

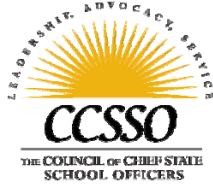
Council Connections to the Earliest Years



By Helene Stebbins



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The Council of Chief State School Officers

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 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.

Early Childhood and Family Education

With a grant from the A. L. Mailman Foundation, CCSSO is connecting the early childhood education work of the Council to the earliest years of learning—for children aged 0-3. This project is intended to identify, analyze, and advance successful practices in making those essential connections—between the school and children from infancy to pre-kindergarten—and to support the Council in its initial call to action, within its policy statement on early childhood and family education, to promote the creative development of infants and toddlers. The resulting research, analysis, and products are intended to assist chief state school officers and their local education partners in implementing the policy foundation necessary to support school-based and linked programming for infants and toddlers, under the assumption that such evidence-based practices will promote school success for those children in their education systems. Helene Stebbins was the primary researcher for this project and is the author of the executive summary and paper.

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Executive Summary

Children are born learning. Even before birth, they are laying the foundations for healthy development that predict future success in school. Increasingly, school districts recognize that babies and toddlers are also their concern and that the services and experiences they receive in their first few years influence the services and experiences they need in kindergarten and beyond. They also understand that narrowing the achievement gap and meeting the standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mean supporting parents and communities in promoting healthy development in the first years of life. To advance successful practices in connecting schools and very young children, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) solicited examples from around the country and convened a group of experts to share their advice. This paper reflects the wisdom and experiences of these efforts.

Schools are already engaged in supporting the healthy development of infants and toddlers. Schools are becoming directly involved in the care and education of children before they enter school by providing or facilitating access to high-quality child care and health care and supporting parents to feel confident and competent as their children's first teachers.

- The Fulton County School District in metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia, partnered with Sheltering Arms Early Education & Family Centers to build child care centers on school grounds. Sheltering Arms pays \$1 per year to lease the land and school teachers receive first priority for their own child care needs.
- Three schools in Howard County, Maryland, host "learning parties" for parents to attend with their children from birth through age four. The nonprofit Ready at Five Partnership administers the program in the schools, using kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers as lead trainers.
- In Orange County, California, parents of infants and toddlers can access health care from school nurses. In Cicero, Illinois, the school district hosts developmental screenings for children birth to three as well as three to five.

There are a wide range of opportunities for schools and school districts to connect to infants and toddlers. There are many ways for schools to support the care and development of infants and toddlers, and many do not require the provision of direct services. At one end of the continuum, schools can advertise available supports and help identify families who can benefit from them, or they can leverage their physical plant and administrative staff to help organizations that serve young children and their parents. At the other end of the continuum, schools can convene local stakeholders to identify and meet the local needs of parents with young children or find ways to implement research-based programs such as the School of the 21st Century, Parents as Teachers, or The Parent-Child Home Program.

States can play a supportive role. Even though many states have decentralized school systems, state departments of education can still support local efforts. Chief state school officers can attract media attention, commission publications, appoint task forces, and document best practices. State education agencies can also work to promote educational standards for early care settings that reflect the multiple dimensions in which children grow and learn. Finally, state legislatures can allocate funding to support quality services that support parents with young children.

Recommendation: Design an approach for connecting schools and supports for children in their first three years. Experts advised CCSSO to design an approach for connecting parents, schools, and infant/toddler programs that minimally includes the following three steps:

1. **Initiate a collaborative process.** Increasingly, school leaders recognize that they cannot do it alone and that success requires working in partnership with parents, community early learning providers, and other community partners. To emphasize the importance of parents and community partners in preparing children for success, state superintendents can use their bully pulpits to generate media attention, establish a task force focused on making connections, and/or host forums that bring diverse stakeholders together to get the conversation started.
2. **Establish minimum quality standards.** School leaders can create a collaborative process to define minimum quality standards. These standards should include early learning standards that reflect the multiple dimensions of early childhood development, environmental standards that address the quality of the setting, and evidence-based standards that demand high-quality programs and services.
3. **Raise awareness.** Successful connections between schools and parents with young children already exist. School leaders can raise awareness about the potential for successful connections by holding joint trainings of school personnel (teachers, principals, superintendents) and service providers (child care and early intervention service providers) to build relationships and respect for the unique role each plays. They can also document best practices to provide examples of how schools are effectively engaged in supporting infant and toddler development.

Based on the accumulated research and the recommendations of the experts around the table in September, CCSSO will continue designing an approach to connect schools to children in their infant and toddler years. Future work will elaborate on the exemplary programs and practices collected through the information search and investigate more deeply the specific issues that bear on at-risk families with infants and toddlers. Through publications, websites, and policy statements, CCSSO will work to make the lessons accessible to the stakeholders who can best put them to use.

