

Transcript of Audrey Powell

Audrey Powell

I'm Audrey Powell and I'm the Early Childhood Coordinator for Salt Lake City School District. I'm also a certified parent educator and a family life educator for the National Council of Family Relations.

Interviewer

What happens after the Baby to Baby campaign, which is very successful by the way. What programs promote development?

Audrey Powell

The Baby to Baby campaign is very successful. I know many families who have used the campaign, who have accessed services from the campaign. The problem is, there aren't enough people who are providing services because Baby to Baby campaign may not have home visitors that are able to go right into the home and support families. Because we know that children are learning as soon as they're born -- actually before they're born. And it's really important for families to have support from someone who has knowledge about what the research is telling us and what science is telling us about brain development, so that families aren't alone. Because parenting is a very hard job and children do not come with manuals and families need support in learning how to support their child's development and knowing what they can do in their responsive care to provide support for our young children.

Interviewer

I'm going to cover the Nurse Family Partnership program, so that's one program where they're going into the home for first-time mothers. Do you know about that program?

Audrey Powell

I'm familiar with a lot of home visit programs but not -- I know that our state has nurse programs through the University of Utah, well baby programs. But I'm not really familiar with the agency itself.

Interviewer

What programs promote child development in this district?

Audrey Powell

Our program through Salt Lake City School District provides home visiting for families with children with zero to five, small babies. However, we're very limited because we only have 19 certified parent educators who also teach in a classroom. Two family educators are full-time and they are able to serve more families, but on a limited basis because you know, we just don't have enough educators. But what our program does is we provide home visits for families, we

provide families and link them to services that they might not have known about. We make sure that families are linked to some sort of health care service. We link them to other families so that they can network with each other and share developmental information with each other and start that community partnership with each other. Our district also provides preschool services so we have a parent child class. And in that class parents participate and oftentimes families of course don't have child care for their very young students so the families can bring their three-year-old child in our preschool program and also bring their young babies with them. So we create a climate of learning, not just with the three year olds, but also with the very young children. And during that time, we focus on parenting behaviors, so parents are learning how their behaviors with communication affect child development. Parents are learning how -- reading to their child and showing them pictures and having communication with them is stimulating the brain so that it's providing language and millions of neuron connections in the brain with the young child. The parents are learning how to provide guidance in a positive way. They're learning that responding to their child's cues are very important. And then those same three year olds are moving into our four-year-old program. And so we have preschool services for that three-year-old how is now a four-year-old. And the family is already involved because they're networking with other parents. They're willing to be a partner in the classroom by doing volunteer work for the classroom. And they're also coming to the community events at the school. So they're not frightened about what's taking place at the school and they know that their partnership is very important and very valued. Our district values parent participation. We have an online assessment system where families who have access to that online service can provide information from home about how their child is developing. We honor the parent as the child's most influential teacher.

Interviewer

Throughout the district, is this available, this service and preschool available only to Title 1 schools or how does this work?

Audrey Powell

Preschool is available to at-risk, the low socioeconomic families and families who live outside of the Title 1 boundaries of our school district. Those families pay a higher tuition for their students to attend preschool. However, the professional development is the same across the board. All of our teachers receive high quality professional development and so all of our families who are participating have access to that high quality investment that we make. Our teachers are trained every Friday around early development and they're also trained with parents as teachers -- foundational curriculum for those who are certified as a parent educator. So we have a far-reaching program and our preschools, at our Title 1 schools, we have 18 sites and two private paid sites that are not Title 1.

Interviewer

So some development money right?

Audrey Powell

It's actually funded by the parent tuition. It's totally funded by parent tuition.

Interviewer

What are those schools?

Audrey Powell

Beacon Heights and Ensign.

Interviewer

My son went to Beacon Heights, I didn't know that. Okay. You support families zero to three by looking at the whole family. What does that mean?

Audrey Powell

You look at the whole family because you're going into their home and you're seeing where they come from as a diverse culture of a family. You're in their home because it's a safe place for them to be. And so you're learning more about the family and you're seeing where the whole family comes from. You're gaining a knowledge about what the child is experiencing when he comes to school because you have more knowledge about where this child comes from. Many families have more than one mother, father in a family, they have extended family that lives many times in the home. And so you learn more about the extended support that this child may be receiving and that all the adults in the home may be caring for this child. So you have a better perspective of where this child is coming from when that child enters your classroom.

Interviewer

And perhaps who you can invite to your Parents as Teachers events, right? You're inviting the whole family.

