

**Early Steps with Ready Schools:  
The CCSSO School Readiness Project  
December 2006**



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## **The Council of Chief State School Officers**

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 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.

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## **CCSSO School Readiness Project**

With generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the School Readiness project at the Council was designed to create and facilitate a learning community of cross-agency state and local teams in six states: Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Oregon, Washington, and West Virginia. Focused on maximizing efforts to promote school readiness in low-income communities, the resulting 31 Ready Schools sites work to accommodate all children at school entry, as well as working with families and the community to improve school readiness.

Teams are composed of state, district, and school-level leaders from early childhood, K-12, and special education. In addition, staff members from Head Start and private preschools are included, along with representatives from the community advocacy, social services, health, nutrition, child care, and parenting sectors. Ready Schools efforts are supported through Title I and other federal funds, as well as state appropriations and private grants.

The Council has pursued the following objectives in providing technical assistance and resources to help these states meet student needs and scale up effective practices:

- assessing the quality and quantity of early childhood education opportunities available in low-income communities
- making connections among multiple stakeholders to foster a community of practice
- monitoring and reporting on the progress of state plans around a core set of indicators developed by each state team
- establishing mechanisms for sharing knowledge about best practices

To achieve these objectives, project work is organized around a framework condensed from the 1998 National Education Goals Panel, including the following elements of Ready Schools:

- supporting the transition to kindergarten
- encouraging alignment and continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools
- implementing meaningful parent and community involvement
- designing high quality learning environments in the early grades, including high standards for teachers in the early grades and training that is focused on developmentally-appropriate instruction and techniques

For more information, please visit: [http://www.ccsso.org/projects/School\\_Readiness](http://www.ccsso.org/projects/School_Readiness).

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## **I. Executive Summary**

In this report, the Council of Chief State School Officers School Readiness Project examines learnings and accomplishments from state teams focused on developing Ready Schools in six states: Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Oregon, Washington, and West Virginia. The School Readiness Project began in 2004 to create and facilitate a learning community focused on promoting school readiness in low-income communities where gaps based on race and poverty are apparent at early ages. The resulting 31 Ready Schools sites focus on accommodating all children at school entry, as well as working with families and the community to improve school readiness.

The report presents each state's efforts to support children's transition to kindergarten; encourage continuity and alignment between early care and education programs and elementary schools; and ensure high quality learning environments. States also identify strategies for addressing the challenges of linking these efforts to school improvement planning and sustaining funding. Information about supplemental resources is included to support the states involved in the School Readiness Project as well as the larger community of those interested in improving this crucial transition.

The six Ready Schools states have demonstrated key successes in facilitating broad inter-agency collaboration, planning, and implementation. However, there is much work to be done to improve the transition from early care and education to the early grades nationwide. We hope that this publication will supplement current efforts and encourage the development of new initiatives so that states can continue to provide the best start for students.

## **II. Framing the Report**

### **Introduction**

When children enter kindergarten, differences in readiness are already apparent. Nationwide, white and higher-income three-to-five year olds are more likely than their black, Hispanic, and lower-income peers to display cognitive and linguistic school readiness skills.<sup>1</sup> Similar gaps separate the performance of these students as fourth graders, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading and math.<sup>2</sup> While these differences in performance have persisted over time, states, districts and schools face new pressure under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act to raise the achievement of subgroups of students.

Schools in need of improvement under NCLB are concentrated in low-income communities.<sup>3</sup> By targeting Ready Schools efforts in these communities, schools have the opportunity to build Ready Schools principles into school improvement efforts. CCSSO Ready Schools conferences have initiated conversations between state teams on integrating school indicators of readiness into school improvement to support better transitions into the early grades as well as increased

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<sup>1</sup> See ChildTrends Data Bank.

<sup>2</sup> See U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>3</sup> See U.S. Department of Education, 2006.

achievement in the later grades. Early intervention holds great promise in reducing achievement gaps in the later grades.

The School Readiness project at CCSSO was shaped by the ten keys to Ready Schools identified by the 1998 Goal 1 Ready Schools Resource Group.<sup>4</sup> Led by researchers Asa Hilliard and Sharon Lynn Kagan, this group of early childhood leaders operationalized Goal 1, which focused on preparing children to start school ready to learn. The National Education Goals Panel defined readiness as both getting children ready for school and getting schools ready for children.

The CCSSO School Readiness Project sponsored three national conferences to bring the six state teams together and share policies and practices about preparing schools for all children.<sup>5</sup> The three conferences assisted state teams in developing processes to align early learning standards, curricula, and assessments; linking Ready Schools principles to school improvement plans; and collaborating across agencies.

