



# Ready Schools

The e-Newsletter of the CCSSO School Readiness Project

Issue 8 February/March 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**

*Getting School Ready* (9 pages)

<http://www.gettingschoolready.org/gsrguide/gsr-english.pdf>

Forty-one community conversations that were led by parent facilitators throughout King County (**Washington**) resulted in this guide to help parents, educators, caregivers, and community members prepare both schools and children for kindergarten. For each of the following six components of readiness, the brochure provides practical actions that adults can take from the child's perspective:

- My social and emotional skills
- How I learn
- Using words and numbers
- Support my family, culture and language
- Keep me safe and healthy
- Communication among the adults in my life

## **Ready Schools Encourage Continuity and Alignment between Care and Education Programs and Elementary Schools**

*Ladders of Learning: Fighting Fade-Out by Advancing PK-3 Alignment*  
(11 pages)

[http://www.newamerica.net/Download\\_Docs/pdfs/Doc\\_File\\_2826\\_1.pdf](http://www.newamerica.net/Download_Docs/pdfs/Doc_File_2826_1.pdf)

This issue brief from the New America Foundation's Early Education Initiative emphasizes the importance of having strong, well-aligned programs beginning in pre-kindergarten and extending through third grade (PK-3). The author compares learning and development to

climbing a ladder, where high-quality PK and full-day kindergarten enable children to climb the first rungs of the ladder. If educational experiences after kindergarten build on those skills learned early, children will climb smoothly to the top of the ladder. However, the positive effects of PK and full-day kindergarten can be short-lived without horizontal, vertical, and temporal alignment from pre-kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Recommendations for federal action include:

- Convening a national PK-3 Commission,
- Supporting the creation of state PK-16 councils, and
- Dedicating new Title I NCLB funds to PK-3 efforts

### **Ready Schools Ensure High Quality Learning Environments**

RALLY Jacksonville! is the mayor's literacy initiative in Jacksonville (**Florida**), which aims to make early literacy a core value, improve the quality of its child care sites, and increase the number of children who are ready for school at the beginning of kindergarten. The Career Ladder for Preschool Professionals initiative is one of the three components of RALLY Jacksonville!, which intends to help childcare centers shift from providing custodial care to providing quality early education to prepare the growing majority of children in childcare for school. The initiative encourages high school graduates and non degree professionals to attain Child Development Associate certification for a career in preschool or voluntary pre-kindergarten education. Certificated students can apply their coursework to qualify for the associate degree. As part of the program, the University of North Florida and the Florida Community College at Jacksonville have partnered with city and community agencies to fund scholarships for teachers at childcare centers that serve low-income children. For more information about RALLY Jacksonville!, you can visit: <http://www.coj.net/Departments/Childrens+Commission/RALLY+Jacksonville/default.htm>

*Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise* (201 pages)

<http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG341>

While nearly half of all children face one or more risk factors associated with gaps in school readiness, in this study RAND identifies the role that high-quality early interventions can play in improving outcomes for disadvantaged children. Additional supports for parents, children, and families can generate lifelong benefits for the participating child and society as a whole, such that the benefits outweigh the upfront investment. The author draws the following conclusions from a review of intervention strategies, what works, and the economics of early childhood interventions:

- The period from birth to age five is one of opportunity and vulnerability for healthy physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development.
- A sizable fraction of children face risks that have the potential to limit their development in the years prior to school entry.
- Variations in early childhood experiences are manifested in disparities in school readiness measures, and these gaps often persist as children age.
- Early childhood intervention programs are designed to counteract various stressors in early childhood and promote healthy development.
- Rigorous evaluations of early childhood interventions can inform our understanding of the array of outcomes at school entry and beyond that programs may improve.
- Rigorous scientific research has demonstrated that early childhood interventions can improve the lives of participating children and families in both the short run and longer run.
- A very limited evidence base points to several program features that may be associated with better outcomes for children: better-trained caregivers, smaller child-to-staff ratios, and greater intensity of services.
- The favorable effects of early childhood programs can translate into dollar benefits for the government, participants, and other members of society.
- Economic analyses of several early childhood interventions demonstrate that effective programs can repay the initial investment with savings to government and benefits to society down the road.
- The economic benefits of early childhood interventions are likely to be greatest for programs that effectively serve targeted, disadvantaged children compared with universal programs or programs that serve more-advantaged children.