Introduction

Research has shown—and experience confirms—that children are born learning. Even before birth they are laying the foundations for healthy development that predict future success in school. Recognizing the importance of early childhood development, CCSSO adopted a policy statement on early childhood and family education in 1999, articulating CCSSO's commitment to “promote parent and family education and join in coordinated health, child care, and education services which enable families to provide creative development for their infants and toddlers.”

With the support of the A.L. Mailman Foundation, CCSSO is working to connect its work to the earliest years of learning—from birth to prekindergarten. This initiative will identify, analyze, and advance successful practices in connecting schools and very young children. The resulting knowledge will assist chief state school officers and their local education partners in establishing a policy foundation to support a continuum of services for infants, toddlers, and their families.

Recognizing that many schools are already connecting to infants and toddlers, CCSSO solicited current examples to document much of what is possible. Over 40 programs or initiatives responded, and their examples are highlighted throughout the paper. The Council also convened a meeting of experts in September 2005 to seek advice on how to promote better connections. Their wisdom guides the organization and content of this paper.

Our goal is to make a compelling case for schools to connect to families with infants and toddlers and then to provide examples of how to make this connection. To that end, this paper begins by making the case for schools to connect, followed by multiple examples of how some schools are already supporting efforts to meet the child care, parenting education, and health care needs of

families with young children. Sections on what schools, school districts, and departments of education can do illustrate a continuum of actions that schools are currently taking. Examples range from the simple act of providing space for parenting education classes to meet to the more difficult act of finding funding to provide supports and services. The section on challenges articulates potential resistance that schools may face in becoming more connected to very young children, and the final section summarizes the recommendations from participants at the September meeting.

Why Connect Schools to the Earliest Years?

The rich and compelling brain research depicted on the covers of news magazines and documented by the National Academy of Sciences report *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* tells us that the biology of learning and development are turbocharged during the first few years of life. The rigorous and accumulating body of program evaluations on the efficacy of quality preschool experiences for assuring school success in the later years underscores the biological basis.¹ These studies show that all children are born learning, and their healthy development does not disaggregate into age cohorts. Rather, it takes place on a continuum which is best supported by integrated and connected services over time.

Still, the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows a persistent achievement gap that signals too many children are not receiving the educational supports they need. As Harold Hodgkinson suggested in his report, *Leaving Too Many Children Behind*, “All of the deficits that we know exist between kindergarten and high school, we now know exist before they even knock on the door of kindergarten. It’s too late when you start at the 4th grade, and as a consequence, we’re going to leave a lot of kids behind by definition alone.”² If school leaders want to narrow the achievement gap and meet the standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act, they must begin connecting to parents and communities in promoting healthy development in the first years of life.

These connections are even more essential for those children most vulnerable to the consequences of the achievement gap—those who are in poverty, who are learning English, or those with disabilities.

What Families with Young Children Need

Increasingly, school leaders recognize that babies and toddlers are also their concern, and the services and experiences they receive in their first few years influence the services and experiences they need in kindergarten and beyond. Schools are becoming directly involved in the care and education of children before they enter school by providing or facilitating access to high-quality child care and health care and supporting parents so they feel confident and competent as their children’s first teachers.

Child Care. Schools enter the child care market for a variety of reasons, such as improving the retention and graduation rates of teen parents, recruiting and retaining quality teachers, and improving the quality of early care and education programs. The potential benefits of partnerships between schools and child care centers include more child care choices for parents, better alignment between early education and K–12 education standards and practice, expanded professional development opportunities for child care staff, and growing recognition that child care staff are education professionals.

¹ For links to the seminal research on the importance of early care and education, go to: http://www.ccsso.org/projects/early_childhood_and_family_education/projects/6742.cfm.

² Add citation

- New Beginnings High School in Chaska, Minnesota, serves pregnant and parenting teens with a combination of academic and parenting classes and a partnership with East Creek Child Care Center.
- The Fulton County School District in metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia, partnered with Sheltering Arms Early Education & Family Centers to build child care centers on school grounds. Sheltering Arms pays \$1 per year to lease the land and school teachers receive first priority for their own children.
- In Kansas City, some elementary schools open their doors to family child care providers who receive special training and supports provided through the LINC Educare Initiative. Schools become the nexus where providers access professional development and become connected with other community supports.