Throughout the three conferences, state teams also explored the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation Ready School Assessment (RSA), which evaluates eight dimensions of school readiness.<sup>6</sup> The first conference took place in October 2004, and teams learned how to administer the RSA. Nineteen Ready Schools sites joined High/Scope's nationwide RSA pilot. At the second conference in April 2005, High/Scope discussed the finding that transitions and respecting diversity were the main concerns for schools across the country. Dr. Robert Pianta's research on transition planning presented at the second conference became a guiding force for several states, as indicated in the case studies below.<sup>7</sup> The third conference in November 2005 focused on developing school plans to address site-specific RSA findings.

## **Purpose**

The case studies included in this report were developed to disseminate information on each state's Ready Schools project and facilitate cross-state sharing of practices.

The study has the following three goals:

- present case studies to describe each state's accomplishments in supporting early elementary efforts at schools in low-income communities
- identify how states are integrating school improvement initiatives into Ready Schools and securing and sustaining funding
- respond to state and district requests for information about programs related to Ready Schools efforts

## **Methodology**

State early education specialists in the Ready Schools network were asked to identify topics of interest that were then used to develop the CCSSO Ready Schools online survey.<sup>8</sup> Each case

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<sup>4</sup> See Shore, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> See Council of Chief State School Officers, a.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A for more information about the High/Scope Ready School Assessment.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix B for more information about Dr. Pianta's work.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix C to access the CCSSO Ready Schools Survey.

study represents an iterative process of collecting information from state and local early childhood leaders using the online survey, drafting a summary of the results, and revising the drafts based on feedback from the respondents. State and local leaders had the opportunity to review and comment on the resulting publication before it was finalized. Staff members from Washington State could not be reached; therefore, archived data were used to construct the Washington case study.

### III. Case Studies

Each case study includes an overview, accomplishments, challenges, and some thoughts on how the project will sustain itself and/or grow. The following three elements of Ready Schools are highlighted in each state's case study if relevant information was provided by the state:<sup>9</sup>

- *Ready Schools support children's transition to kindergarten.*

There is tremendous variety in the environments where children spend their time prior to entering the K-12 system. Children may be transitioning from part- or full-day center-based child care, home care, Head Start, or preschool. Over one-quarter (27%) of children under the age of six years were in family-based child care in 2003, and forty-four percent of three and four year olds were enrolled in nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten in 2004.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Resource Group, children's needs when entering kindergarten may include becoming part of a group, sharing the teacher's attention, being away from home, learning English, and adjusting to the expectations of school.<sup>11</sup> School leaders can help ease the transition for children and parents by providing packets of activities for parents to do with their children at home, advising parents on high-quality child care, and making parents aware of community libraries, medical screenings, and parenting classes. Home visits, school orientations, and community fairs also facilitate introductions between school leaders and families. Outreach to families to make them aware of expectations for children's development and learning during the year before kindergarten or earlier can also help.

- *Ready Schools encourage continuity and alignment between early care and education programs and elementary schools.*

As of the 2000-2001 school year, over one-third (35%) of public elementary schools offered pre-kindergarten classrooms.<sup>12</sup> However, sharing a building does not ensure that the pre-kindergarten program is aligned with the early elementary grades or that the staff members are communicating across programs. To improve this alignment, elementary

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<sup>9</sup> Along with these three elements of Ready Schools, the School Readiness project also focuses on parent and community involvement. The recent "Parent Involvement at Selected Ready Schools" report shares school-based strategies for reaching diverse parents. See Council of Chief State School Officers, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> See the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> See Shore, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> See U.S. Department of Education, 2001.

schools can identify and reach out to their feeder preschools, Head Start centers, and child care centers and facilitate meetings between pre-K and early grade teachers. States and districts can collaborate to align pre-K standards with the K-12 standards system, along with aligning the licensing, training, and compensation of teachers at these levels.

- *Ready Schools ensure high quality learning environments.*

This principle includes several of the National Goals Panel’s recommendations regarding tailoring developmentally-appropriate materials to children’s needs, supporting teachers’ ongoing learning, implementing research-based practices, improving programs on an ongoing basis, incorporating appropriate assessments, and strengthening leadership.

**Arkansas**

The Arkansas partnership was established after two years of working with a broad coalition and aggregating resources. The partnership includes representatives from the Division of Child Care at the Department of Human Services, Head Start, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), Centers for Effective Parenting, the Arkansas Children’s Hospital, Even Start, and the special education, early childhood, and K-12 divisions at the department of education. There have been efforts to incorporate staff members from the nutrition and parenting agencies as well. Despite the lack of state funding to support Ready Schools, the following five sites participated in the High/Scope Ready School Assessment pilot, which gave schools the opportunity to evaluate eight dimensions of school readiness.

