



Ready Schools

The e-Newsletter of the CCSSO School Readiness Project

Issue 9 April 2006

The Ready Schools e-newsletter is a monthly publication from CCSSO that provides information, ideas and resources to support schools as they strive to become more prepared and ready to meet the needs of all children. A "ready school" is a critical component of the school readiness conversation and school improvement efforts. Through this newsletter, we will highlight efforts at the state and local level that support schools in their process toward becoming "ready schools."

Ready Schools Support Children's Transition to Kindergarten

Kindergarten Transition Resources

<http://children.state.mn.us/mde/static/008965.pdf>

The **Minnesota** Department of Education reviewed relevant literature and interviewed local education staff to compile several lists of strategies to help support students during the transition into kindergarten. The strategies are tailored with a separate list for (1) families, (2) community members, (3) teachers and caregivers, and (4) policymakers. The section for each stakeholder group provides opportunities for support, along with resources.

Planning for Terrific Transitions: A Guide for Transitions-to-School Teams (100 pages)

http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/2b/c8/d7.pdf

SERVE developed these training materials to help teams plan, implement, and evaluate their transition process for children entering kindergarten. The first tab of the materials package includes a description of a successful transition plan, effective strategies for breaking down barriers to effective transitions, and instructions and worksheets for the five-step transition improvement process:

- Step 1: Round out the team
- Step 2: Assess the situation (needs assessment)
- Step 3: Plan the work
- Step 4: Work the plan
- Step 5: Measure up (evaluation)

Tab two provides a case study from a team that completed the process. The third tab includes instructions, checklists, worksheets, templates for implementing the transition process, strategies and tips. The final section focuses on references and resources.

Ready Schools Encourage Continuity and Alignment between Early Care and Education Programs and Elementary Schools

Governor Chris Gregoire created the Department of Early Learning in **Washington** state to consolidate the management of child care and early learning programs and to improve students' transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. The new department will encompass the state's child care programs, the Head Start Collaboration, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, and the Early Reading Initiative. Transition work groups are beginning to address the numerous related policy issues. For more information about the process that Washington state is undergoing, please visit:

<http://www.governor.wa.gov/earlylearning/default.htm>

PK-3 Education: Programs and Practices that Work in Children's First Decade (28 pages)

<http://fcd-us.org/pdfs/PK-3EducationProgramsandPracticesthatWork.pdf>

In this paper, authors at the Foundation for Child Development studied the contribution of PK-3 extended early childhood interventions, which include pre-k programs, full-day kindergarten, reduced class sizes in the early grades, parent involvement, instructional practices, and school transitions. The literature review and data analyses indicate that children that receive PK-3 components outperform their peers in third grade, and multiple components provide compounded benefits. Further findings demonstrated that the PK-3 components have "enduring and sizable links to school achievement," with the exception of full-day kindergarten. The cost analysis portion of the study found that economic benefits of PK-3 programs and practices outweigh the costs. In conclusion, the authors recommend an expansion of PK-3 through four strategies:

- Disseminate PK-3 programs and practices based on key principles of effectiveness.
- Use evidence on cost-effectiveness to better prioritize funding of PK-3 programs.
- Educate policy makers and administrators about the advantages of PK-3 programs.
- Develop new funding mechanisms for PK-3 programs.

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) Early Learning K-12 Alignment webpage includes quick facts on alignment between early care and elementary education, what states are doing in this area, as well as related research and publications. To access these resources, please visit: <http://ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=37&subIssueID=24>

Ready Schools Ensure High Quality Learning Environments

In order to clarify expectations and define state-funded preschool as an educational experience, the **Pennsylvania** State Board of Education adopted the state's first instructional regulations for public preschool programs. The guidelines establish a minimum of 2.5 daily instructional hours and a 20:1:1 ratio for students, teachers, and teacher aides. In addition, the proposal strengthens the qualifications for teacher aides, by requiring them to either complete two year's of college, obtain an associate's degree, or pass a test of their ability to help teach reading, writing, and math, by the 2009-2010 school year. Certain exemptions would apply for districts exhibiting high-quality programs. A related regulation will require teachers of students in prekindergarten through third grade to attain an early childhood certificate, as of 2010. The proposals must now be approved by the legislature and an independent review board.