Parent Education and Support. Parents are a child’s first and best teachers, but many parents need and want support in their role of preparing their children for success in school. Schools are providing these supports by improving access to information, hosting parenting classes, and partnering with organizations that work with young families to ensure that programs focus on early literacy and that program quality standards align with the K–12 standards. The following are examples of parent supports:

- The Kennewick School District in Washington funded the development of a 15-session program for parents with children from birth through age five. Each session provides age-appropriate information for parents to teach their children lessons about letters and sounds, math, and social skills.
- The state of Missouri spends more than \$30 million each year to fund the Parents as Teachers program in each school district.
- Three schools in Howard County, Maryland, host “learning parties” for parents to attend with their children from birth through age four. The nonprofit Ready at Five Partnership administers the program in the schools using kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers as lead trainers.

Health Care/Developmental Screening. Hunger, a toothache, or vision or hearing impairment can inhibit healthy early childhood development. These can be easily resolved with access to health care. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children visit the doctor 10 times before their second birthday—and that is if they are healthy. Nationally, 20 percent of children ages 18 and younger are uninsured and do not have access to information and care that addresses their most basic health needs.³

Lack of health care in the infant and toddler years can have lasting impacts on growth and learning. As the young brain grows, it establishes connections that help the child make sense of what he or she is hearing, seeing, and feeling. Interruptions to this development, such as hearing or vision impairment, alter the brain development and can cause permanent harm. The key is to identify problems early and address them before it is too late—before schools must spend significant resources on remediation or care for children with special needs. Schools can support early detection by facilitating stronger linkages between parents and health care professionals and by providing direct services.

- In Orange County, California, parents of infants and toddlers can access health care from school nurses.

³ Urban Institute and Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured estimates based on pooled March 2003 and 2004 Current Population Surveys.

- In Cicero, Illinois, the school district hosts developmental screenings for children birth to three as well as three to five.

What Schools and School Districts Can Do

There are many opportunities for schools to support the care and development of infants and toddlers that do not require the provision of direct services. The following examples represent a continuum of opportunities, from the simple act of advertising available supports and helping identify families who can benefit from them to the more difficult task of funding and implementing evidence-based programs.

Facilitate outreach. Most schools do not teach children between the ages of birth and three, but they frequently serve their older siblings or neighbors. Schools can help identify families who may benefit from supports or services for infants and toddlers, and they can be especially helpful in identifying younger siblings who may need special attention.

- The three Howard County, Maryland, schools that hosted learning parties helped advertise the parent education program to families of enrolled students who had younger siblings. Additional outreach efforts focused on those families with children currently enrolled in English as a second language classes and those reading below grade level.

Provide space. Schools can leverage their physical plant and offer space to organizations that serve young children and their parents. This can range from opening a classroom for a group of parents or family child care providers to meet to floating a bond or giving land for organizations to build facilities on school grounds.

- In Fulton County, Georgia, the board of education approved 40-year land leases at \$1 per year so Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Centers could build child care centers on three elementary school campuses.
- In Flint, Michigan, the Carman-Ainsworth Board of Education designated \$3 million to build an infant/toddler wing at a local school. Called The Learning Community, it provides an integrated family services system that includes Early Head Start, Even Start, and a Parents as Teachers program.

Provide administrative infrastructure. School districts can share their administrative infrastructure to provide the behind-the-scenes supports for organizations working with young families. This may include acting as the fiscal agent for a program, or providing the administrative staff to help with outreach, registration, or other administrative functions.

- In rural Minnesota, the Families Share Learning family literacy program is located in the Cloquet Middle School. In addition to space, the school district provides phones, electricity, postage, copying services, and computer usage.

Track students to evaluate outcomes. The long-term sustainability of programs for very young children depends on their ability to measure and demonstrate their effectiveness. Many positive outcomes accrue over time as children develop in elementary school. Schools can be a partner by tracking the development of students who received early education supports. This may be as simple as identifying students who participated in the programs and tracking their development in comparison to similar students who did not participate.

- Colorado's School Readiness Quality Improvement Program seeks to improve the quality of child care programs in low-income neighborhoods with low-performing elementary

schools. Local early childhood care and education councils work with the school district to track these children into their elementary school years and monitor their later achievement on state assessments.