The following five sites are beginning to implement their Ready Schools action plans in Arkansas:

Site	District	Phase
Langston Magnet School	Hot Springs School District	Implementation
Noble Elementary	Hamburg School District	Implementation
William Jefferson Clinton Primary	Hope School District	Implementation
Woodrow Wilson Elementary	Paragould School District	Implementation
Yellville-Summit Elementary	Yellville-Summit School District	Implementation

The most helpful research to the Arkansas planning team has been Dr. Robert Pianta’s work on the kindergarten transition. Networking both within the state and across states at the April 2005 Ready Schools conference also strengthened the project.<sup>13</sup> Some highlights from the conference included understanding state data from the Ready School Assessment, linking the data to school improvement efforts, and developing state action plans.

*Supporting Children’s Transition to Kindergarten*

Arkansas harnessed cross-agency collaboration to support school readiness on a broad scale between the many partners mentioned above. For example, school improvement plans include a pre-kindergarten-to-kindergarten transition plan. Also, schools in Arkansas use Title I funds to support kindergarten readiness through tips for parents, school parent nights, community

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<sup>13</sup> See Council for Chief State School Officers, a.

awareness events, school newsletters distributed throughout the community, public service announcements about the importance of reading and talking to children, and co-locating preschools with elementary schools.

A widespread communications campaign served as another means to support children's transition to kindergarten. The state distributed approximately 100,000 school readiness brochures to parents through private and public preschools, as well as health offices and the Arkansas Children's Hospital. Developed by early childhood educators and advocates, the brochures include 38 kindergarten readiness indicators.<sup>14</sup>

### *Encouraging Alignment between Early Care and Education Programs and Elementary Schools*

Staff members serve on inter-agency committees in order to ensure alignment between early care and the early grades. Professional development creates an opportunity for kindergarten and preschool teachers to jointly focus on early childhood. State frameworks for early learning provide a structure for ongoing learning, planning, and support between early care and early grade leaders. Previous training topics include transitions, developmental stages from birth to five years old, parent engagement, and communication. The state wide parent involvement conference united preschool and K-12 leaders with projects like Head Start.

Resource sharing between schools has improved, and the state has linked assessment tools for preschools, Head Start and the K-12 sector. Another alignment support is using the Quall Early Learning Inventory to screen incoming kindergarten students. Areas of weaknesses that are identified by the assessment become targets for reinforcement by preschool teachers in the subsequent school year.

### *Challenges*

Funding is the primary obstacle to scaling up and sustaining Ready Schools efforts in Arkansas. The vision and the will are in place to support better alignment between early care and the early grades as well as to prepare schools for all children that enter in kindergarten. A variety of resources have been pulled together to support the effort thus far, including state funds appropriated by the legislature, Title I, Head Start, the National School Lunch Act, and nominal fees charged by schools for preschool services. Staff members have creatively collaborated across these agencies to maximize funding and support all children.

### *Looking Ahead*

The team of collaborators in Arkansas will meet in December to plan a state wide transitional conference that will help disseminate findings from the five sites to schools throughout the state. One priority will be securing additional funding sources.

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<sup>14</sup> See Arkansas Department of Education.

## **Connecticut**

Ready Schools has become part of the new framework for early childhood in Connecticut, “Ready by 5 & Fine by 9,” which includes four other components: Ready Families, Ready Communities, Ready Workforce, and Ready State. This framework was developed by the new Early Childhood Cabinet in the Governor's Office. Chaired by the Governor's designee and the Commissioner of Education, the cabinet includes agency heads from all the related agencies in the state.

The Early Childhood Cabinet is focusing on 10 of 50 early childhood priorities during the current legislative session, with the following three goals established for children birth to age 8:<sup>15</sup>

- All children will achieve age appropriate developmental milestones from birth to age five.
- All children will begin kindergarten with the knowledge, skills and behaviors needed to succeed in school.
- All children will have K-3 education experiences that extend children's birth-to-five learning and ensure consistent progress in achieving reading mastery.

This structure integrates Ready Schools with other state wide early childhood initiatives. The structure also provides support from leadership in the Governor’s office and the department of education to sustain Ready Schools. Given the lack of funding earmarked for Ready Schools efforts, staff members cite widespread awareness of the components of Ready Schools as the major accomplishment thus far.

Connecticut’s Ready Schools program includes six schools in three districts, but there are plans to expand it district wide in New Britain. Schools in the Hartford School District were the initial focus of the Ready Schools project because of their high concentrations of poverty. However, the schools in Greenwich and New Britain became involved in the Ready Schools work through the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation and were integrated into the project. All of the participants have become strong examples of Ready Schools principles in action.