- For more information about the Pennsylvania proposal regarding pre-K guidelines and teacher aide qualifications, please visit section 4.20:
http://www.pde.state.pa.us/stateboard_ed/cwp/view.asp?Q=117155&A=3
- For more information about the Pennsylvania proposal regarding early childhood certification, please visit section 49.85:
http://www.pde.state.pa.us/stateboard_ed/cwp/view.asp?Q=119038&A=3

The Connections between Academics and Social-Emotional Learning
(11 pages)

<http://www.casel.org/downloads/Elias2006BookCh1.pdf>

In this chapter from *The Educator's Guide to Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement*, Maurice Elias describes social-emotional learning (SEL) as "a way of teaching and organizing classrooms and schools that helps children learn a set of skills needed to successfully manage life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, communicating effectively, being sensitive to others' needs, and getting along with others. The author finds that highly-effective school-based SEL programs and approaches can improve academic achievement, school climate, and student-adult relationships, as well as decreasing problem behaviors. The chapter presents the following eight elements of SEL to support an academic, social, and emotional balance in students and links each element to its research base:

- Link social-emotional instruction to other school services.
- Use goal setting to focus instruction.
- Use differentiated instructional procedures.
- Promote community service to build empathy.
- Involve parents.
- Build social-emotional skills gradually and systematically.
- Prepare and support staff well.
- Evaluate what you do.

Ready Schools Have Strong Partnerships with Parents and the Community

The Washoe County School District (**Nevada**) recently introduced the Virtual Pre-K resource series, which was produced by the Chicago Public Schools five years ago. Parents can access lessons and hands-on activities in video, CD-ROM, and English or Spanish text for purchase or on loan from local libraries. The 20 lessons introduce preschool-level learning concepts to help build early literacy, math, social studies, and science skills. For more information about Virtual Pre-K, please visit: <http://www.virtualpre-k.org>

Ready Schools: Other Resources, Publications and Sites of Interest

Current and Emerging State Policy Trends in Early Childhood Education: A Review of Governors' 2006 State of the State Addresses
<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/68/21/6821.htm>

The Education Commission of the States reviewed State of the State Addresses from 2006, revealing that nearly half of states included early childhood policies in these speeches. Trends included the importance of full-day kindergarten, universal pre-K, increased access and/or funding for pre-K, improved program quality, improved service coordination, and staff retention and quality. States with a history of pre-K and kindergarten policy are strategizing to solve key implementation challenges, including P-3 alignment, governance structures, and quality rating systems.

2006 Child Well-Being Index
<http://www.fcd-us.org/CWBIndex2006.html>

The Foundation for Child Development's Child Well-Being Index, a measurement of trends affecting children and youth, evidences improvements in many domains, including safety, family economic well-being, community connectedness and emotional/spiritual well-being. Negative trends were found in the health and social development domains. Overall education trends have neither increased nor decreased during the past 30 years, despite active school reforms. One exception is explained in Gene Maeroff's article, "The Role of PreK-3 in Improving School Achievement."

The State of Preschool: 2005 State Preschool Yearbook

<http://nieer.org/yearbook>

The first section of this yearbook from the National Institute for Early Education Research presents trend data on the enrollment, quality, and state spending on preschools during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years. Recommendations for improving state-funded preschools are also included. The second section focuses on each state's policies regarding access, quality standards, and funding. The third and final section of the yearbook contains 2003-2004 state survey data, as well as Head Start, child care, and U.S. Census data.

About the School Readiness Project at CCSSO

The School Readiness Project is part of the School Improvement Initiative housed at CCSSO and is supported through funding from the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#). The school readiness project is designed to support states in the development and implementation of comprehensive systems of early childhood education in low-income communities with a particular focus on ready schools.

To submit a news item relevant to School Readiness-Ready Schools at the state or district level, provide feedback, or to subscribe/unsubscribe, send an email to Alyssa Alston at alyssaa@ccsso.org. PDF versions of all Ready Schools newsletters are available at http://www.ccsso.org/whats_new/newsletters/ready_schools/index.cfm.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on the major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress and the public.

Our mission statement: The Council of Chief State School Officers, through Leadership, Advocacy, and Service, assists chief state school officers and their organizations in achieving the vision of an American education system that enables all children to succeed in school, work, and life.