



Ready Schools

The e-Newsletter of the CCSSO School Readiness Project

Issue 16 November 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

Enhancing the Transition to Kindergarten: Linking Children, Families, & Schools

http://discovery.wcgmf.org/resources/sps_resource_409.pdf

This manual from the University of Virginia's National Center for Early Development and Learning Kindergarten Transition Studies focuses on a unique approach to developing transition strategies for students entering kindergarten. This approach promotes connections between students, families, and schools while incorporating five core elements:

- fostering relationships as resources
- promoting continuity from preschool to kindergarten
- focusing on family strengths
- tailoring practices to individual needs
- forming collaborative relationships

Throughout the planning process, all stakeholders are required to consider

- establishing a collaborative team of teachers, administrators, family support personnel, parents, and community agency representative
- identifying a transition coordinator to provide continuity and coordinate transition activities
- creating a timeline to plan when activities will occur
- implementing transition practices
- evaluating and revising the outcome of transition practices

Additionally, a "menu" or checklist of kindergarten transition practices offers specific examples of strategies for school personnel to utilize and augment depending on the specific needs of the individual school/district.

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

Principal magazine from the National Association of Elementary School Principals presents "Readiness for Kindergarten: What Schools Can Do" on the primary school's role in developing and aligning expectations that ensure success for all kindergarten students. Findings identify differences in the skills that are important to student success among teachers, parents, and childcare providers. The report highlights two action steps for schools to implement to align expectations and support student success:

- Develop community-wide understanding of knowledge important to children as they enter kindergarten
- Provide information and education to other childcare providers, families, and private pre-kindergartens—so that they are better able to help children develop the skills and knowledge

Members of NAESP may access the full report. Member information and the abstract of this report are available for free at:

<http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=2003>

The "Prekindergarten for All" chapter in Gene Maeroff's latest book, *Building Blocks*, stresses the need to integrate high quality pre-K as an essential step to meet the goals of the PK-3 approach. It highlights the work of three diverse school systems that provide examples for best practices:

- Harrisburg School District (Pennsylvania) – This school system combined public pre-K with Head Start programs. It invited Head Start centers to relocate in public schools. Each classroom was equipped with two teachers—one from Head Start and one from the school district. The school system obtained foundation grants to supply aides for the pre-K classrooms as well as to create the Reaching Early Achievement for Children in Harrisburg (REACH) initiative. Through this initiative the school system implements a universal pre-K program that includes extended-day child care, health care, and social services housed in the district's elementary schools.
- Montgomery County Public Schools (Maryland) – This school system also combined public pre-K with Head Start classes. Using an Early Reading First federal grant, the school system focuses on early literacy providing staff development, extra specialists, diverse instructional materials, opportunities for parent involvement, and childcare before and after school to students and families.
- The New Jersey Program – Court orders by the state Supreme Court established the state's universal pre-K program in 31 school districts to serve the state's poorest families. The state pays \$440 million annually to fund daily six hour pre-K and before- and after-school wraparound services. In addition, it requires a certified teacher for every 15 students. New regulations and standards were developed to

ensure alignment of expectations among private providers that are contracted by eligible school systems to take the overflow of incoming students.

To purchase this book online, please visit: <http://www.fcd-us.org/BB.html>

Ready Schools Ensure High Quality Learning Environments

Class Size and Student Achievement

<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=kjJXJ5MPIwE&b=1498577&ct=2040795>

This research brief focuses on the relationship between class size and student achievement. It features the findings of three statewide programs: **Tennessee's** Project Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR), **Wisconsin's** Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE), and **California's** Class Size Reduction (CSR) program. These programs aim to dramatically reduce class sizes amongst targeted populations in kindergarten through grade three. Findings indicate

- Smaller classes in grades K-3 improve student achievement in reading and math.
- A class size of 15-18 is the upper limit for capturing benefits in the early grades.
- Young students benefit more when reduced class size programs span grades K-3.
- The benefits of small classes in the primary grades are lasting.
- Small classes in the primary grades can help close the achievement gap.
- Teachers may obtain more instructional options and give individual attention to students.

Ready Schools Have Strong Partnerships with Parents and the Community

The ABC Unified School District's (**California**) partnership with the Parent Leadership Academy (PLA) cultivates meaningful parental involvement in the district. The PLA operates under the ABC Adult School's Parent Education Program. It works with each individual school in the district to create onsite workshops and sessions for parents on topics that include

- school readiness
- socialization
- parenting and safety
- parent participation program

In addition, monthly district-wide workshops are available. These school and district-wide workshops provide parents with materials and knowledge on how to support their child's learning.

The PLA sends out informational brochures annually to all residents in the district about the sessions, as well as, utilizes "word of mouth" for marketing purposes. The sessions have been so successful that participants are waitlisted.

For more information on the Parent Leadership Academy, please visit: <http://www.abcusd.k12.ca.us/pla/index.jsp?rn=7447> or contact Susan Yim at (562) 402-9821 or susan.yim@abcusd.k12.ca.us

Ready Schools: Other Resources, Publications and Sites of Interest

Gene Maeroff's new book, *Building Blocks*, presents strategies for improving early education. In "Building a New Learning Structure" chapter, he highlights effective practices of centers and elementary schools that have made early childhood education a primary focus. These centers and schools derived as a solution to overcrowding in the neighborhood schools. Depending on the specific needs of the community, they are configured in a variety of ways housing only pre-K through grade three, kindergarten, K-2, or K-3. They have their own administration and are housed either in a separate building or within another school. Maeroff posits advantages to these self-contained learning structures:

- professional development focuses on early childhood development and education
- teachers and administrators are able to provide students with more attention because they are not pre-occupied with preparing 4th and 5th grade students for middle school
- compared to full elementary schools, operating costs are lower

Maeroff makes the case for self-contained PK-3 schools/centers and describes the main advantages:

- Alignment – Curriculum, standards, instruction, and assessment are streamlined across grades.
- Literacy – The manageable size fosters a more focused approach to reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.
- Articulation – Teachers are provided with more opportunities to share information about students' learning and development.
- Continuous progress – Students proceed through grades based on their individual development needs.
- More time for learning – Schools are better able to expand time for learning.
- Wraparound services – Schools are better able to identify children and family needs and appropriately refer them to the health and social services.

To purchase this book online, please visit: <http://www.fcd-us.org/BB.html>

Closing the Achievement Gap through Expanded Access to Quality Early Education in Grades PK-3

<http://www.fcd-us.org/PDFs/ClosingtheAchievementGapBrief.pdf>

This brief presents recommendations for changes to existing federal grant programs to increase access to quality early education in pre-K through grade 3. Recommendations to expand access to children include:

- creating a tiered, federal matching grant program that calls for the resurrection of the defunct Goals 2000 education plan
- dedicating new NCLB Title I funding to early education
- increasing local flexibility to use existing NCLB Title I funding on PK-3 efforts

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, to 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.