Sites include the following:

<b>Site</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Phase</b>
Burns School	Hartford School District	Implementation
Burr School	Hartford School District	Implementation
DiLoreto Magnet School	New Britain School District	Implementation
Julian Curtiss Magnet School of World Languages	Greenwich School District	Implementation
New Lebanon School	Greenwich School District	Implementation
Smalley Academy	New Britain School District	Implementation

The state supports each site through technical assistance, professional development sessions, and training and awareness sessions. The sites are used as models for other schools interested in adopting the program. Research helpful to the sites includes Robert Pianta’s transition to

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<sup>15</sup> See United Way of Connecticut Community Results Center.

kindergarten materials and Ready Schools conference presentations, especially those pertaining to the needs of English language learners. In addition, Smalley Academy (New Britain) and Julian Curtiss Magnet School and New Lebanon School (Greenwich) have found High/Scope's materials and annual conferences helpful in defining Ready Schools.

The New Britain and Greenwich schools feature a unique partnership with High/Scope, which provides funding and training to support local collaborations. These districts collaborate with the local Head Start, and Smalley and New Lebanon also bring in other community pre-K program providers. Participating schools have shared strategies and discussed common concerns in sessions facilitated by the state office. The Greenwich School District has also lent support to their sites by focusing on the importance of pre-K and elementary programs in reducing the achievement gap. New Britain schools have utilized the concept of Ready Schools as they develop their school improvement plans.

### *Supporting Children's Transition to Kindergarten*

A number of activities evidence Ready Schools components in Connecticut, including parent events and meetings between pre-K and kindergarten teachers. Each site develops a transition plan with activities scheduled throughout the year. For example, New Lebanon School has addressed the kindergarten transition by providing spring and summer kindergarten orientation sessions for parents of pre-K students. Staff members also visit incoming kindergarten students in their preschool settings.

In New Britain, sites have expanded their efforts to include the following activities:

- The spring retreat provides teacher training on developing transition activities and strategies for involving community preschools, family resource centers and Head Start programs in the transition process.
- Incoming families and children visit and spend time in kindergarten during the spring to receive materials and ask questions.
- Backpacks are distributed with school supplies to incoming students.
- Summer parent gatherings in the park allow families to become acquainted with each other.
- The schools make home visits to students.
- Smalley Academy developed a PowerPoint presentation on their transition activities, which can be shared with early childhood programs, other public schools, and families.

Julian Curtiss Magnet School is easing parents and students into kindergarten in the following ways:

- The school developed a kindergarten brochure, which is available in both English and Spanish. The brochure provides a description of kindergarten, a profile of each kindergarten teacher and the principal, registration information, community resources such as the library and the school website, and information on how parents can work with children at home to prepare for the transition. Brochures are distributed face-to-face at kindergarten registration and orientation.
- In addition, staff members complete home visits with entering kindergarten students deemed at-risk and by request. At-risk children are defined as English language learners, students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and students identified for other reasons including not attending preschool. During the first home visit, the kindergarten teacher develops rapport with the child and starts building trust with the family through discussions about the transition into kindergarten. The teacher brings a school-related gift to promote home study (i.e. crayons, books, or paper and a pencil). At the second home visit, the social worker and principal provide a gift related to literacy development such as the alphabet, bingo, or magnetic letters.
- All incoming families are surveyed about the transition to kindergarten. Parents complete a questionnaire during home visits or through the mail.

#### *Encouraging Alignment between Early Care and Education Programs and Elementary Schools*

In Connecticut, the Ready Schools sites work to align their curricula with the Preschool Curriculum Frameworks and the Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks PreK-12. These standards were purposefully aligned to promote seamless service delivery throughout the grade continuum. The state introduced Ready Schools as a support for the school improvement plan to strengthen the alignment between Ready Schools and school improvement planning.

In New Britain, the elementary school curriculum was aligned to the state standards, and training was provided for staff on early literacy development. There is a strong focus on serving children whose first language is not English.

Exemplifying site-based pre-K to kindergarten alignment at Julian Curtiss Magnet School, the school social worker and preschool administrators meet to discuss individual incoming students and to forge connections between the preschool and kindergarten curricula. Kindergarten teachers visit feeder preschools to observe the children in a school setting, learn about their needs and abilities, and introduce themselves to the children.

New Lebanon School is also intensifying its efforts to connect early care to the early grades by beginning to provide opportunities for students to develop and enrich their literacy and math readiness skills. In September 2006, the school added a pre-K class to improve the alignment of pre-K academic and social-emotional curricula with the primary grade curricula. Also, the school is increasing bilingual (Spanish) services to parents.