- The Educare Center in Chicago provides high-quality center-based care, education, and family support for children aged 0–5 and their families. Built on a Chicago Public School (CPS) campus between an elementary school and a high school, Educare’s curriculum is aligned with the Illinois State Board of Education’s 0–5 program and learning standards. Educare engages in ongoing assessment and tracking of child outcomes in the areas of social emotional development and early language and literacy skills. This data is relayed to Educare teachers continuously so they can adjust their instruction accordingly. As part of Educare’s partnership with CPS, children enrolled in the 0–3 program are assigned a CPS identification number that follows them through Pre-K and/or public school. This allows Educare and the district to track the children’s progress as they transition from the early learning setting to school. The Educare Center in Chicago is part of a growing nationwide network of centers called the Bounce Learning Network.
- In Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, the Plymouth School District launched a Family Resource Center to help connect parents to community resources. The center runs a Parents as Teachers home visiting program for all first time parents of children between the ages of birth and three years living in the county. At the end of the program, when children turn three, the resource center asks parents if they would like to release their child’s demographic information and developmental assessments to the local school district. Parents also receive information on their local school to promote the transition into school district programming. Two county school districts are considering using the home visiting information released to track the impact of the program as the children progress through the early grades.

Get involved. Schools are one of many community stakeholders that are necessary to achieve successful early childhood outcomes. School districts can take the lead or become an active partner in efforts to promote coordination with the individuals or organizations that promote early childhood development.

- Washington’s five-county region served by the Northwest Educational Service District 189 (NWESD 189) has a regional early childhood education systems plan created by a diverse array of early childhood stakeholders. In 2004, the service district convened parents, child care providers, preschool and elementary school teachers, early intervention specialists, and local health department officials to begin the planning process. These efforts successfully secured a federal Early Learning Opportunity Grant to help implement the plan.
- Building Brighter Futures for Broome is a countywide, collaborative early childhood initiative in New York to advocate for effective parenting, healthy children, and quality early education. It involves the public schools, health service and family support organizations, higher education, and other providers of care or workforce development. All 12 public school superintendents have endorsed the local board of education’s involvement in the advocacy, fundraising, and public education efforts related to this effort, and 5 of the 12 superintendents serve on advisory committees and work groups.

Implement research-based programs. Many well-respected, research-based programs for families with infants and toddlers already exist. Schools do not need to create their own program but can leverage their existing physical and administrative infrastructure to replicate an existing program.

- The School of the 21st Century (21C) is a school-based childcare and family support program that transforms the school into a year-round multi-service center providing children and families with services from early morning to early evening. Schools are responsible for providing direct services to children and families, including monthly home visitations for parents with children from birth to three; full-day, full-year childcare for preschool children; and before and after school and vacation care for school-age children. In some communities, 21C schools also provide full-day, full-year infant care.
- Parents as Teachers (PAT) is designed to enhance child development and school achievement through parent education accessible to all families. The program model includes four core components: home visits; group meetings; developmental, health, vision and hearing screenings; and a resource and referral network. Each contributes to supporting parents' primary role in their child's learning. The PAT quality standards and best practice indicators specify that personal visits should be delivered at least monthly and more frequently when there is greater need. Local program funding typically determines actual intensity of service. School districts, family resource centers, nonprofit organizations, public health and social service agencies, government agencies and child care centers are the most common implementers of PAT.
- The Parent-Child Home Program is a national, research-based, home visiting model founded in 1965. The program's goal is to promote parent-child verbal interaction and early language and literacy experiences in an effort to improve school readiness. The program targets children ages 16 months–3 years in families with a variety of risk factors, including low income, low level of parental education, teen parents, and/or families facing language/cultural barriers. Sites are primarily sponsored by school districts or social agencies. Each site provides direct services to families, which consist of twice-a-week visits over the course of two school years. The home visitor models verbal interaction and learning through reading, conversation and play, and using carefully chosen books and toys, which are the program's gifts to each family.

What States Can Do

One of the challenges to identifying state-level actions that promote school connections to the earliest years is the decentralized nature of school systems in many states. One participant at the September meeting said she had to negotiate partnerships with each school individually because there was no authority to work with at the district or state level. State departments of education and state superintendents can support efforts to make the public school system a partner in promoting the healthy development of babies and toddlers in the following ways:

Raise awareness. Chief state school officers and state departments of education have communication networks that can raise awareness about the importance of early childhood development. Most education departments already have staff dedicated to the care and education of young children, but they rarely receive high-profile recognition for the work they do. Chiefs can raise awareness about their work by making appearances at child care centers, appointing special task forces or commissions to recommend how to strengthen connections between schools and families with infants and toddlers, or documenting examples of best practices within their state.

- In Washington, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) created an Early Learning Toolkit “to assist communities considering new or additional investments in early learning by offering both policy guidance and practical tips for developing effective programs for children birth through kindergarten.” The toolkit is posted on the OSPI

website and includes case studies, research, and strategies to promote linkages between schools and children before they enter school.

