of relying on one another for sustenance and support. As Joyce Parker, the director of Citizens for a Better Greenville, explains, “Just think about back in slavery time, ... they made it by doing a collective community. ... [W]e not that far from that family generation where everybody helps each other.” And so, as it tackled the community’s educational challenges, the collaborative would build upon these traditions.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN GREENVILLE:

The benefits of strong early childhood education are well established. Preschool programs can enhance children’s language, reading, and math skills and offer socio-emotional and health benefits (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Stimulating child-teacher interactions can promote children’s interest in learning, and programs

that support strong parenting can further enhance children's learning and skill development. Preschool programs' positive effects stretch well beyond children's early years; they increase the likelihood of high school graduation and continuing one's education, enhance one's occupational earnings, and reduce the likelihood of teen pregnancy and crime. Children from low-income families appear to benefit the most from quality early childhood education.

Yet Mississippi has long neglected early childhood education. It wasn't until 2015 that the state legislature appropriated funding for a statewide pre-kindergarten program, but the money went to less than two-dozen programs across the state—and it fell far short of levels recommended by researchers and teachers (Mader, 2014). Only half of poor children in Mississippi attend preschool, and the state does not require kindergarten enrollment. Early childhood education programs throughout the state face teacher shortages and uneven or lacking teacher preparation (Mader, 2012). Programs also reflect deep racial disparities in resources and funds, and centers that serve mostly white children often have greater access to current curricula, new supplies, well-trained teachers, and age-appropriate toys and books than programs with larger black populations (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2016). Some advocates speculate that the state's historic neglect of early childhood education represents a deep-seated racism, as state-supported sites would likely serve mostly black children and families.

Greenville currently houses a wide variety of ECE programs and services. The most varied of these services are an estimated fifty daycare centers. These range in size from small, in-home programs to much larger facilities, and they serve children as young as a month or two to those much older, who are often dropped off after school—and some centers even operate nighttime hours to accommodate parents working graveyard shifts. But most daycare centers focus on children age two to five, providing academic and social activities and tending to their basic needs and care. The city also has a number of Head Start preschool centers, all tied to the federally-funded program that supports the social and academic development and school readiness of low income three- and four-year olds. Finally, thanks to a resourceful superintendent that realized that "graduation starts pre-K," the Greenville Public

School District recently opened two ECE sites of its own: McBride Pre-Kindergarten Academy and Webb Kindergarten Academy.

THE CURRENT ECE CHALLENGE:

Despite this wealth of ECE programs and services, Greenville faces enormous challenges. Twenty-five percent of its children do not participate in preschool or kindergarten. With the area's high poverty rate, many families lack access to transportation, medical care, and food—all barriers that can prevent children from enrolling in a program or, if enrolled, arriving fully prepared for learning. Many of the daycare centers struggle with exceedingly low funding, compromising their ability to attract and retain the best-trained teachers and offer the newest curricula and provide the most books and resources, and some have seen a drop in enrollment. The sheer number of ECE programs and services has created its own problems, as their variety can mean inconsistently prepared first graders and centers often compete for students. These issues seem to manifest later in children's educations, too: on state standardized tests, the city's third graders lag in core academic areas.

Some prevailing narratives, common understandings, and possible misunderstandings also shape perceptions of Greenville and its ECE programs—and likely contribute to their challenges. Some collaborative participants characterize parents as uninvolved and underinvested; they feel that these parents, many of whom were failed by the school system themselves, don't understand the importance of early childhood education. Others note widespread misunderstandings of daycare centers and Head Start, with daycare providers seen as "babysitters" and Head Start understood as a social, rather than academic, program. Even the district can face negative perceptions, often from other ECE providers; some see it as "the big bad wolf," more as a regulatory office than a source of support. And all three entities—daycares, Head Start, and the district—sometimes feel stuck in a scramble for scarce resources, heightening the sense of distrust and competition. As one daycare provider shared, "it's always been a division," and past efforts at collaboration across sectors have repeatedly failed. And finally, along with these narratives is also the perception—held, many residents suspect, by

more than a few state officials—that Greenville is a declining Delta community, a place with a weak educational system and a dim future.