#### *Ensuring High Quality Learning Environments*

Connecticut's program works to maintain high quality learning in the early grades through a combination of partnerships, training requirements, and resources for the local sites. Higher education is an essential partner in preparing teacher candidates. Connecticut requires teachers to obtain 75 units of professional development over a five year period with a focus on literacy and curriculum development. Schools may have additional requirements as well. Many communities utilize state funds to employ literacy coaches and supports for data driven decision making.

The state has piloted and will begin a new Results Based Accountability process over the next few years. The Results Based Accountability process is a system for setting measurable goals and reporting to the state legislature on the state department of education's status and plans. Notably, the system was piloted at the early childhood level. In addition to the state cabinet's early learning priorities and components of the five-year state plan related to equity and equality of opportunity, this accountability structure supports high-quality environments at the early ages for children living in poverty. Finally, educators have access to numerous resources on the Connecticut Department of Education website regarding early learning and early elementary standards and frameworks.<sup>16</sup>

At the district and school levels, high quality early-learning environments are also a priority. New Britain schools have used Ready Schools activities to inform the development of school improvement plans. Also, staff members at Smalley Academy participated in training sessions like "The Responsive Environment" and "Developing Meaningful Learning Centers" to improve the quality of classroom environments and support children's learning.

Kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers at Julian Curtiss participate in Greenwich Professional Learning activities twice per month to focus on literacy or math throughout the early grades. The Ready Schools program at New Lebanon School is linked to two School Improvement Team goals: (1) improving academic performance of every child and (2) improving parent involvement in each child's education. To support the first goal, kindergarten teachers have attended state wide conferences focused on early education, and district professional learning has focused on literacy and numeracy. The school psychologist has worked closely with kindergarten teachers to monitor student transitions and adjustments to kindergarten. The second goal is supported through the school psychologist's work as a resource to parents, especially regarding developmental issues, behavioral strategies, and anxiety.

Through the multi-state National School Readiness Indicator Initiative, Connecticut identified average class size and the number of children in full-day kindergarten as important indicators of Ready Schools.<sup>17</sup> The report found that overcrowded kindergarten classes were clustered in schools in low-income neighborhoods. Based on research supporting the increased rewards of class-size reduction for children living in poverty, the state reimburses districts for five to 10 percent of spending on facility bond projects that include space for class-size reduction, full-day kindergarten, and/or preschool programs.

While the indicator report found that the state's poorest schools had the highest enrollments in full-day kindergarten, many at-risk children still did not have access. State early childhood

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<sup>16</sup> See Connecticut Department of Education a, b, and c.

<sup>17</sup> Duran and Wilson, 2004.

specialists developed a proposal to increase full-day kindergarten in all communities, but the proposal did not make it through the legislative session.

### *Challenges*

Connecticut's team currently feels limited by the lack of Ready Schools funding to help related programs engage in the process. One particular struggle is supporting small projects such as Take Home Bags of Books and social activities for parents that would reinforce Ready Schools. In the absence of funding for Ready Schools, some communities have engaged local businesses or found their own funding to support Ready Schools activities.

State staff members have focused on making schools aware of Ready Schools principles through conferences, trainings, and distribution of information on the project. For example, in fall 2005, the state hosted an Administrator's Breakfast that was open to all elementary principals and introduced the Ready Schools concept. Principals from Hartford, New Britain, and Greenwich made presentations about their involvement in the project, implementation challenges, and benefits of utilizing the High/Scope Ready School Assessment and group process.

The Julian Curtiss program cites parent communication as a challenge. Reaching the parents of at risk children to schedule home visits has been overcome through repeated calls and flexible appointments. Partnering with parents is also an ongoing challenge at New Lebanon School. The school works to familiarize parents with school and district expectations of student achievement. There is also a relatively high degree of family mobility. Half of the kindergarten students exit from the school prior to the completion of fifth grade. Family mobility makes it difficult to establish and maintain a common educational climate.

### *Looking Ahead*

Connecticut plans to sustain and grow the program by continuing its integration into the governor's early childhood cabinet plan and using training sessions to build awareness at schools. State staff members will again propose legislation for more full-day kindergarten classrooms in low-income districts funded through a grant system.

In order to launch the effort more broadly, the state department of education co-hosted a High/Scope training in fall 2006 for Connecticut's elementary principals. High/Scope trainers provided an overview and orientation to the Ready School Assessment, as well as practice with questions in all sub-sections to support the use of the RSA in schools.