The toolkit is available at:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/EarlyLearningToolkit/DevelopingStrategies.html>

Establish Early Learning Standards. In the past century, child care progressed from an act of charity, to a work support, to an educational opportunity for children.⁴ In response, state education agencies are becoming more involved in defining and promoting educational standards for early care settings. In some states, this process has forged new relationships between the early education and child care offices.

- Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards represent specific learning standards for children birth through four years of age. They are designed as a framework and tailored to assist parents, early care and education professionals, administrators, and others in understanding what children are able to know and do from birth through four years of age.
- The State of California Department of Education/Child Development Division created a developmental continuum of desired results, indicators, and measures for children from birth through 12 years. It used a broad conception of school readiness in developing its six desired results intended to guide practitioners in improving early childhood services and enhancing school readiness. The continuum identifies standards of development for ages birth–7 months, 8–17 months, and 18–35 months. To see the developmental continuum of desired results, go to:
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/documents/continuum.doc>.

Provide funding. There are very few public funding streams (federal or state) that target children before their third birthday. Most school districts struggle to cover their expenses for children who are in school and need additional resources to expand their mission to babies and toddlers. Even though research shows that targeted investments in early childhood development actually pay for themselves in reduced future costs,⁵ schools do not have the ability to pay the up-front costs. A few states recognize the value of investing in early childhood development and commit state funds to allow for early investments:

- The Illinois Early Childhood Block Grant allocates \$273 million each year for programs that serve children from birth to school entry. Funding pays for a prekindergarten program, parent education and training, and a prevention initiative for at-risk children between birth and age three. By law, 11 percent of funds must be spent on infants, toddlers, and their families. The majority of programs that administer these programs are schools, and the average grant is \$140,000.
- Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education program combines state and local funds to allow local school districts to tailor programs and services to meet local needs for families with children from birth to age five. An annual allocation of \$34 million (one-third local, two-thirds state) provides services such as parent discussion groups, play groups for children, home visits, early developmental screening, and community resource information.
- Missouri gave birth to the national Parents as Teachers program when it began as a pilot program for first-time parents in 1981. In 1984, it implemented the program statewide in all 524 school districts. The state allocated \$31.5 million in 2005 to ensure all first-time

⁴ Joan Lombardi. *Time to Care* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 2003), p. 29.

⁵ For a bibliography of recent publications on the costs and benefits of early education, go to the Invest in Kids website at: <http://www.ced.org/projects/kids.shtml>.

parents have access to personal visits; group meetings; developmental, health, vision and hearing screenings; and a resource and referral network.

Challenges

The successful examples profiled throughout this paper demonstrate the many ways schools can connect to families with infants and toddlers. Still, these success stories were not without problems. The following are some of the challenges participants shared at the September 29 meeting.

“It is inappropriate for schools to become involved with children at this young age.”

As one participant put it, “We were accused of backing the school bus up to the maternity ward.” While it is important to keep parents as the primary audience of any connection, it is also true that schools can be another partner in supporting parents of young children. Many participants at the meeting felt it was essential for schools to become engaged in appropriate ways. In general, people agreed with the statement, “We don’t have to do it in the schools, but we can’t do it without the schools.”

“It is difficult to organize efforts at the state and school district levels.”

School systems can be highly decentralized, with principals holding the authority for how and when they partner. Since there is often significant turnover among superintendents and principals, it can be difficult to build relationships. Engaging school leaders at the beginning of their tenure is a promising strategy, and many programs succeed by negotiating partnerships school by school.

“There is a lack of rigorous research on what programs work best for this age group.”

It is difficult to design evaluations that deny some families services in order to create experimental research conditions. It is also true that the biggest improvements will come from connecting to families with the most risk factors. Targeted programs to at-risk populations can be politically unpopular, raising sensitive issues about race and poverty in public schools. The five-year longitudinal study of Early Head Start programs may change this research challenge. The design of the study was scientifically rigorous, the program reflects a variety of supports and services for infants and toddlers, and the findings demonstrate significant correlations between the program elements, measured school readiness, and later school success.

Recommendation: Design an approach for connecting schools and birth to three services.

Participants in CCSSO’s September 2005 meeting provided many rich examples of how schools can connect to children and families in the earliest years. At the end of the day, there was a general feeling that more people needed to know about these good examples and that the Council could be most helpful in illuminating an approach that helps parents, schools, and infant/toddler programs become connected. There are three dimensions to outlining this approach: bringing community stakeholders together in a meaningful conversation about their unique local needs and resources, establishing minimum standards for quality services, and educating stakeholders about the need for better connections and the many ways connections can occur.

