



Ready Schools

The e-Newsletter of the CCSSO School Readiness Project

Issue 11 June 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

The Lancaster County School District (**South Carolina**) expanded its free pre-K summer transition program this year through funding by a grant from the Lancaster County First Steps initiative. The summer program is designed to ease the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Students attend a four week session at elementary school buildings Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 12:30 pm. When possible, students are assigned to schools that they will be attending in the fall. They become acquainted to the routines of kindergarten: riding the school bus, attending academically structured classes with other students, and eating lunch at school. Teachers, all of which are certified in early childhood education, have class sizes no larger than ten students and informally report student progress to parents on a weekly basis. Teachers plan instruction around the district’s literacy and “I can problem solve” curriculum, emphasizing skills needed to prepare and get ahead for kindergarten.

Additionally, as part of the Lancaster County First Steps initiative, parents whose students are enrolled in the pre-K summer transition program are invited to attend a six week series of workshops. The workshops connect parents to the “I can problem solve” curriculum giving them an understanding of how to support and reinforce student learning. These evening sessions are free and provide dinner and child care to parents.

For more information on the pre-K summer transition program or the parenting series, contact Mim Boucher, Lancaster County School District Instructional Specialist, at 803-416-8822 or mboucher@lcsd.k12.sc.us

For more information on the Lancaster County First Steps initiative, please visit: <http://www.scfirststeps.org/Lancaster.htm>

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

The **Pennsylvania** Department of Education and Public Welfare created the Early Learning Standards for Pre-Kindergarten. These standards are available in English and in Spanish. They are meant to guide the development of pre-kindergarten programs in the state and were used as the center point to develop the kindergarten standards. The standards combine curriculum and assessment to:

- Help inform parents of appropriate expectations of what students should know and be able to do
- Frame discussions for community and education partnerships that foster learning
- Assist and provide guidance to teachers and administrators on instruction
- Encourage parent-school-community collaborations

Much like the format of the pre-K standards, the kindergarten standards list key learning areas, give examples of what students should exhibit to show mastery, and detail supportive practices providing suggestions to what teachers may do to encourage students. When applicable, links to third and fourth grade standards are identified to kindergarten key learning areas to show the connection to future learning.

For more information about the Pennsylvania's Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment for Early Childhood Education, please visit: http://www.pde.state.pa.us/early_childhood/cwp/view.asp?a=179&Q=101706&early_childhoodNav

For more information on the Early Learning Standards for Pre-Kindergarten, please visit: http://www.pde.state.pa.us/early_childhood/lib/early_childhood/Early_Learning_Standards_August_05.pdf

For more information on the Kindergarten Early Learning Standards, please visit: http://www.pde.state.pa.us/early_childhood/lib/early_childhood/DECE_MBER_2005_KINDERGARTEN_STANDARDS.pdf

Ready Schools Ensure High Quality Learning Environments

Small Classes in the Early Grades, Academic Achievement, and Graduating From High School

<http://www.apa.org/journals/releases/edu972214.pdf>

This study investigates the relationship of high school graduation to small class sizes (13-17 students) and academic achievement in kindergarten through grade 3. It uses data sets from the Tennessee Department of Education's Project Star to show that high school completion derives from a culmination of school experiences beginning in the early grades (K-3).

The Project Star experiment used almost 12,000 students and more than 300 classrooms statewide. It assigned students entering kindergarten to random class sizes: a small class (13-17 students), a full class (22-26 students), or a full class with a teacher's aide. Students maintained the same class size up to four years (Grade 3) with a new teacher assigned to the class indicating:

- Higher academic performance by students in small classroom settings
- Greater academic benefits to students at risk in small class sizes
- Students in small classes were more engaged in learning

At the end of the fourth year, student data continued to be collected through the high school grades. From the Project Star sample, the graduation rates were significantly higher among students attending small classrooms for four years showing a positive long-term effect.

Ready Schools Have Strong Partnerships with Parents and the Community

The Branford Early Childhood Collaboration (BECC) (**Connecticut**) focuses on bringing awareness to early childhood development. The BECC is funded by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. Its membership consists of twenty businesses, the superintendent of schools, members of the board of education, and parents, as well as individuals from the police department, the family resource and early years center, the counseling center, and the after school program. Funding provided enables the BECC to hire a part time coordinator who keeps minutes of monthly meetings held at the Board of Education and manages the listserv.

Recently, the BECC published and distributed a Kid's Directory for families. The directory provides resource information to families needing assistance in a wide array of situations from abuse and child care to after school programs in the community. Directories were distributed with the delivery of the local newspaper and are available at partnering businesses and institutions. Plans of future activities involve workshops sponsored by early childhood education providers and obtaining a monthly information parent's corner in the local newspaper.

For more information, contact BECC and Board of Education member Marie Watson at 203-483-8015 or mariewatson@gmail.com

The Branford Early Childhood Collaboration Kid's Directory is available online at: http://discovery.wcgmf.org/resources/sps_resource_747.doc

Ready Schools: Other Resources, Publications and Sites of Interest

ECS Policy Brief: Early Learning, Emerging Issues 2006

<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/68/84/6884.pdf>

This policy brief by the Education Commission of the States addresses issues surrounding early learning programs for policymakers. It identifies pertinent implementation challenges to inform decision making that includes funding streams, pre-K-K-3 alignment, governance structures, assessments, program quality, and parent engagement.

Are Children Ready For School? Assessment of Kindergarten Readiness in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties

<http://www.uwsv.org/kindergarten/RKSFinalReport.pdf>

This report by the Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness and the Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families uses data collected in two counties, San Mateo and Santa Clara, to establish benchmarks for early childhood education. It informs teachers, schools, families, and communities on how well prepared students are entering K-12. Findings show students most prepared for kindergarten:

- Are able to effectively manage conflict
- Have more educated mothers
- Are 5 years old or older
- Live in households with no more than two other children

Additionally, students with parents actively engaged in enrichment activities are as equally prepared as students with preschool experience.

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 Morakot Masokas at morakotm@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.