On the local level, Julian Curtiss School plans to reallocate money to Ready Schools and add an orientation program for late-registering students. The new pre-K class is an exciting development at New Lebanon School with benefits for the instructional program. It will also provide an opportunity to work collaboratively with parents during a critical stage in their child's development. New Lebanon School hopes to continue its affiliation with High/Scope, which has provided knowledge and strategies while promoting a focus on early readiness. The school will continue to provide essential bilingual support and resources for families and pre-K students.

## **Indiana**

After initiating the Ready Schools program three years ago with the Muncie Community Schools, Indiana staff members have expanded ambitiously.

Currently, there are nine Ready Schools efforts in Indiana:

<b>District</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Phase</b>
Evansville Vanderburgh Schools	Evansville	Implementation
Fort Wayne Community Schools	Fort Wayne	Implementation
Lafayette School Corporation	Lafayette	Planning
Lake Station Schools	Hammond	Implementation
Metropolitan School District Warren Township	Indianapolis	Implementation
Metropolitan School District Washington Township	Indianapolis	Implementation
Muncie Community Schools	Muncie	Implementation
New Albany-Floyd Schools	New Albany	Implementation
Tell City-Troy Township Schools	Tell City	Implementation

During the planning phase, each site develops a core team of collaborators, including representation from schools, families, and caregivers for young children in the district. Team members from pre-kindergarten programs represent center-based early childhood programs, early childhood programs with religious affiliations, Head Start, and home-based child care. One powerful support at this stage is Dr. Robert Pianta's research on supporting the transition from early care to the early grades. Dr. Pianta co-authored *Successful Kindergarten Transition* with Marcia Kraft-Sayre, providing insights into identifying key stakeholders and facilitating diverse groups.<sup>18</sup> The book is provided to all core team members, and some districts disseminate the book even more widely. Dr. Pianta has also collaborated with the Indiana team at a recent conference sponsored by the Early Childhood Center at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University-Bloomington.

During the planning phase, the team also hires an external transition facilitator, administers the High/Scope Ready School Assessment, and develops an action plan based on RSA results. State leaders prefer that sites select an external facilitator to ensure objectivity in this key role, and the person must have expertise in the early childhood area. The facilitator is the site's largest expense, typically ranging from \$7,000 to \$8,000 per school year. The state supports the sites by identifying funding sources, such as the Bureau of Child Development and the Early Literacy Intervention Grants.<sup>19</sup>

Implementation begins after the site has submitted an initial action plan that addresses weaknesses identified by the RSA. The sites are required to submit an annual action plan in order to have their funding renewed. As the initial Indiana site, Muncie has the longest tenure and is demonstrating positive results. Though parents have the option of transferring their children to other schools under the choice provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act, the increase in parent and community engagement has helped stabilize the student population.

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<sup>18</sup> See Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> The Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program funds research-based early intervention literacy programs and professional development in preschool through grade two. See Indiana Department of Education.

### *Supporting Children's Transition to Kindergarten*

Indiana is supporting children's transition to kindergarten through a variety of projects, including the state Ready to Learn, Ready Schools Initiative and a number of joint projects with higher education partners. In fact, key partners in the Indiana Ready Schools program are higher education representatives from Ball State University, Indiana University-Bloomington, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, and Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana. These collaborations strengthen the project by bringing early childhood expertise into Ready Schools sites. In addition to supporting the project, the higher education institutions have capitalized on the opportunity to collaborate with each other.

Dr. Patricia A. Clark, associate professor of elementary education from Ball State University, originated Indiana's Ready Schools work with state staff. She piloted the site-based leadership model by serving as the Muncie site's first facilitator. Dr. Clark has maintained a close connection to the project by training new facilitators and supporting their meetings. Other faculty members at Ball State have joined in the project by facilitating sites in other districts.

Training sessions for the facilitators focus on understanding and administering the Ready School Assessment, convening the core team, and using the assessment results. Since the RSA was developed for elementary schools, facilitators learn how to adapt the instrument so that the broad range of stakeholders from the feeder sites can examine their own sites for readiness. The training sessions also help facilitators develop the skills to convene these diverse groups, assist them in presenting their findings to each other, and come to a consensus about which elements to focus on in the site's action plan. State early childhood staff members cite Dr. Clark's leadership as essential in supporting the facilitators as the team moves through these steps in the planning phase. Later in the process, her guidance also includes expansion of the action plan.

In addition to partnering closely with higher education and districts, other key partners in Indiana are well-known national organizations. The Indianapolis *Making Connections* site, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, works to strengthen families in urban areas by providing high quality supports and collaborating with a host of related agencies.<sup>20</sup> The United Way's Success By 6 project, which works closely with *Making Connections*, is another key partner that is collaborating with the Indianapolis schools to support children's transition into kindergarten.