This section will elaborate on each of these three dimensions and is guided by two principles that participants articulated at the meeting. The first principle is to *keep parents of infants and toddlers as the primary audience*. Parents need a variety of supports in raising their children. Some need advice, others need to learn skills, and still others need direct services such as child care, health care, or early intervention services for their children. Parents who have the supports and services they need will be competent and confident in raising their children. The second principle is to *respect existing efforts*. In many areas, schools and organizations serving infants/toddlers are already making connections. Any effort to encourage connections should support them, learn from them, and not duplicate their efforts. Respecting existing efforts also acknowledges that one

size does not fit all. The approach should provide the flexibility to respond to the unique needs and resources of local communities.

1. Initiate a collaborative process

The need for schools to collaborate with community partners is one of the six shifts in thinking identified by the Washington Office of the Superintendent in its Early Learning Toolkit. Increasingly, school leaders recognize that “We can’t do it alone; the only way to be successful is working in partnership with parents, community early learning providers, and other community partners.”⁶ Historically, schools serve children starting at age five, and infant/toddler programs rarely serve children past age three. Connecting these two entities means forging new relationships and establishing a common understanding of what children need and how to provide it. Initiating a collaborative process to find common ground helps build relationships, and the more diverse the stakeholder group, the stronger the relationships and the common vision they define. Stakeholders may include state and local school superintendents, school principals, service providers (e.g., child care, health care, family support, parent education), and the parents they intend to serve.

A collaborative process creates a structured setting to address the misperception that it is inappropriate for schools to become engaged with children younger than age three. It also allows for input on the needs of the community and the resources available to meet those needs.

What Superintendents Can Do: Collaboration is never easy and never successful without the right incentives to come together. The State Superintendent can use his/her bully pulpit to signal the importance of parents and community partners in a collaborative process to improve linkages with children in the earliest years. State and local superintendents can also host forums that bring diverse stakeholders together to get the conversation started. Imperative are the parents, whose voices should be primary in determining local needs.

2. Establish minimum quality standards

The second dimension of an approach to connect schools to families with infants/toddlers is establishing minimum quality standards. Collaboration is equally important in developing standards and should include schools, service providers, and parents, as well as the institutions of higher education that may need to incorporate professional development standards into their curriculum.

Communities should have the flexibility to set their own standards, but they may want to address standards in the following three areas:

- **Early Learning Standards:** While every state has or is in the process of adopting early learning standards for three- and four-year-olds, fewer have developed standards for children younger than three. Early learning standards should address the multiple dimensions of child development, which can include the social and emotional health of both the child and parent, physical development, communication, creative expression, and, of course, cognitive development.
- **Environmental Standards:** Standards should also address the quality of the environment, especially for services that provide care for infants and toddlers. This includes staff credentials, group sizes, and staff-child ratios. These standards should take into consideration age-appropriate licensing standards for child care and early intervention services.
- **Evidence-based Standards:** Several participants at the Council roundtable voiced concern over the number of parenting and early education programs that get funding

⁶ Office of the Superintendent, State of Washings, *Six Shifts in Thinking + Four Critical Constants for K-12 Educators*, available at <http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/EarlyLearningToolkit/DevelopingStrategies/6Shifts.pdf>

without any evidence that they make a difference. Recognizing that it is difficult to prove programs make a difference, participants encouraged local efforts to replicate programs that do have an evidence base and advised that replications should be required to meet the same program standards that existed in the evaluations. When programs are implemented without adequate funding, staffing, or quality, they will not yield the same results.

What the Superintendent Can Do: Superintendents can focus resources on a collaborative process to develop multi-domain early learning standards for children birth to age three and support alignment between birth to three, three to five, and K–12 standards. Several meeting participants argued for linking early care and education standards to a lifelong continuum of learning. While it is important to recognize that very young children have different needs and abilities, it is equally important to recognize the importance of transitions between developmental stages. Standards that are aligned can facilitate a smooth transition to the preschool and then elementary school years.

3. Raise awareness

The third dimension of an approach to connect schools to infants/toddlers is to educate superintendents, principals, and infant/toddler service providers about appropriate ways schools can connect to parents during the earliest years. While very few school leaders have expertise in infant and toddler development, most recognize the importance of these years in laying a foundation for later learning. An effort to connect schools to very young children requires a focus on how to raise awareness among all stakeholders about how schools can promote infant and toddler child development.