Audrey Powell

We invite the whole family, we have grandparent who participate, we have aunts and uncles who participate. Sometimes the parents may not be able to attend because they're working, but someone in the family makes a point to make sure that they attend and participate in the parent connection that we have. Mainly in the evenings, but now many times during class time we're finding that our families are about 85 percent attending when we do a connection during class time.

Interviewer

You have zero to three program, and then PAT program, right?

Audrey Powell

Parents as teachers provides the curriculum for zero to three. So it's research-based. There's evidence that it's a proven model. And it focuses on early

development and it also focuses on meeting the needs of the family and the parent goals. So during our zero to three programming, our families are asked to participate, they're asked to be active members of the early learning. And they're also asked to share information with each other and provide that social networking not only for the adults that are participating, but also their young children.

Interviewer

Are those going on in the separate schools?

Audrey Powell

The zero to three programming that we have, as I mentioned, Sally, it's very limited. However, we do provide that service at our community learning centers and right now we have three established: Glendale/Mountain View which we're in the center right now. And then the Rose Park Community Learning Center, and also Lincoln Community Learning Center. Right now, because of limited space at Lincoln, we're not able to do infant toddler programming there. However, we are providing that service for the Glendale community -- the Glendale community.

Interviewer

When will one of these programs happen?

Audrey Powell

That program will start October 14th.

Interviewer

The infant toddler. Okay. And then you have parent and child preschool classes.

Audrey Powell

Parent and child preschool classes. And those classes will start on the 14th. And they will start at the two locations, the Rose Park and Glendale/Mountain View Community Learning Center. That is a class where the parents participate with their young child who is three. We provide preschool services. The parent is actually considered the teacher in the classroom while the parent educator is the facilitator of what's happening in the classroom. So they plan, however, the parent, through a survey and through questioning, is able to determine what their needs are. And depending on what their needs are, that's how the teacher implements a lesson plan and makes sure that it's meeting the needs of the family.

Interviewer

So families fill out a survey and say this is what I need in raising my child and my needs for a three-year-old. She has a curriculum that she gives them and then that's how becomes the parent as teacher? They use that curriculum and impart

that to their child, right?

Audrey Powell

We provide the preschool curriculum, yes, in the classroom. And the parents are learning how their behaviors affect how and what the child is learning while they're participating. In our Glendale/Mountain View Community Learning Center we have observation rooms. It's very unique because the families, during the class, once a week, are separated from their children for a short time. And they're able to observe their child's social development while they're not in the care of their child. And many times families are learning that their child is able to be separated from the parent and how well they are doing socially without the parent being there. The advantage to all of this however is that the family does participate, the parent does participate. So the parent is also able to see other children of the same age and the milestones of their child and how other children are developing. And they oftentimes network with each other outside of class time. They may go to coffee together or they may have, you know, an extracurricular activity with older children in the school that they do together. So they often form friendships.

Interviewer

The other piece that your program, that you're involved in is a pre-kindergarten class, the four year olds, just talk a little bit about that.

Audrey Powell

Our four-year-old program is designed to be developmentally appropriate. We follow the state core standards and our curriculum is research based. We focus early on social development and making sure that children have opportunities to learn about the school community and make rules that apply to them in the classroom so that they feel safe in the classroom. We provide them with opportunities to problem solve. We want them to be independent learners and to be self-confident learners. So our teachers are training almost every other week around professional development and child development and learn how to interact positively with the children. They work on lesson plans that are teaching strategies (gold?) has implemented with the curriculum. So they're given many resources in the classroom so that children have opportunities to have hands-on exploration, have experiences in meaningful ways, and to interact with adults who are caring for the children in the classroom so that we can provide that foundation for school success.

Interviewer

So huge parent/child family resources here. You're not providing services for families to be employed and the issues that they have outside of the school, but you do referrals, right?

Audrey Powell

We do make referrals and we do link families to resources so that they can be empowered to seek out the resources that are available in the community.

Interviewer

Are there any two-generational mechanisms going on? You would just see the development of the parent as a parent?

Audrey Powell

Right. Oftentimes our educators work -- actually, one of our educators met a family who was participating in pre-K over 14 years ago and is now a mother. And just so happens that now her children are entering pre-K. And so we are servicing families for long-term.

Interviewer

Early intervention. What are we intervening and talk about why early intervention is important.

Audrey Powell

Children are born to learn. So they are learning well before they're actually even born. And so if we are providing families with information on how their interactions with their child, with their children, very early can make a profound difference in their development. You're responding to your child's cues. You're responding positively. You're responding in ways that are meaningful. You're giving children experiences. Years and years ago we thought that you know, children weren't learning until they entered school. Now we know that they're learning in the womb. They're hearing. They're tasting. And it's such an opportunity to provide enriching experiences for these young learners whose brains are connecting all the time. The neurons are firing all the time. And if they are connecting in positive ways, it really impacts them to have a foundation for lifelong success.