### *Encouraging Alignment between Early Care and Education Programs and Elementary Schools*

Staff members cite collaboration between elementary school personnel and early childhood personnel as a major accomplishment. For example, Indiana is supporting the alignment between early care and the early grades through the Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards, which were created by early childhood and elementary grade experts. These foundations promote collaboration and transparency among teachers and caregivers regarding expectations for young children. Professional development is then used to translate the standards into practice. As the program with the most experience, the Muncie site sponsors joint trainings between early caregivers and teachers in the early grades based on the foundations. Another collaborative tool

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<sup>20</sup> See the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a.

is the Indiana Standards Tool for Alternate Reporting (ISTAR). This online database improves communication about children as they progress from grade to grade by providing a common data system.

### *Challenges*

The major challenge to Indiana's program is the lack of state funding for preschool or kindergarten. There is no state history of supporting transitions from early care to the early grades. To overcome this serious hurdle, staff members have employed two strategies. First, the state structures professional development opportunities that bring together districts that have taken the initiative to improve the transition into kindergarten and those that have expressed an interest in this work. Indiana staff members keep lines of communication open to districts, and districts request presenters or topics according to their needs. The state then hosts events to meet these needs. A second strategy is identifying supplementary funding sources for districts.

### *Looking Ahead*

The Division of Prime Time, Indiana's technical assistance department, will continue to provide professional development and publications to their public schools, funded through a number of grants. Funding restrictions make program expansion a challenge, but recently Indiana was awarded a small grant from the National Association of State Boards of Education. With funding through this grant, Indiana will continue and expand the strategic collaborations forged to date. One current priority is aligning efforts with special education providers to provide seamless supports for students with disabilities. A series of professional development opportunities are being held throughout the 2006-07 school year with a focus on promoting school readiness for all children through efforts to develop ready children, ready families, and ready schools.<sup>21</sup>

## **Oregon**

The Oregon Ready Schools project team includes approximately thirty state and district staff members from different agencies and has met for almost two years. This broad collaboration has led to inter-agency awareness of the importance of Ready Schools principles, and the team hopes that these connections will lay the groundwork for continued collaboration when districts and schools across the state implement Ready Schools practices. A committee from the project team has worked extensively outside of project team meetings supported by materials and research from the Ready Schools conferences.<sup>22</sup> The most useful resources for this team have been Dr. Robert Pianta's transition to kindergarten materials from the April 2005 meeting and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) work on community partnerships.

The following three elementary schools are piloting many of the activities suggested in the "Transition to Kindergarten Manual" written by the Oregon Ready Schools project team and described below:

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<sup>21</sup> See Indiana Institute on Disability and Community.

<sup>22</sup> See Council for Chief State School Officers, a.

Site	School District	Phase
Beaver Acres Elementary	Beaverton School District	Implementation
Greenway Elementary	Beaverton School District	Implementation
Nyssa Elementary	Nyssa School District	Implementation

### *Supporting Children's Transition to Kindergarten*

Oregon's major accomplishments to date are focused on supporting children's transition into kindergarten, a need that was identified when five Oregon schools participated in the pilot of the High/Scope Ready School Assessment. The centerpiece of Oregon's work is the creation of seven transition to kindergarten documents developed by an SEA staff member and several teachers. The state used a small grant to pay teachers to draft the materials during summer 2005. Team planning during the November 2005 Ready Schools conference was used to refine the materials. The materials were carefully designed with implementation in mind so that they can be adopted as they are or adapted to suit each school or district at little cost. The documents to be disseminated to families will be translated into Spanish before they are posted on the Oregon Department of Education website. Based on principles that were condensed from Dr. Pianta's materials, this transition planning process guides schools in a year of planning with preschool parents and children in preparation for the transition into kindergarten.<sup>23</sup>

The "Transition to Kindergarten Manual" describes a six step planning process:

1. Establish a transition planning team that will represent early care and early elementary staff members, as well as those from related agencies. This step includes identifying a leadership team, conducting a transition needs assessment, setting goals, and facilitating regular meetings.
2. Generate ideas for transition activities that will connect the family with the school, the child with the school, and the community with the school. Activities that foster the family-school connection include school meetings and events, home activities, and home visits. Child-school connection activities include pajama night, kindergarten visitation, assessment of entering kindergarten students prior to the start of school, a variety of summer activities, and back-to-school night. The community-school connection seizes upon the opportunity to incorporate recommendations from community service providers into school programming. Activities include early identification of incoming students and a family fair held at the school during the week before the start of school. Family fairs can include food; games; cafeteria treats; classroom and library tours; fire and bike safety; and immunizations, along with other ideas.
3. Create a transition timeline.
4. Anticipate and minimize barriers to parent and teacher participation. The former may include conflicting work schedules and lack of childcare, transportation, and knowing others at the school. Teacher participation obstacles may include late generation of class

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<sup>23</sup> See Oregon Department of Education.

lists; time and money drain; and lack of pay, parent participation, and school and district support for transition planning.

