



# Ready Schools

The e-Newsletter of the CCSSO School Readiness Project

Issue 14 September 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

*Strengthening Kindergarten Transition in Tough Neighborhoods*

[http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/Strengthening\\_Kindergarten\\_Transition\\_Des\\_Moines-Vancouver.pdf#search=%22vancouver%20%22des%20moines%22%20peer%20match%22](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/Strengthening_Kindergarten_Transition_Des_Moines-Vancouver.pdf#search=%22vancouver%20%22des%20moines%22%20peer%20match%22)

As part of a series of technical assistance resources from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Center for the Study of Social Policy, this publication focuses on effective kindergarten transition strategies. It compiles information from two days of collaborative sessions among practitioners from Des Moines (**Iowa**) and Vancouver (**Washington**). Practitioners from the Annie E. Casey Making Connections site in Des Moines visited selected sites and observed promising practices in Vancouver to learn from the experiences of their peers. Representatives from both regions identified these essential elements needed to implement effective kindergarten transition programs:

- committing to achieve healthy development and learning for all students and understanding your work within the context of the larger effort
- building cohesive connections between the early childhood community, schools, parents, and community members
- engaging principals; pre-K and kindergarten teachers; Head Start staff; family outreach and support staff; and members of community-based organizations as part of the kindergarten transition team
- increasing cultural competency in school and early childhood education providers that will welcome parents as partners in their children's learning
- designing professional development that offers the opportunity for early childhood education providers to work with school staff

- developing communication among all members of the kindergarten transition team

Throughout the session, practitioners worked together to discuss these topics related to designing and carrying out transition programs:

- strategies and challenges for parent involvement
- techniques for engaging classroom teachers
- tracking results

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

The **Maryland** State Department of Education created the Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC) for pre-K through grade 8. The VSC is a guide for local school systems to prepare and assist educators and curriculum specialists to align classroom instruction with state wide content standards, indicators, and specified objectives. Teachers are able to connect broad content standards to what students should be able to demonstrate at every grade level and subject area. The VSC is available in a variety of formats for teachers and administrators to use:

- pre-K through grade 3 and grade 4 through grade 8 standards displayed in one document to show alignment of skills and content knowledge across those grade levels
- toolkits that provide sample assessments, explanations of skills and objectives, and lesson planning ideas to include for instruction
- instructional strategies that include question cues, primary resource documents, rubrics, and sample activities

For more information on Maryland's Voluntary State Curriculum, please visit: <http://www.mdk12.org/instruction/curriculum/index.html>

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

*Principals Lead the Way for PK-3*

<http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=1928>

This publication from the National Association for Elementary School Principals summarizes the findings from a series of case studies on principals working successfully to build strong PK-3 programs in their schools. It highlights selected case studies to describe common traits found among principals managing effective programs:

- strong focus on grade level transitions that align to standards
- strong leadership that creates connections among families, educators, and providers
- support for high-quality, ongoing professional development for teachers
- strong focus on student achievement and results

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

The **Missouri** Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provides parent handbooks on its Early Childhood Standards. The Early Childhood Standards provide a framework for parents, parent educators, early child care providers, Head Start, and public and private school teachers on what students should know and be able to demonstrate in the areas of literacy, math, physical development, social/emotional learning, and science. These handbooks

- assist parents in understanding learning expectations
- describe the behaviors to observe in children's development
- list methods for supporting children's learning
- provide suggested activities and a list of additional resources

Literacy and social/emotional learning handbooks are available in additional languages, including Bosnian and Spanish. For more information about the parent handbooks, please visit:

[http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/fedprog/earlychild/PreK\\_Standards/Index.html](http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/fedprog/earlychild/PreK_Standards/Index.html)

*Parent Involvement and the Social and Academic Competencies of Urban Kindergarten Children*

[http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/digest/parent\\_involvement.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/digest/parent_involvement.html)

This research digest from the Family Involvement Network of Educators at the Harvard Family Research Project examines parent involvement in kindergarten. It focuses on social and academic competencies of ethnic minority, low-income students from seven urban public schools. It examines parent involvement in three areas:

- supportive home learning environment – parent behaviors at home that foster learning, including talking about the importance of school and assisting with home work
- direct school contact – parent involvement in school-based activities and communications with school staff/faculty
- inhibited involvement – barriers to parent involvement, such as time constraints

Findings indicate students that demonstrate high levels of social skills and are engaged in home and school environments have parents who provide supportive learning at home, have regular contact with the school, and have fewer barriers to involvement. The findings suggest several recommendations for schools to increase parent involvement:

- modify traditional parent involvement activities that will accommodate working mothers or those without childcare
- utilize culturally sensitive methods for understanding and encouraging parent involvement

- be sure the school expectations are realistic to the familial and cultural context
- find creative ways to engage parents in their child's learning at home
- create extracurricular activities that are more accessible for parents and increase student interest in school

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

*Recognition and Response: An Early Intervening System for Children At-Risk for Learning Disabilities*

[http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~randr/pdfs/2006Synthesis\\_RandR\\_ES.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~randr/pdfs/2006Synthesis_RandR_ES.pdf)

This report from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill discusses the development of the Recognition and Response system. The system is designed to help parents and educators respond to learning difficulties in pre-K students beginning at age three and four. It is adapted from the Response to Intervention (RTI) model for school-aged children, which emphasizes pre-referral prevention and intervention. The system includes four components:

- a hierarchy of multiple intervention tiers that include effective intentional teaching strategies, modifications requiring minimal adjustments to targeted groups, and intense individual interventions
- recognition of learning difficulties through screening, assessment, and progress monitoring
- response to identified learning difficulties by using research based curriculum, instruction, and focused interventions
- collaborative problem-solving that involves teachers, parents, and specialists

### **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.