Interviewer

Which is really important, which is why it's going all over the country. I talked to someone who said she doesn't like the phrase "achievement gap". She said children should be asset-based. They should be based on their human capital, educational opportunities.

Audrey Powell

They're our future leaders.

Interviewer

They are, but "closing the achievement gap," does that phrase work for you?

Audrey Powell

I feel that all children have the ability to learn. And if the adults invest in early learning, then we're gonna make a profound difference. It's going to have a

significant impact socially for all of us because we are taking the time to close that window that maybe closed. We're taking the time to -- while that window is open for learning, and that's before the age of three -- if we take the time to know that that window is so important and to really invest in making sure that families have the information that they need about how important they are and how important it is that we have at-risk children who may not have opportunities to have enriching experiences. But if we can say to a parent that the time that you spend with your child before their age three and the quality of that time that you spend with your child, making sure that your child has enriching relationship with you is very important, and will affect the learning of that child well beyond school.

Interviewer

So what would you suggest the state -- what are we not doing and what can we do to make sure that families have that education?

Audrey Powell

We need to invest more in programs that provide home visiting such as the Baby your Baby campaigns. More nurses that can go into the home who -- and I'll speak from personal experience -- just providing a young mother with the information that her getting enough sleep is very important to the development of her child, making sure that she has proper nutrition is very important to the development of the brain, interacting while the child is in utero. Singing. Reading. All of those things will make a huge difference before the child is even born. But when you have a young parent who isn't sure on now I have this young baby, now what do I do, to knowing that it's natural for her to feel that way and here are some things that you can do to support, you know, your child's development. You know, have eye to eye contact with your baby, gentle touch, massage your baby, provide tummy time activities with your baby because eventually that will stimulate the brain so that the brain has more of a capacity to be learning things that will impact the child forever.

Interviewer

What policies or funding can happen through the state directly to this district?

Audrey Powell

I would love to see the state of Utah invest more in young children. Invest now or we pay later. We're paying more for prevention type services later. If we give children the tools to learn how to communicate, to learn how to be self-sufficient, to learn how to solve problems, then they're going to have the tools that they need into adulthood on how to be in the workforce and how to be a productive citizen. We need to do that and we need to invest while those windows are open and that's well before the age of three.

Interviewer

Why did Herbert say no to the \$15 million in federal money to help preschoolers? Why did he turn that down for our at-risk families?

Audrey Powell

I'm not sure but that would be a great question to ask the governor.

Interviewer

What can we do to be more aware of potential funding like this, and if we don't accept the monies, what are the consequences?

Audrey Powell

Well, school districts are going to have to try to find funding to provide services for families that they know is making a difference and as you know, funding for schools is limited. We have large class sizes. And we're unable to do with our small budget, we're unable to serve small children who we know live in our boundaries who are probably on a waiting list. But we're not able to reach out to all the families who could actually benefit from services.

Interviewer

You've received a little bit of HB 96 money. Talk about what you'll do with those funds.

Audrey Powell

The House Bill 96 fund will provide us an opportunity to ensure quality programming -- we feel that we already have quality programming -- but this will enable us to train coaches, to work more closely with our teachers who obviously will be impacting the instruction that's going on in the classroom. So it gives us an opportunity to have checks and balances and to have... more opportunities to look at the data to see what our instruction is actually doing for children and if it's making a difference.

Interviewer

Talk about Maria, what does she do here?

Audrey Powell

Maria is a dedicated educator. She is kind, caring. She has the ability to look at family strengths. She has the ability to help the parents see what they're doing that's making a huge impact on their child's development. She is not afraid to go into a home and to reach out to the family community. She's not afraid to be vocal about what's developmentally appropriate. She is a master teacher. She works from the heart. She's very knowledgeable about parent education and how important it is for children to have the opportunity to have parents participate in their education. She empowers families to take responsibility in what's happening in the school. She empowers them to be active participants in what's happening at the school. And overall she's just a wonderful person.

Interviewer

And do you know about the Paz family we're referring? Do you know the family

personally?

Audrey Powell

I don't know of the family personally because I haven't -- I should say I've probably met them in a family group connection. I haven't been in their home. It's my understanding that the family has participated for many years in PAT. They're always attending the group connections that we invite them to. They -- even when they have moved, have made sure that they travel quite a distance to attend those, the family group connection. They're always informed and active in their child's learning.