Whatever the state’s perception, it wasn’t doing much to help the city address its ECE challenges. Change would have to come from within—from Greenville’s ECE providers themselves.

COLLABORATIVE HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES

The collaborative grew out of My Brother’s Keeper, an Obama initiative designed to support youth development and education from birth to college and career. In response to Obama’s call for local action on these issues, Citizens for a Better Greenville, in partnership with the Delta Foundation, facilitated a series of community dialogues designed to identify local needs and resources around the growth and development of Greenville’s youth. CBG was well-positioned to host these conversations, as it had more than a decade of experience organizing the town’s black community, often around educational access and opportunity. Across these dialogues, one issue repeatedly emerged: the importance of early childhood education. It was both a matter of quality—the provision of rich early learning opportunities across a vast landscape of diverse centers—and participation—about a quarter of Greenville’s children entered first grade with no pre-kindergarten or kindergarten experience.

Then-superintendent Leeson Taylor had long preached the necessity of a strong ECE foundation for later learning, and these conversations dovetailed with these aspirations. He started a prekindergarten and a kindergarten, housed at separate sites, and he staffed these schools with experienced principals and well-trained teachers and filled them with Smartboards and books and brightly colored rugs and bulletin boards for children’s work. CBG began to pull together a coalition of administrators and teachers from the district, Head Start, and local daycares. The latter was a particularly important group, as more than 50 providers operated in and around Greenville, many struggled with low enrollment and budgets, and competition fostered distrust and isolation. But during the community dialogues, Barbara Thompson, the

director of one of the most established centers, had publicly accepted the MBK challenge of boosting ECE quality and participation, providing an opportunity for a new, more formal level of collaboration across Greenville’s ECE providers. In addition, the state was offering a competitive grant for cities and towns pursuing early learning collaboratives; a formal collaboration of Greenville’s ECE stakeholders would position the district well to apply for this funding. And CBG—and, in particular, its director Joyce Parker—had trusting relationships with many in the community; she would come to serve as collaborative organizer and facilitator.

The fledgling group first assessed the community’s early childhood needs and assets. As a federally funded program, Head Start had access to considerable resources, and the district’s new kindergarten and preK programs—as well as the superintendent’s clear support for ECE across Greenville—made the schools an important ally, and both joined the growing collaborative. Engaging daycare providers was more difficult: their work was long and isolating, and they often felt pigeon-holed as babysitters, not educators. Yet, Joyce’s network of relationships, CBG’s reputation as a trusted community organization, and respect for Barbara served to pull in providers, and Joyce also engaged the faculty at Mississippi Valley State University involved with the “child development associate” (CDA) licensure program. The collaborative widened, now with more than 20 daycare providers, Head Start and district teachers, program directors, district administrators, and professors.

Since its inception in 2014, the collaborative has organized a variety of activities and dialogues. Participants have toured one another’s facilities—the district schools, Head Start sites, and various daycares—to get a better understanding of programming and share ideas around teaching and supporting development, and during meetings, they share information about national ECE standards and best practices and discuss their own goals and ideas. District-run professional development activities are now open to ECE providers throughout Greenville, including those from daycares and Head Start, and a shared listserv publicizes these trainings to the entire collaborative. The collaborative has helped align certification and licensure process across their