One suggestion from meeting participants was to hold joint trainings of school personnel (teachers, principals, superintendents) and service providers (child care and early intervention service providers). Bringing these constituencies together helps build relationships and respect for the unique role each plays. A second suggestion was to document best practices by providing examples of how schools are effectively engaged in supporting infant and toddler development. These examples could illustrate a continuum of involvement, from providing direct services to supporting existing organizations that provide services. They can draw from local, regional, or national examples, and should include information on costs and funding sources. For example, Washington's *Early Learning Toolkit*⁷ includes a section on best practices from around the state with information on funding sources and lessons learned.

What the Superintendent Can Do: State and local school leaders can learn about the existing connections in their community and the range of possible roles schools can play in supporting early childhood development. They can reach out to local child care providers and others working with families of infants and toddlers, invite them to participate in relevant training opportunities, and seek opportunities to address their professional development needs. Superintendents can send a clear message that they are not trying to replace the services currently provided, but are an ally in helping very young children get the best possible start in life.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Just as the earliest years are at the beginning and most opportune point of a child's "learning curve," the Council's work on connecting schools to children at this age is also at the beginning. Based on the accumulated research and the recommendations of the experts around the table in September, CCSSO will continue designing an approach to connect schools to children in their infant and toddler years. We hope to elaborate on the exemplary programs and practices

⁷ <http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/EarlyLearningToolkit/index.html>

collected in our information search and to make the lessons accessible to the stakeholders who can best put them to use.

With continuing support from grant makers, we will connect school leaders with the programs and practices that have documented success and help them to plan for similar action. We will also investigate more deeply the specific issues that bear on at-risk families with infants and toddlers—how the issues are different for poor, English Language Learner, African American, and Native American families. Most importantly, we will continue to elicit the policy and practice implications for state and local education agencies with the vision for school success for all children.

Appendix 1: Program Summaries

Early Childcare Centers, Bellevue School District, Washington

Description: In 1991, the Bellevue School District used bond funding to build Early Childcare Centers on nine of the district's sixteen elementary campuses. The centers open at 6:30 a.m., close at 6:00 p.m., and provide preschool and child care services for children ages 4 weeks through fifth grade. Child care services include infant and toddler care, before- and after-school care for preschool and elementary age children, and care during school holidays and the summer. All child care staff have a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, infant rooms have one teacher for every four children, and rooms with children ages 12-36 months have a one to seven ratio. All child care programs accept special needs students.

Role of the schools: The school district runs the nine child care centers, and all staff are employees of the school district. Funding for the care comes primarily from parent fees, with some funding from public child care subsidies.

For more information: Karin Cathey, Bellevue School District, 425-456-4030 or <http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/EarlyLearningToolkit/EffectivePractices/Bellevue/BellevueFINAL.pdf>

Local Investment Commission (LINC) Educare Initiative, Kansas City, Missouri

Description: In most communities, the needs of family-based child care providers receive too little attention and support. Since 1995, LINC's Educare Initiative has provided training, educational resources, and home consultations to family, home and center based childcare providers in designated Kansas City neighborhoods. Educare's primary goal is to create a network for family-based child care providers, and link them to services and resources provided through the local schools. Providers meet at the school for professional development workshops that include CPR and first aid, recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect, and the nuts and bolts of developing and running a child care business. In addition to the workshops, providers can access supports offered at the school through the Caring Communities Initiative. These supports include dental clinics, ESL classes, and emergency utility assistance. Educare efforts annually serve more than 5,000 families and 7,000 children. More than 2,500 childcare providers (both stay-at-home parents and home-based providers) attend workshops each year. Through satisfaction surveys and site visits, Educare staff continually make adjustments to improve the materials and instruction provided.

Role of the Schools: Educare uses the schools to deliver training and educational resources, and the location confers the added benefit of forming attachments between the providers and the neighborhood community. LINC also runs before- and after-school programs at the schools, and family child care providers frequently receive referrals for younger siblings who need child care.

For more information: Candace Cheatem, KC LINC, 816-889-5050

READY! for Kindergarten, Kennewick School District, Washington

Description: In order to meet the goal that "90 percent of our students will read at or above grade level by the end of third grade," the Kennewick School Board developed the family-based READY! for Kindergarten program. The school board did not want to be "telling parents what to do," so it helped establish the nonprofit National Children's Reading Foundation to be the messenger. Parents can attend a fifteen-session program, three per year, between their child's birth and fifth birthday. The curriculum includes hands-on training and research-based, age-appropriate information for parents to teach their children lessons about letters and sounds, math, and social skills. Launched in 2003, the program currently reaches 1,000 parents during each session. Initial outcome data suggest the percent of Kennewick students entering kindergarten with age-appropriate language and literacy skills has increased from 50 to 55% in less than two years.

Role of the schools: All classes are held at a Kennewick elementary school, and the district allocates \$210,000 each year to cover the on-going costs of program management, curriculum maintenance, class instructors, parent materials, and outreach activities.