Interviewer

Kindergarten is not mandated in Utah. Elementary offers both part-time and full-time kindergarten. And then talk about the advantages of kindergarten.

Audrey Powell

Well, the advantages of kindergarten is we're helping children to be socially ready for school. And school is hard. And it provides children with the foundation to have opportunities to learn across the learning domains, to socialize with other children, to have activities that are relevant to their learning. And it does it in a way where... we know that children are not always reading in kindergarten, but some children are. But we're providing that foundation so that they have more opportunities to be readers.

Interviewer

And it's not mandated in Utah.

Audrey Powell

Kindergarten is not mandated in the state of Utah. However, it is funded by the state of Utah.

Interviewer

For both part-time and full-time.

Audrey Powell

For both part-time and full-time.

Interviewer

And does this district offer it in every school?

Audrey Powell

Yes. The Salt Lake City School District offers kindergarten in every school.

Interviewer

You were talking about demographics. We're on the west side. And there is a separation. Talk about looking at the whole child supporting whole families,

struggling poor families often on the west side. Talk about your personal experiences with why is it important for everybody.

Audrey Powell

I know of a particular family who I had the opportunity to meet with them in their home. Although I didn't have the same language of the family, we did have a translator in the home. However, we did connect and we had a shared language, and that was that we were interested in knowing how we could support the family so that they could support their children's learning. What I learned about the family from visiting in their home was that they had a story to tell. And their story was that they were struggling. They struggled for food. They struggled for a job. And they struggled because they had a language barrier. And what I learned is that once this family was linked to resources and we encouraged the family not to give up, to keep trying, call the numbers that can provide you with food. Call the numbers that provide you with job resources. Keep trying. Once the family connected, after a long wait on the phone, the family was able to receive services, therefore, they had food at the end of the day in their fridge. What I learned is that families are very resilient and everybody has their own stories to tell. So we see children in the classroom, but we don't always know what the struggles are in the home.

Interviewer

Why again should people care?

Audrey Powell

People should care because our young children will be our future leaders and children matter. And if we want to have a successful community, then we need to give children the opportunities to learn in an environment that's stress-free.

Interviewer

The one thing that we all have in common is children. We all know what it's like to be a parent.

Audrey Powell

And we've all been children.

Interviewer

And so we all have that in common. Talk about how diverse this community is.

Audrey Powell

In our Salt Lake City School District we have over 120 languages spoken in our classroom communities. Our classrooms are very diverse. We see families of every socioeconomic background in our district. We have employees that try hard to connect with families who are culturally different. The unique thing about our early childhood program is that we do have instructors who are second language learners themselves. And so we try to have a classroom that has a

strong predominant English language and a strong predominant Spanish speaker. Oftentimes the language may not be Spanish that's predominant, it may be another language. But we provide the children with adults who have command of their language in the classroom because we know that they need to learn in their native languages and that's often important. And they need that modeling in the English language as well.

Interviewer

How do you see success in the child? Or a family?

Audrey Powell

Our infant toddler home visitation program, we had a family who lived with other adults in the household. So the mother was very afraid to put the child on the floor. So the child was very overweight. The child was almost 12 months, and not crawling. And what the mother didn't realize is that her child who was, didn't have the opportunity to be on the floor crawling was missing opportunities for crossing over that midline connection. And the child could barely even roll over. So the developmentally the child was delayed. So we intervened with someone from DDI Vantage who came into the home and provided physical development for the child. And now the child is on target. So just that little intervention made a big difference in the development of the child. The child now is of course walking and talking and developmentally doing well, but the mother did not realize how important just the crawling experience was for the child.

Interviewer

So why is this a community issue?

Audrey Powell

It's a community issue because we're expecting children to learn so much when they enter school, and if they're developmentally behind already, it takes -- it's too hard for them to catch up.

Interviewer

So you're speaking to the legislature, what are you asking them?

Audrey Powell

I'm asking the legislatures to look at the windows of opportunity for learning and that it's smart policy for us to invest in the very young. Our parent educators in preschool really have a strong partnership with families and the relationship is really important. And when they invite families to participate, to come to a parent connection, it's almost like a contract with them.

Interviewer

Any "ah ha" moments in your experiences with education and families?

Audrey Powell

Ah-ha moments for families are the times when you see the fathers and the children doing an activity together and the father saying, "Ah, I didn't realize that." When you see the young parent who is watching a video about child development and about language and about how many words that the brain can learn at a very early age and the two parents looking at each other and saying, "I didn't know that." It's so powerful. It's so powerful to see families engaging in an activity and learning something that they did not realize that their child could do.