various systems; district administrators, for example, are getting certified as “state-approved” professional development providers, so that providers will get credit towards their CDA license by participating. They have also worked with the state to identify other state-approved providers, deliver more ECE workshops in Greenville, and offer virtual trainings—changes that make professional development more available to local daycare providers. And, in a grow-your-own approach to the local need for certified ECE professionals, the high school now offers an ECE class, and career-oriented high school students are receiving course credit for volunteering in ECE classrooms and centers. In addition, providers are encouraging parents to get licensed. The collaborative has also taken advantage of opportunities to broadcast the importance of early childhood education in an effort to boost local participation rates. Joyce worked with the district’s new superintendent to link ECE to her “Missing in Action” student attendance campaign, and she also brought the collaborative into the University of Washington’s Family Leadership Design Circle process, which provided new thought partners and perspectives, as well as the opportunity to document the collaborative’s work. Though a change in leadership prevented the district from applying for the state’s early learning collaborative grant, if the state offers it again, it will be ready to put in a competitive application.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This collaborative seems to have accomplished what past efforts at cooperation had failed to do: it knits together a diverse group of ECE stakeholders to share resources and ideas, all in an effort to expand and support early childhood education opportunities in Greenville. So why has this collaborative worked when others failed? And what, exactly, has changed as a result of its work?

KEY COLLABORATIVE ELEMENTS:

“None of us will be guests anymore; we’ll be the team.” (Joyce Parker, director of CBG)

Interviews with stakeholders show that three factors seem crucial to the collaborative’s operation and

evolution: an attention to individual needs and resources, a norm of collegiality and respect, and the presence of a trusted and well-connected convener.

MEETING NEEDS: The collaborative was established in a moment of need: all three of the major ECE stakeholders—the district, Head Start, and the daycares—needed something the other stakeholders could provide. The district was concerned about its third grade reading scores, and strong early childhood programming has long been associated with later literacy skills. At the time, it also hoped to win a state grant, and a strong local ECE collaborative would be crucial to a successful proposal. However, it also offered a strong leadership team, two innovative schools, and a network of support staff, from special education to counseling. Head Start arrived at the collaborative in something of a transition, as the federal program was trying to move away from its historically social focus to enhance its academic rigor. Due to its federal funding, however, its local sites were quite well-resourced with updated materials and training opportunities. And the needs of daycare providers might have been greatest. A number of sites had lost students to Head Start, as its programs were free to low-income parents, and were therefore under-enrolled. Overhead costs were ballooning, and many were struggling to provide staff with a livable wage while also meeting state requirements for small businesses, like offering health care and keeping meticulous records, and for daycare centers, including the mandated staff/student ratios and safety guidelines. Yet they also likely possessed the greatest resource: with the long, flexible hours they offered and the wide age ranges they served, they knew local families better than any other stakeholder. Changing early childhood education in Greenville, therefore, depended upon the participation of daycare providers.

And using their collective resources to meet these various needs would become the focus of the collaborative, as participants began to understand “the importance” of supporting ECE participation and quality, “saw that one organization can’t do this,” and recognized that “we all have to come together and meet the common goal for our children.” Joyce often began meetings with a key question: “What do you need as a part of this process?” Discussions ranged

from the general—for example, aligning district trainings with state daycare requirements—to the specific and immediate, such as assisting a local family that had lost two children to a house fire. Using a variety of meeting structures and formats, including facility tours, entire group gatherings, and single-stakeholder meetings, allowed different concerns and issues to emerge, as new settings and new people provoked new ideas and more focused groups provided a sense of shared understanding and safety and, therefore, often surfaced different issues.

As the collaborative has developed and evolved, new ideas for meeting needs emerged. One daycare provider suggested a daycare partnership for medical insurance; the principal of the district kindergarten encouraged daycare staff to attend her school's professional learning community meetings; and the group invited the new district superintendent to key meetings to help her understand their work. The collaborative continues to meet and find new opportunities for partnership; as one provider explained, "Now we're all coming together to try to fill the gap, and we all want the same thing. It has really helped."