For more information: Steve Halliday, The National Children's Reading Foundation, 509-51-5201 or

<http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/EarlyLearningToolkit/EffectivePractices/Kennewick/KennewickFINAL.pdf>

Learning Parties, Howard County, Maryland

Description: Built on the idea that learning can be fun, Learning Parties are intensive parent skill-building opportunities. Developed by Children's Resources International and modified by *Ready at Five*, the five-part Learning Party series creates interactive "parties" that enable parents and children to socialize while learning a wide-range of activities to improve the school readiness of the children. In the 2004-05 school year, Ready at Five and its Howard County partners launched the Learning parties in three elementary schools. Each party runs two and a half hours in length for parents and their children up to age 4. After an initial parent networking and child play session, children are invited to the "fun learning room" (a pre-kindergarten classroom) where they do an activity with a pre-kindergarten teacher that aligns with the concept discussed at the parent portion of the Learning Party. Parents learn specific emergent language and literacy concepts such as: building language and communication skills, learning about print and letters, developing comprehension, and initiating phonemic awareness. After the lesson, parents and children reunite and practice the activity with their child while trainers provide positive feedback and suggestions or modifications for the future. All sessions are conducted in Spanish and English. Follow-up surveys and focus groups indicate almost all of the parents learned new skills to help them improve their child's language and literacy skills, and most wanted additional Learning Parties.

Role of the school: A pre-kindergarten or kindergarten teacher who is trained in the Learning Party model facilitates the Learning Parties or staffs the fun learning room. Staff receive release time from school to participate in the parties and attend monthly advisory committee meetings. Parties are held at the local Elementary School, introducing parents to the public schools prior to their child's entry into kindergarten and easing children's transitions. Schools encourage parents of currently enrolled students who have younger siblings to attend the parties, with targeted outreach to parents whose children are English language learners or whose older children are reading below grade level.

For more information: Louise Corwin or Amanda McMahon, Ready at Five Partnership, 410-727-6290.

All Our Kids (AOK) Early Childhood Network, Cicero, Illinois

Description. AOK Cicero increased the number of developmental screening opportunities for children ages 0-3 through a partnership with School District #99. AOK added developmental screening for children 0-3 to the screening SD #99 was already doing for children ages 3-5. The costs of the program were absorbed by the participating agencies. Public Health staff initiated the partnership, created the flyer and oriented volunteers to their responsibilities; the school district provided the locations and distributed the flyers; the child care center took the calls from the community and made the appointments; the bi-lingual early intervention staff did most of the screening; Child & Family Connections staff took follow up referrals; the high school and the college provided people to register parents and translate in Spanish when needed; a medical center provided medical students for screenings; other community volunteers filled the gaps. In the past five years, the screenings have identified 112 children, ages 0-3, who were identified and received early intervention services.

Role of the school: The screenings take place at five schools on two Saturdays in early spring. The schools continue to screen 3-5 year olds in the gym, and make appropriate space available to accommodate young children. Schools publicize the event by distributing flyers.

For more information: Marge Ciewswlewicz, Cicero School District #99, 708-863-4856

School Nurse Initiative, Orange County, California

Description: The Children and Families Commission of Orange County launched the School Nurse Initiative in July 2004. In one year, it provided community-based health services, along with almost 50,000 direct services, to 7,600 children ages 0-5. Located in Orange County school districts with a kindergarten population, the school nurses receive referrals from teachers of older siblings, as well as community-based organizations such as child care centers. Nurses:

- identify medical homes and assist in finding health care for children ages 0-5
- perform essential preventive services and state mandates (immunizations, screenings, child abuse prevention and reporting),
- provide referrals and follow-up with families for medical treatment compliance

The initiative also supports on-going nurse recruitment and professional development that includes a mentoring component, standards of care, and best practices for school nurses. A post-baccalaureate school nurse program has been developed locally through the California State University Department of Nursing. The annual cost of the program is approximately \$2 million per year, for which the Commission has made an initial multi-year commitment. The Commission pays all costs through the California Children and Families Act, which generates revenue from a 50-cent per pack excise tax on cigarettes. Some districts have been able to secure additional funds through administrative claiming of Medicaid. The initiative includes an evaluation that is in process.

Role of the school: School districts have a two-year contract with the Commission. Districts have some flexibility in designing the program, but the services must fit a standard scope of practice for school nursing. Nurses are placed in schools, and provide both school-based and school linked services.

For more information: Alyce Mastrianni, Children and Families Commission of Orange County, 714-824-3916.