

# Evaluation Snapshots

Research summaries at a glance  
Vol. 2, No.1



*Evaluation Snapshots* examine the effects of Family Connection collaboratives on indicators of well-being in Georgia.

Family Connection began as a Georgia initiative in 1991 with the formation of 15 community collaboratives.

Today, Family Connection has 159 county collaboratives that work with more than 3,000 partners to improve the well-being of children, families and communities in Georgia.

## **A Closer Look: High School Graduation Rates Among Early- and Late-Forming Collaboratives**

Compiled from research by *The Theory of Change* workgroup

Does community collaboration bring results? That's the million-dollar question that partners, legislators, and funders ask when they consider supporting Family Connection, a statewide initiative of 159 county collaboratives that works to improve the well-being of children, families, and communities in Georgia.

Family Connection Partnership is conducting research to examine changes in Georgia KIDS COUNT indicators associated with the formation of Family Connection collaborations. In this edition of *Evaluation Snapshots*, we report recent key findings from the study, regarding high school graduation rates among early- and late-forming Family Connection collaboratives.

### **Background**

#### **How do we track our progress?**

Indicators of well-being in Georgia are tracked by KIDS COUNT, a state and national effort funded by Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the status of children. It tracks a multitude of indicators, which Georgia reports in five result areas—Healthy Children, Children Ready to Start School, Children Succeeding in School, Stable Self-Sufficient Families, and Strong Communities. High school graduation is an indicator under Children Succeeding in School.

#### **Defining high school graduation**

Prior to 2003 students who finished high school with a certificate of attendance or special education diploma were counted as graduates; whereas in 2003 and beyond they were not. The net effect of the definition change was a decrease in the number and percentage of students graduating each year.

High school graduation rates were available by both old and new definitions for the year 2002, so we used the average difference between the old and new definition across all 159 counties as a correction factor, which we added to the years 2003-2005. (There were fewer post-definition change years than pre-definition change years.) The application of the correction factor makes data points following the definition change comparable to data points preceding the change.

#### **What state partners need to know**

As a state partner, you need accurate information to make informed decisions about your work that affects the well-being of children, families, and communities in Georgia. Most likely you need the information quickly.

Family Connection Partnership, the supporting state intermediary for Family Connection, conducts in-depth analysis of Georgia indicators and presents the information in these Evaluation Snapshots to give you the best of both worlds—the analysis you need to understand the story behind the data and an abbreviated format so you can learn on the go.

## Key Findings

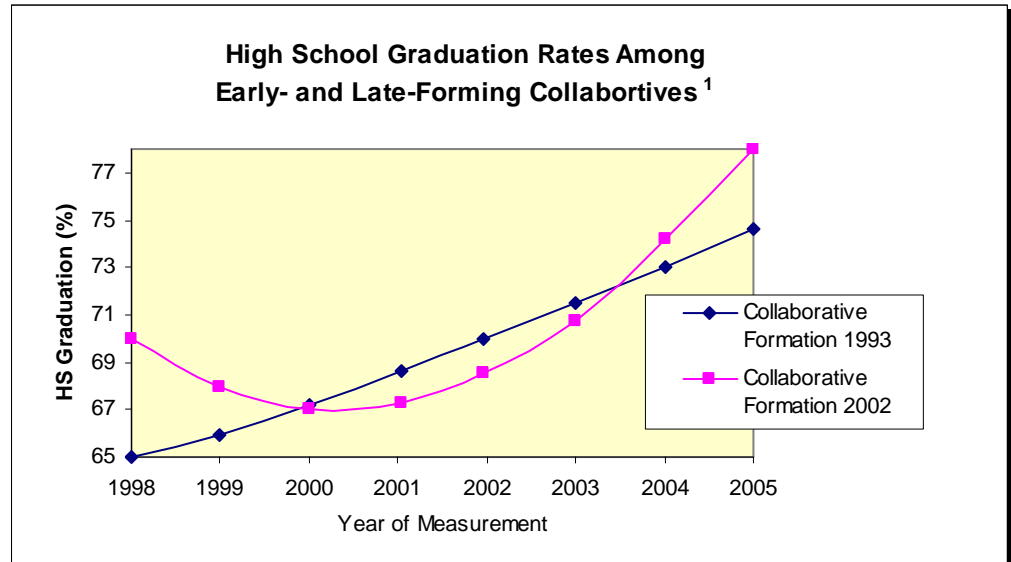
### Research Model

Model was based on:

- 1) Overall change in high school graduation rates from 1998-2005
- 2) Differences between counties in overall change in graduation rates
- 3) Year of collaborative formation as a predictor of overall change in graduation rates

### Early collaborative formation associated with greater overall improvements in graduation rates

Counties that formed Family Connection collaboratives earlier had better overall improvements in high school graduation from 1998-2005 than counties that formed Family Connection collaboratives later.



<sup>1</sup> Note: Model estimated values of high school graduation

This edition of *Evaluation Snapshots* is based on reports from the Family Connection Partnership *Theory of Change*

Workgroup:

- EMSTAR Research
- Rebekah Hudgins
- Valerie Hutcherson
- Metis Associates
- Ann Peisher
- Sharpe Solutions

### Counties with later-forming collaboratives show later upturn

Counties with earlier-forming collaboratives tended to demonstrate steady increases in high school graduation over time. In contrast, counties that formed collaboratives later tended to have declining graduation rates early on, followed by an upturn.

### Results of Community Collaboration

The positive effect of early collaboration formation on overall improvements in graduation rates was statistically significant after controlling for variation in county population, socioeconomic status, extent of pre-Family Connection collaboration, and length of time directly targeting the high school graduation indicator.

By including these variables, we have accounted for a number of factors that may be associated with changes in graduation rates. However, it is important to note that there are a number of other services and programs provided by collaborative partners and non-partners, as well as contextual factors, occurring in any given county that also may account for the changes observed here.

These findings show promising evidence for a relationship between Family Connection collaboration and improvements in high school graduation, but they do not indicate that Family Connection collaboratives *caused* these improvements.

### What's next

Additional analyses are underway to account for effects of specific intensive interventions such as Communities in Schools, and state or local Board of Education policies working in conjunction with Family Connection collaboratives to improve high school graduation rates.