



# Ready Schools

The e-Newsletter of the CCSSO School Readiness Project

Issue 13 August 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

Through funding from First 5 San Joaquin (**California**), school districts in the county offer the following programs to incoming kindergarten students:

- Welcome to Kindergarten Orientation (1 day)
- Kindergarten Orientation (2-3 days)
- Pre-kindergarten camp (1 week)
- Kindergarten Bridge Program (2 weeks)

The shorter programs occur before the start of the school year, either in the spring or during the week prior to kindergarten entry. These programs focus on building social skills and provide orientation to the school.

The Tracy Unified School District offers the one-week and two-week programs. In these programs, student to teacher ratios mirror that of kindergarten classes. Students work on social skills as well as practicing academic activities that include writing, color and shape recognition, and counting to ten. Teachers and parents are required to fill out a detailed information sheet on students to assess possible learning difficulties. These programs are made available in the summer.

For more information on First 5 San Joaquin, please visit:

<http://www.sjgov.org/first5/>

For more information about Tracy Unified School District's transition program, please contact Brandi Harrold, Tracy Unified School District School Readiness Coordinator, at 209-830-3275 ext. 8.

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

*PK-3: What Is It and How Do We Know It Works?*

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

This policy brief from the Foundation for Child Development provides a literature review of small and large scale studies on PK-3 programs. It argues that skills learned from high quality pre-K programs frequently fade out as students move beyond kindergarten. The studies show students attending programs that connect pre-K to full-day kindergarten and the primary grades obtain greater academic gains in literacy and math. Across all studies, the following five components create a coherent PK-3 education program:

- Alignment – Sequencing standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment that focus on academics, social competence and self-discipline from pre-K through grade 3.
- School organization – Making available full-day pre-K for 3- and 4-year old children as well as requiring full-day kindergarten. School principals and teachers are provided with ongoing professional development and time to build PK-3 programs.
- Qualified teachers – Creating teacher preparation and certification requirements for teachers to provide instruction at any level from pre-K to grade 3.
- Classrooms as learning environments – Class sizes are small. Qualified teachers provide balanced instruction that is both student and teacher directed and administer assessments that improve teaching.
- Accountability to parents and community – Schools work with communities and families to provide supports for students.

The following are recommendations for state departments of education:

- Align standards and assessment tools for pre-K through grade 3.
- Direct schools of education to develop programs that will prepare teachers for a PK-3 specialization and make it a requirement for certification.
- Support funding of scholarships for the current early education workforce to achieve PK-3 specialization.

The following are recommendations for local school boards and school districts:

- Examine methods to braid funding streams to expand pre-K opportunities for all.
- Advocate for principals to reach out to the community and families for assistance to support outcomes.
- Encourage school-university partnerships that support professional development.
- Accommodate teachers to be able to collaborate regularly to implement standards.

- Adopt literacy and math curricula that focus on the PK-3 continuum.

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

Of the 92 elementary schools in the Denver Public Schools (**Colorado**), 89 house pre-K classrooms. Pre-K classes are two hours and 40 minutes long and are available in the morning or afternoon. Depending on the session, pre-K students ride the same school bus at least one time per day with elementary school aged students. All pre-K classes are taught by state certified teachers who plan instruction using the district's pre-K standards. These standards along with the K-12 standards are published on the district's website, along with other helpful resources:

- *Instructional Planning Guides* for all subject and grade areas to provide district wide instructional consistency throughout the school district to counter the high mobility rate.
- Information on best practices that support literacy and mathematics standards from pre-K to grade 5 for teachers, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders to support the continuum for learning. The best practices differentiate between developing, effective, and highly effective instruction.
- Lesson plan guidance for pre-K and kindergarten teachers to frame out activities for group work, reading, physical play, mathematics, and enrichment

For more information about the Denver Public Schools' curriculum and instruction, please visit: <http://curriculum.dpsk12.org/>

For more information about the Denver Public School's best practices and guidelines for effective teaching, please visit: [http://curriculum.dpsk12.org/elp\\_resources.htm](http://curriculum.dpsk12.org/elp_resources.htm)

For more information about early childhood education in the Denver Public Schools, contact Cheryl Caldwell, Denver Public Schools Director of Early Education, at 720-423-8207.