COLLEGIALITY AND RESPECT: This partnership is not just about resource-sharing, though; how resources have been shared is also key. From its start—from the moment Joyce announced, "none of us will be guests anymore; we'll be the team"—the collaborative operated with a norm of mutual respect and a spirit of cooperation. "Whatever we do, we want to make sure every partner benefits," she declared. This attitude was something of a shift from the past; participants described a "crab mentality" that characterized the self-interested scramble for scarce resources, limited funds, and few students in the past. But now that they were a "team" and understood their mutual dependence, the tone began to shift. Their goal, participants realized, was the same: "for us to get together to collaborate with ideas concerning the education of children... [and for] all of us to be on the same wave so when the children get ready to enter into school, then they'll all be on the same page." Such a goal requires collaboration, despite a history of rivalry and competition. And, for many, particularly the daycare providers, this collaborative offered their first opportunity to meet and share ideas and resources

with other ECE teachers and staff: "the getting together," one reported, "it just feel good."

One important manifestation of this collegiality was participants' understanding of one another as experts in their own respective arenas, a perspective that Joyce modeled from the very first meeting. "I'm honored to be in this space," she said, "because we've got experts in this room." During meetings, she called all participants "partners," she encouraged them to talk about strengths and assets as well as challenges, and she acknowledge everyone's ideas and perspectives. Joyce seemed to operate from the assumption that the district—with its array of programming, its passionate educators, and its focus on continuous improvement—was already a model district and that, eventually, others would eventually come to recognize it as well. Participants soon adopted—or had already embraced—many of these same beliefs and orientations, seeing one another as specialists with particular knowledge and skills. As the collaborative continued, they grew more comfortable sharing suggestions, asking one another questions, and visiting one another's centers and programs. In turn, they appreciated being respected for their expertise—particularly daycare providers, who work in an historically underpaid and underappreciated profession.

A TRUSTED CONVENER: A final essential element of the collaborative is the role of CBG and, specifically, Joyce; she has served as a trusted convener, one both well-connected and "neutral." Participants describe Joyce as central to both the start and the continuation of the collaborative. Many got involved because they trusted Joyce; CBG has a long track record of advocating for parents, children, and community members and, when necessary, pushing for greater power, voice, and representation for Greenville's black community. She is also not a member of any one of the stakeholder groups making up the collaborative and, therefore, is seen as impartial and fair, interested only in the needs of the city's youth. Additionally, her unfamiliarity with ECE gives her a genuine curiosity about best practices and participants' work, which she conveys through questions and a trust for their opinions, and an openness to new ideas, as she isn't wedded to old methods and routines. And she is well-connected to a variety of individuals, groups, and

institutions within the community; for example, she could leverage existing ties to faculty at MVSU to get them involved.

With the help of Tinsa Hall-Morris, another representative of CBG, Joyce continues to organize collaborative logistics: she finds meeting rooms and sets meeting times, she steers conversation and determines loose agendas, she brings chicken biscuits and calls participants to remind them about upcoming events. She also occasionally offers advice on negotiating collaborative challenges, reminding participants of their mutual interests or providing background and insights gleaned from CBG's work. Perhaps her most important practice as a convener is her willingness to challenge conventional narratives, often about parents and poverty. She raises new perspectives, often through a pointed question or an alternate interpretation, while also honoring participants' understandings, a "Yes, and..." move that pushed the collaborative to new insights, greater accountability, and more complicated narratives.

NEW CONVERSATIONS, GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY, CHANGED NARRATIVES

"Either way you look at it, we all are held accountable to a sense..." (Queen Bell, daycare provider)

As the collaborative has, through the guidance of a trusted convener, met participants' needs and operated with a spirit of collegiality and respect, it has also opened up new opportunities, leading to new conversations, expanding participants' sense of accountability, and changing dominant narratives.

New conversations: The collaborative has gathered a group of previously isolated stakeholders and invited them into one another's centers and schools, creating new groups in new spaces. The walls are coming down, participants report, and this has led to new conversations on a range of topics, from best practices and evolving ECE standards—like new recommendations around vocabulary targets and screen time—to difficult dilemmas and shared challenges—like state regulations and parent involvement.

