



Ready Schools

The e-Newsletter of the CCSSO School Readiness Project

Issue 1 July 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

In the state of **Washington**, the Office of Superintendent and Public Instruction’s Readiness to Learn grant provides Clark County the opportunity to support kindergarten school readiness and transition at five local elementary schools: Fruit Valley, Hazel Dell, Image, Silver Star and Yacolt. Each site assessed existing readiness efforts and linked public schools with early learning services, professionals, families, and community agencies to create a Kindergarten School Readiness and Transition Plan. Schools and community partners meet throughout the year to identify current kindergarten readiness issues and to coordinate education and early learning systems. Information on other readiness projects and best practices research is shared.

Within its school readiness transition plan, Fruit Valley Elementary School (**Washington**) has identified several strategies in an attempt to reach out to all families. According to a survey completed by members of the community, one of the most helpful ways a school could ease the transition to kindergarten for children and families included the Kindergarten Round-up activity. During the month of May, families with incoming kindergarten children are invited to attend and learn about the school, classroom, and register for the following fall class. Packets are distributed, complete with school handbook, lunch program information, a school district calendar, a summertime activity calendar and booklet for incoming children, brochure on skills children will need for school, some community resource information, and parent partnership information. Other transition activities in Fruit Valley’s school readiness transition plan include the following:

- Jump Start Kindergarten – *August* – Any kindergarten-eligible child is welcome to attend the pre-kindergarten two-week session

designed to acclimate children to a classroom experience, practice basic classroom skills, and learn about classroom rules.

- Preschool Packets – *Each month throughout the school year* – Distributed by the Vancouver School District, each packet contains activities and worksheets for four and five-year olds to practice the alphabet, writing their name and letters, along with math, science, and socials study skills.
- Back to School BBQ – *prior to first day of school* – All school children and their families can attend the open house to meet their new teachers, see their new classrooms, and receive information about the school. Traditionally, Burgerville has helped sponsor the BBQ by providing some of the food, volunteers, and the Burgerville Train.
- Read & Play Story time – *weekly, year-round* – A sixty-minute session designed for children birth to age five and their families. A librarian reads a story, uses finger plays, music, and movement to encourage literacy-skill development. Parents and caretakers can talk with each other and receive support from a Parent Educator.
- Literacy Kits – *weekly, year-round* – Available for checkout by parents and childcare providers, these kits are filled with activities and toys related to a literacy-based theme.
- Family Nights – *1-3 times per school year* – Preschool children and their families are welcome to attend family nights at the school with themes such as literacy, health, and parenting. Activities are designed to engage parent and child interaction. Materials are provided on parenting and child development topics.
- Family Resource Center – *year-round* – Families and community members have access to the resource center located inside the school. With access to the internet, a food bank and clothes closet, as well as a school-supply drive in September, families have the opportunity to visit the school while obtaining support.

Additional information about the school readiness plans developed in Clark County can be found online at

http://www.esd112.org/parents/kindergarten_trans.html.

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

The **Washington** Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has posted a resource designed to support all who care for and teach young children. This resource, *The Early Learning and Development Benchmarks- A Guide to Young Children's Learning and Development: From Birth to Kindergarten Entry*, represents goals for young children's development that reflect the perspectives, values, and recommended practices of a diverse range of people, institutions and communities. The Benchmarks are designed to support the growth and development of young children from birth to kindergarten entry, whether the

children are in their own homes, others' homes, in licensed child care, early intervention programs, Head Start, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, or in private or public preschools. Moreover, the Benchmarks aspire to serve as a common tool for discussion, dialogue, and sharing among parents, early childhood professionals, and community members about reasonable expectations and practical strategies for all adults who care for and teach young children and assist early childhood programs and K-12 schools to align what experiences children have before entering school with what they need to know and be able to do when they begin school.

The Early Learning and Development Benchmarks- a Guide to Young Children's Learning and Development: From Birth to Kindergarten Entry (206 pages) can be downloaded for viewing at:
<http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/pubdocs/EarlyLearningBenchmarks.pdf>

Ready Schools Ensure High Quality Learning Environments

Fairfax County Public Schools (**Virginia**), through their Family Services and Involvement Section (FSIS), have embraced the concept of creating welcoming environments using a program known as a "Welcoming Environment Walk Through: Seeing Your School as Others See It." The purpose of the welcoming environment is to examine how inviting the school appears to a diverse community and to determine strategies that will make the school more welcoming and therefore, increase parent involvement. The welcoming environment concept has four basic components:

1. The Physical Environment. The physical appearance of the facility is an essential element in creating a welcoming atmosphere.
2. School-wide Practices and Policies. The way in which school-wide practices and policies are implemented can enhance or undermine a welcoming atmosphere.
3. Welcoming School Staff. The attitudes of the staff members are an essential element in creating a welcoming atmosphere.
4. Written Materials. A more welcoming atmosphere is created when the printed materials sent home from the school are clear, understandable and meaningful to parents and others reading them.

More information about Virginia's Welcoming Environments concept is located online at:

<http://www.fcps.edu/DIS/OECFS/FLI/welcome.htm>

Ready Schools Have Strong Partnerships with Parents and the Community

Four high poverty elementary school communities in Denver (**Colorado**) received funding from the Piton Foundation to participate in the Early Excellence Initiative. The four schools (Fairview, Harrington, Maria Mitchell elementary and the Wyatt-Edison Charter School) adopted early education plans that lay out how each will build connections among the school, parents of young children, and neighborhood based child care and early education providers. The initiative offers parent enrichment activities, experiences to prepare young children for school and family support activities to help connect parents to social and services networks in the community. The schools offer parents and families with young children ages 0-5 hundreds of hours of programming throughout the school year such as: extended-day Early Childhood Education classes, play groups, field trips to the zoo and Children's Museum, home visits, home child care provider training, ESL classes and cultural celebrations. Promoting and developing parental involvement, Early Excellence program directors and staff record progress of selected families through web-based tools in Journey Mapping.

Evaluation, conducted by the Research & Development Center at **Colorado** State University, focuses upon language and social and emotional development of the participating children. Extensive data is collected about program attendance, home visitations, and service activity. Preliminary results indicate positive impacts on vocabulary development and parental understanding of child development and strategies to improve school readiness. To read more about the Early Excellence Initiative, please visit http://www.piton.org/Admin/Article/EEFact_Sheet_E.pdf

Ready Schools: Other Resources, Publications and Sites of Interest

Inside the Content: The Breadth and Depth of Early Learning Standards

<http://www.serve.org/downloads/publications/insidecontentfr.pdf>

Researchers analyzed the content of the early learning standards established by 36 states. The standards documents examined were published in November 2003 or before. Items were coded using indicators that fall within five domains of children's development and learning: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language and communication development, and cognition and general knowledge. The purpose of the analysis was to determine which of the domains have been addressed within the standards documents and what particular skills, characteristics, and/or knowledge within each domain have been addressed. Results from the analyses indicate that state

standards emphasize the language and communication development and cognition and general knowledge domains more than the physical well-being, social-emotional, and approaches toward learning domains in the early learning standards documents. The full report, *Inside the Content: The Breadth and Depth of Early Learning Standards (71 pages)*, can be downloaded at SERVE's website:

http://www.serve.org/_downloads/publications/insidecontentfr.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 PDF version of this newsletter is available at the following URL:

<http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/RSNewsletterJuly05.pdf>

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.