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

The Tracy Unified School District's (**California**) Countdown to Kindergarten initiative assists parents of students entering kindergarten. Brandi Harrold, the district's School Readiness Coordinator, reaches out to childcare centers and homes throughout the district to inform parents of the free two-hour evening workshop and resources. The workshop helps parents learn the following:

- how to register their child for kindergarten
- the district's schools and programs
- kindergarten readiness skills

- ideas to use in the next few months to help prepare their child for kindergarten

This past year 21 workshops serving approximately 140 parents convened in the district's education center during the months of April and May. As the program expands, workshops will soon be held in each school site.

Available resources for parents are 12- and five-month calendars. The 12-month calendar provides suggested activities for parents to engage in with their child to prepare for the academic and social expectations of the K-12 system. It is intended to be used during the months prior to kindergarten entry. The months labeled on the calendar count down to kindergarten entry, i.e. 12 Months to Kindergarten, 11 Months to Kindergarten. The 12-month calendar is included in a school readiness back-pack that is provided through the Local Child Care Planning Council and distributed to families throughout the county.

The five-month calendar runs from April to August, and activities listed are identical to the last five months in the 12-month calendar. It also provides the following resources for parents:

- detailed information regarding the registration process
- the kindergarten standards
- a checklist of to do's leading up to the child's first day of kindergarten
- a school and community directory
- a list of book titles focused around going to school
- tips for reading aloud
- kindergarten math concepts

For more information on the Countdown to Kindergarten workshop and resources, contact Brandi Harrold, Tracy Unified School District School Readiness Coordinator, at 209-830-3275 ext. 8.

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

*The Early Reading and Mathematics Achievement of Children Who Repeated Kindergarten or Who Began School a Year Late*

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006064.pdf>

This Statistics in Brief from the National Center for Education Statistics examines the relationship between kindergarten enrollment and students' first grade achievement in reading and math. It uses data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 to make comparisons between students entering kindergarten on time, students repeating kindergarten, and students delaying entry into kindergarten. Despite the belief that more time may allow for the development of social and cognitive skills, the report suggests that kindergarten retention may not improve outcomes for students.

Compared to kindergarten students enrolled on time, those repeating kindergarten were more likely to

- be male and from less advantaged families
- have parents with less than a high school education
- enroll in full day kindergarten during the second year
- not have attended a pre-K program
- be diagnosed with developmental difficulties by the end of first grade

At the end of first grade, students who repeated kindergarten demonstrated lower overall reading knowledge and skills than the other students. Students in this category did not possess the following grade-level reading skills: understanding the letter-sound connection at the end word, sight word recognition, and understanding words in context. In math, these students also demonstrated lower overall knowledge than their peers and did not possess addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division skills.

Compared to kindergarten students enrolled on time, students delaying kindergarten entry were more likely to

- be white and male
- not have been enrolled in a pre-K program
- have parents who obtained a bachelor's degree or higher

Students in this enrollment status performed slightly higher overall in reading knowledge and skills at the end of first grade. Also, these students possessed reading skills typical of first grade students. In math, these students exhibited lower overall knowledge than their peers and did not possess addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division skills.

*Commission Hears Importance of Properly Supporting Early Childhood Education within NCLB – Solid Early Childhood Education Needed For Success*  
[http://www.aspeninstitute.org/site/c.huLWJeMRKpH/b.1885265/k.DAE3/Release\\_NCLB\\_Commission\\_Hears\\_Importance\\_of\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Ed.htm](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/site/c.huLWJeMRKpH/b.1885265/k.DAE3/Release_NCLB_Commission_Hears_Importance_of_Early_Childhood_Ed.htm)

This press release from the Aspen Institute summarizes one of five roundtable discussions held by the Commission on No Child Left Behind. This discussion focuses on early childhood education, defined as pre-K through grade 3, and how it connects with NCLB. Panelists presenting remarks to the commission included: Sam Meisels, the President of the Erikson Institute, Libby Doggett, the Executive Director of Pre-K Now, Jim Hinson, Superintendent of the Independence School District, and Jim Lesko, Education Associate with the Delaware Department of Education. Panelists commented on the need for assessments and accountability, advocated for early childhood education provisions in NCLB, and recommended the coordination of federal and state program requirements.

## **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](mailto:morakotm@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.