One of these new conversations was sparked by a tragic community event: a house fire that killed two young children. The house had no gas or electricity,

and the fire was started by a burning candle; six children, ages 1 to 14, had been home alone. In two meetings shortly afterwards—an evening meeting involving only daycare providers and a morning meeting with the other stakeholders—Joyce mentioned the fire and the children's deaths, raising questions about how they might have been prevented:

This is our community. We know that they are not the only ones where children might not have light, gas and water. ... I'm really using them for an example, not to criticize but to critique, for us to think about why we do what we do. Where were they eating if they didn't have light, gas, or water? What were they eating, and if they were so comfortable with this, how long had it gone on? But the part where we talk about missing in action and all of us have to take some responsibility in that, how many people knew it?

In both conversations, the questions sparked a wide-ranging discussion about whether utility companies should shut off power for unpaid bills, how the community might now respond, and who was really at fault. Participants also described often knowing when a child's family was struggling to pay bills or put food on the table or keep the lights on and the dilemma this knowledge provoked: a call to the Department of Human Services might result in the state removing the child from the home, a consequence often worse than the conditions that precipitated the call. They also didn't want to embarrass a struggling family, ECE providers noted, and there were no easy answers; the state's social welfare policies exacerbated the issue, and community organizations and churches weren't providing adequate alternatives.

Though this discussion was precipitated by the fire, it tracked important themes that had surfaced in earlier conversations—the effects of poverty on children and families, what these effects mean for ECE programs, and how ECE providers should respond—and, therefore, provided an entry point into these hard-to-discuss topics. Many participants shared stories about children they had taught or even their own families' experiences. They talked about causes and manifestations and how they affected the children and families in their schools and programs. The conversation surfaced new possible responses, such as creating larger donation centers or working with elected officials to change utility policies or encouraging churches to play a greater

role in caring for all community residents. Throughout these discussions, Joyce offered new perspectives, with her “yes... and...” approach that acknowledged and affirmed a participant’s view and then provided a new idea or interpretation. These interpretations often encouraged a more structural or systems-level explanation of a situation—focused, for example, on the policy failures and historical inequities that might cause six children to be left alone in a home filled with candles or prevent a parent from getting her child to daycare on time in the morning—and reframed parents and teachers as allies in the struggle for equitable education and a stronger Greenville.

GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY: These new conversations also complicated participants’ understandings of their individual roles and responsibilities as daycare providers, district teachers, college faculty, or even just community members. In these discussions, they wrestled with difficult questions: Whose responsibility is it to ensure children are ready to learn? How do we, as a collaborative, take on that role? What does it mean to be truly accountable to one’s community? These conversations and questions seemed to change participants’ sense of responsibility; their sphere of influence and interest expanded.

During the conversation about the fire, for example, as participants debated who knew about the children living alone, how utilities should respond when clients don’t pay their bills, and whether churches should be doing more, other responses—responses that implicated the participants—also emerged. Barbara Thompson from Sunshine Daycare and Learning Center noted that daycare providers often do know when a family is struggling, even if they’re not sure about the magnitude of those struggles. District teachers and administrators discussed how they might share information about students and families more effectively, as well as better publicize resources like food banks and donation centers. Some participants talked about lobbying current state legislators to change utility policies, electing officials that are more responsive to poor families, or even simply asking the woman that writes the church bulletin to include more information about local donation centers. As Queen Bell, the director of TLC daycare concluded, “Either way you look at it, we all are held accountable to a sense...”

“It takes a village,” according to participants, to raise smart, healthy children and support strong, involved families. Collaborative participants now recognized their shared goals, and so stepping outside of their usual roles and taking on new responsibilities was worth it.

