



Ready Schools

The e-Newsletter of the CCSSO School Readiness Project

Issue 2 August 2005

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

Countdown to Kindergarten in Boston (**Massachusetts**) engages families, educators, and community members in a city-wide effort to support the transition into kindergarten. Countdown's goals are as follows:

- Ensure families of five-year-olds take advantage of the academic and social benefits kindergarten provides.
- Make the process of choosing schools, registering and entering kindergarten within the Boston Public Schools clear and welcoming for all families.
- Lay the groundwork for primary caretakers (parents, grandparents, guardians, etc.) to be active partners in their children's education.
- Coordinate and expand social and learning activities that help children transition from home or pre-school into kindergarten.

The Countdown to Kindergarten website provides activities and materials designed to make the process of choosing schools, registering, and entering kindergarten clear and welcoming for all families. Information sheets are formatted in six languages: English, Spanish, Cape Verdean Creole, Haitian Creole and Vietnamese. The activities also lay the groundwork for families to be active partners in their children's education. Families are encouraged to commence the "getting ready" process of transition to kindergarten a full year in advance of their anticipated start date, which is the September before the child turns 5. For a complete view of the Countdown to Kindergarten timeline, activities and resources, visit the website at: <http://www.countdowntokindergarten.org>

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

PK-3: An Aligned and Coordinated Approach to Education for Children 3 to 8 Years Old

<http://www.srcd.org/documents/publications/SPR/spr19-3.pdf>

This report provides a description of several components required to have an aligned and coordinated approach to education for children 3 to 8 years old.

1. The PK-3 Approach to education proposes voluntary, universal access to PK for 3- and 4-year-olds, followed by mandatory full-school-day kindergarten.
2. Social and pedagogical experiences from PK through third grade are aligned across grade levels and aligned with the learning experiences research indicates children require based on their developmental capabilities.
3. A master plan is needed that lays out clear expectations for children at each grade level, aligns these expectations with classroom experiences, and offers multiple forms of assessment that provide information on whether or not children are progressing toward the expectations.
4. Teachers who are prepared to provide high-quality experiences across PK through third grade are a necessary component to this approach to education.

The authors propose that we expand research from focusing on grade level expectations to investigating how learning experiences are systematically organized across grade levels and their impact on child outcomes. The complete report, *PK-3: An Aligned and Coordinated Approach to Education for Children 3 to 8 Years Old* (24 pages) can be downloaded at:

<http://www.srcd.org/documents/publications/SPR/spr19-3.pdf>

New Jersey Abbott Preschool Program

<http://www.nj.gov/njded/ece/abbott/giantsteps>

Six years ago **New Jersey** implemented the project of providing high quality pre-K in its poorest districts, known as the Abbott Preschool Program. With the focused goal on preparing children to succeed in school, the emphasis shifted from setting up basic program components to selecting and building programs that offer high quality learning experiences for all three and four year olds in low poverty districts. The overarching key to obtaining the goal is to ensure that the program reach all children. In partnership with the Department of Education's Office of Early Childhood Education, the Abbott Preschool Program benchmarked best practices to ensure that children enter school with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the Preschool

Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality and the kindergarten Core Curriculum Content Standards. Results of this work are beginning to show in higher test scores. The quality first approach undertaken by **New Jersey** now brings into focus the challenge to expand pre-K beyond the high poverty districts. To learn about **New Jersey's** work on the Abbott Preschool Program, please visit: <http://www.nj.gov/njded/ece/abbott/giantsteps>

Ready Schools Ensure High Quality Learning Environments

Wisconsin has taken several steps toward developing a cohesive professional development system for its early childhood education and care workforce. Some of the components in the **Wisconsin** Quality Educator Initiative include the following:

- A career ladder that incorporates the range of competencies, educational levels, and the teaching responsibilities needed within the field and that guides an equitable approach to wages and compensation.
- Inter-department commitment and funding to provide a formal collaborative approach to redesign and structure the professional development system.
- Competency-based coursework that prepares teachers to support young children in various settings.
- Articulation of coursework between two- and four-year institutions.
- Credit-bearing coursework will be available through on-site intensive professional development experiences.
- Coordinated training calendars on the regional and state levels.
- Portfolios and mentors that can follow the teacher through the various steps of career development.
- Support and training for mentors.
- Ongoing outreach and networking between/among the state, regional, and local stakeholders about the early childhood professional development system.

Information about the **Wisconsin** Quality Educator Initiative specific to early childhood educators is provided through a report, *Chapter PI 34 Teacher Training and Professional Development Re-design: Implementation in Early Childhood and Care Settings*. This report outlines specific strategies for addressing professional development needs for school district teachers in community settings, licensed special educators, licensed teachers in head start and early head start and licensed teachers in child care settings. To read the report, *Chapter PI 34 Teacher Training and Professional Development Re-design – Implementation in Early Childhood and Care Settings* (30 pages), go to: <http://dpi.wi.gov/fscp/pdf/ecpi34.pdf>

Ready Schools Have Strong Partnerships with Parents and the Community

In an ongoing effort to build strong partnerships with parents, **North Carolina** Public Schools holds an Annual Parents' Day. Contributing to the success of the Annual Parents' Day, a broad based committee is created to organize and plan the event. The committee includes teachers, administrative staff, custodians, PTA members, local business partners and neighboring community groups. Most schools hold back to school nights or open house events to kick off the school year. The Annual Parent's Day is built around a back to school theme and held at the beginning of the school year, but a mid-year or late spring event can also be effective. To meet the variety of scheduling needs of parents, the Annual Parents' Day event has proven successful when held in the afternoon and evening. To find out more on how to initiate an Annual Parents' Day at your school or view other materials developed by the **North Carolina** Department of Instruction on building parent partnerships, visit:
http://www.ncpublicschools.org/involvement/parents_day.html

Ready Schools: Other Resources, Publications and Sites of Interest

Enhancing Family Friend and Neighbor Caregiving Quality: The Research for Public Engagement (29 pages)
<http://hspsc.org/publications/pdf/APHSApaper05.RRF.pdf>

Providing financial support for Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) care is a discussion that involves many public policy makers. Approximately 27% of children receiving federal/state subsidies under the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program enrolled in FFN care. The authors of this paper encourage policy makers to expand the conversation on FFN care to include the issue of quality and develop a coherent strategy to promote FFN caregiving quality. "Utilization of FFN care affects children from all social and economic groups, but it is of disproportionate concern to children from low income and minority backgrounds. Since these children are at heightened developmental risk in their early years, and more likely to experience negative outcomes later in schools, work and family life, the quality of their caregivers is of vital public concern." Top priorities for policy research, experimentation and evaluation, as identified by the authors include the following:

1. Policy makers should experiment with offering training and support to family, friend and neighbor caregivers and conduct evaluations of the impact on observed caregiving.
2. Researchers should focus on whether interventions should be modified or adapted for different cultural groups for caregivers of different age, gender and relationship to the child.

3. FFN caregiving is a three-way relationship among child, caregiver and parent. Changes of attitudes, skills and behaviors of both parents and caregivers may be necessary to improve child outcomes.

The report, *Enhancing Family Friend and Neighbor Caregiving Quality: The Research for Public Engagement* (29 pages) can be downloaded at:

<http://hspsc.org/publications/pdf/APHSApaper05.RRF.pdf>

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 Susan Taylor at susant@ccsso.org.

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.