*The Economic Benefits of High-Quality Early Childhood Programs: What Makes the Difference?* (32 pages)

[http://www.ced.org/docs/report/report\\_prek\\_galinsky.pdf](http://www.ced.org/docs/report/report_prek_galinsky.pdf)

In this study, the Committee for Economic Development explores why the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Project, and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers were so successful with children deemed at risk of subsequent school failure. The findings have implications for making a lasting difference in the lives of children, families, and society, as well as the role of standards in early childhood education. The overarching principles that contributed to the success of these three programs and their return on investment are:

- Working with very young children (first months of life to age three)
- Intensive teacher education, training, and compensation, in addition to low teacher turnover
- Small class sizes and high teacher-child ratios
- Intensive programs customized to a specific population of children, including many contact hours for more than a year, transitions into the early elementary years, and meaningful connections between home and school
- Curricula informed by best practices in child development and learning

Beyond these programmatic features, the principal investigators for the evaluations of these three programs identified the following ways of thinking about and interacting with children, their families and colleagues that made a difference:

- There was clarity of focus in each of these interventions. The leaders of these interventions, all of whom were highly trained experts in early childhood education, were very intentional about what they wanted their programs to accomplish and built support among participants and in the larger community for accomplishing these goals.
- These interventions focused on the whole child—the child’s intellectual, social, emotional and physical growth and well-being.
- The relationship between the teacher and the child was seen as central to the child’s learning.
- There was a mixture between responsive teaching that extended and labored on what the children were already learning and direct teaching, but the direct teaching was also designed to be engaging and to extend children’s learning. The curriculum was not set in stone, but [was rather] a framework for learning.
- Although the teachers were better-educated, better-trained and better-paid than the average early childhood teacher—there was also a strong focus on their ongoing learning. The model of adult learning was not one of pouring information into “an empty vessel,” but one of providing time and resources for the teachers to reflect on what the children were learning and on their own teaching to find ways to improve their teaching practice.

### **Ready Schools Have Strong Partnerships with Parents and the Community**

*Supporting and Involving Families in Meaningful Ways*  
<http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200601/>

The January issue of *Beyond the Journal* by the National Association of Education for Young Children includes three articles that are publicly-

accessible, regarding supports for families of children with disabilities; Family Systems Theory and its daily applications to the work of practitioners; and a list of books, articles, multimedia, family literacy organizations, and websites that can provide further information about meaningful family involvement. The articles are available below:

- *A Team Approach: Supporting Families of Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Programs* (10 pages)  
<http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200601/KaczmarekBTJ.pdf>
- *Understanding Families: Applying Family Systems Theory to Early Childhood Practice* (8 pages)  
<http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200601/ChristianBTJ.pdf>
- *Resources for Supporting and Involving Families in Meaningful Ways* (4 pages)  
<http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200601/FamilyResourcesBTJ.pdf>

### **Ready Schools: Other Resources, Publications and Sites of Interest**

*Pre-K and Politics 2005*

[www.preknow.org](http://www.preknow.org)

The Pre-K Now Political Barometer identifies conditions that create a favorable political climate for developing and/or expanding high-quality universal pre-K. Based on a review of available research, Pre-K Now is tracking each state's political atmosphere surrounding Pre-K. The Political Barometer includes the following ten criteria and urges stakeholders to compare states and act on these data:

- Gubernatorial support
- Key policymaker support
- Legislative or ballot measure activity
- Funding
- Advocacy
- Business community support
- Media coverage
- Governance
- Teacher professional development
- Pre-K-for-all

*Opening the Door to Learning: Literacy is a Family Affair* (48 pages)

<http://69.13.171.71/dls/familyliteracyguide.pdf>

Educators and librarians in New York City developed this literacy guide in partnership with New Visions for Public Schools to help parents and caregivers strengthen children's literacy skills from birth through grade 12. The guide focuses on three areas (1) how children develop

reading skills, (2) what children will experience in school, and (3) what parents and caregivers can do at home to help children learn to use language effectively. There are also lists of books that are appropriate for each grade level.

### **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](mailto:alyssaa@ccsso.org). PDF versions of all Ready Schools newsletters are available at [http://www.ccsso.org/whats\\_new/newsletters/ready\\_schools/index.cfm](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.