CHANGED NARRATIVES: These new conversations and expanded understandings of responsibility also may have an important effect on the prevailing narratives shaping understandings of families, early childhood education, and the community. Shifting deficit-oriented thinking was one of the original goals of the collaborative; as Joyce told participants in one of the its first meetings, “We tell the narrative.” And there was evidence that these understandings were beginning to change.

Rather than thinking of parents as disinterested or adversarial, participants were now beginning to consider parents to be allies and resources, moving towards a “grow your own” model and encouraging parents to get certified as CDAs. The collaborative’s focus on teacher training, high-quality curriculum, and school readiness was helping to reframe daycares as “learning centers” and redefine Head Start’s mission to emphasize academics. “We’re not babysitting anymore,” said Jmelba Thompson, from Pickett Street Learning Center, “We’re not a babysitting service. We are actually teaching.” Participants were also beginning to see each other as partners, with unique programs that were complementary, rather than competitive, all essential to a strong, community-wide ECE network. Perhaps most importantly, through its many activities and future plans, the collaborative is actively countering narratives of decline and failure in Greenville and its educational institutions. Collaborative members are defining and pursuing lofty goals, from vocabulary standards to kindergarten test scores; as Debra Reeves, the principal of Webb Kindergarten Academy, said, “I want our bar to be set higher.” And the collaborative itself shows that, within a context of constrained state funds and racial inequities, Greenville’s educational system can look to itself for resources; through local partnership, it has gathered the expertise, time, money, and energy to bolster staffing and share best practices.

As members of the collaborative begin to talk

and think about each other, their work, and their community differently, these new narratives might also reframe other residents' understandings of the importance of early childhood education, leading to greater participation rates—and thereby truly expanding educational opportunity for Greenville's youngest residents.

LOOKING AHEAD

It takes more than a few years to undo centuries of racial oppression, and collaborative members realize that years of work lay ahead of them. Accordingly, they have set some ambitious goals. One such aspiration is building a learning center for beginning and seasoned ECE professionals—a dream that originated with former superintendent Taylor. The center could offer professional development—trainings targeting issues and building strengths specific to Greenville and the wider Delta—and also certify new teachers. This kind of hub could support a grow-your-own program for ECE providers, working with local parents and recent high school or college graduates to expand and strengthen Greenville's cadre of ECE teachers. Importantly, it could also serve as a hub for the Delta; as the Delta's largest city, Greenville has more resources and population than other Delta towns, opening up opportunities for other partnerships and continued expansion. With such a center, the region, long neglected or dismissed by the state's elected officials, would essentially be taking control of the education of its youngest. And perhaps someday, it could even be looked to as a model for ECE professional development and training across the state.

And, beyond starting an ECE center, Joyce notes that the collaboration is building local relationships and capacity that can provide a foundation for later organizing. The real promise of organizing, she says, is that it's not issue-specific; relationships and partnerships and trust and understandings that emerge through this ECE collaborative can be leveraged toward other shared goals in the coming years and decades. With or without an ECE center, Greenville will be stronger and more self-sufficient for the work of this collaborative.

Challenges remain, of course. Collaborative members have set ambitious goals for ECE participation and student learning—and it remains to be seen if those will be achieved. Also, a myriad of other educational goals and issues—like elementary and high school attendance or changes in district leadership—could divert attention from ECE. There are internal challenges as well, including continuing to flatten occupational hierarchies and fully include and empower participants, particularly daycare providers. And Joyce remains central to the collaborative's momentum; without her leadership, it's unclear if the group could sustain.

But, as participants continue to engage in new conversations, expand their sense of responsibility to their community, and create new narratives about Greenville and its educational institutions, they will become increasingly able to navigate these challenges—these challenges are shared challenges, challenges of learning and growing together. These relationships matter. "... [W]e all striving for the same goal and I think that we want what's best for our children," shared Barbara Thompson, the daycare provider that first accepted the challenge of building this collaborative. "I think that all of us working together, that we just like a family, when we all together and we know that each other is trying to work together."

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