5. Implement transition activities and practices. The manual recommends that schools form a planning team by October to carry out at least four events for parents and children from February through August of the year prior to kindergarten. Advertising is essential.
6. Assess, evaluate, and revise.

Staff members have shaped the guidance with input from multiple stakeholders across the state. In fact, other agencies are adapting the basic transition planning process to use for a variety of other transitions. The team plans to use the Ready Schools documents to promote improvement in transition state wide during the 2006-07 school year. The team sees the process as an intuitive one that is already in place at most schools, but the materials will enhance current planning by making the process more inclusive and deliberate with more stakeholders involved.

The manual includes a number of documents to support the planning process. Templates include a grid for planning transition activities, a seasonal timeline planning guide, a monthly timeline planning guide, an event planning guide, an event evaluation tool, and a menu of activities with the type of connection fostered. In addition to the templates included in the manual, the team has created templates for tri-fold brochures of Ready Schools activities and a year-long calendar of activities. Schools can easily adapt these templates using their own school information and activities.

### *Challenges*

As in other states, funding for the project is a major challenge. Though Oregon has had universal half-day kindergarten since 1989, there is no state-sponsored full-day kindergarten or preschool besides Head Start.

### *Looking Ahead*

Despite the funding issue, the team is optimistic about the future of the Ready Schools project because 'Ready for School' is one of the state superintendent's main initiatives. The team plans to implement the transition to kindergarten process state wide in fall 2006. Ideally, the state will train kindergarten teachers from each district and have these ambassadors take the information back to others in the schools. As in 2005, the 2006 state administrators' conference presentations will include kindergarten teachers who will discuss Ready Schools. There are also plans for a day-long celebration of the importance of kindergarten and its components. The materials will be presented during this event.

## **Washington**

Governor Christine Gregoire's new Department of Early Learning was created on July 1, 2006 to consolidate the management of child care and early learning programs and to improve students' transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten.<sup>24</sup> The new department encompasses the former Division of Child Care and Early Learning, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, and the Early Reading Initiative. This restructuring represents collaboration between the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Department Social and Health Services, and the Department of Community Trade and Economic Development.

Within this new structure, the state works with three schools to implement Ready School principles:

<b>Site</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Phase</b>
Fruit Valley Community Learning Center	Vancouver School District	Implementation
Mount View Elementary	Highline School District	Implementation
Silver Star Elementary School	Evergreen School District	Implementation

### *Supporting Children's Transition to Kindergarten*

The state's Readiness to Learn grants are an essential support for transition services. Fruit Valley Community Learning Center and Silver Star Elementary School assessed existing readiness efforts and used the data to create a Kindergarten School Readiness and Transition Plan. These efforts were carried out in collaboration with early learning services, professionals, families, and community agencies. On an ongoing basis, schools and community partners identify kindergarten readiness issues, coordinate the elementary and early learning systems, and share research on best practices.

The July 2005 CCSSO Ready Schools e-newsletter reviewed Fruit Valley's year-long schedule of activities to support children's transition into kindergarten. During the May before kindergarten entry, families with incoming kindergarten children are invited to register for the fall and learn about the school and classroom at Kindergarten Round-up. Materials include a school handbook, lunch program information, a school district calendar, a summer activity calendar and booklet, a brochure on school skills, 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.
- Back to School BBQ (prior to the first day of school) – All school children and their families can attend this open house to meet their new teachers, see their new classrooms, and receive information about the school. Traditionally, a local restaurant, Burgerville,

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<sup>24</sup> See Department of Early Learning.

has helped sponsor the BBQ by providing some of the food, volunteers, and the Burgerville Train.

- 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 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.

Recently, Fruit Valley staff members hosted a peer match with colleagues from the Annie E. Casey Foundation *Making Connections* site in Des Moines, Iowa.<sup>25</sup> The Iowa team visited the school for two days in February 2006 to meet with residents and staff at Educational Service District (ESD) 112 and schools working with the Support for Early Learning and Families (SELF) initiative across Clark County. ESD 112, a regional service provider in Washington State, was identified as an exemplary learning partner by a Casey consultant who had attended CCSSO Ready Schools meetings. The agenda for the two days focused on the essential components of an effective kindergarten transition strategy, the important steps in initiating a kindergarten transition program, successful parent involvement, successful buy-in and support from other key players, and effective ways to measure success.

The team concluded that the following are essential to effective transition strategies:

- developing a philosophical commitment to do what is best for children
- building on strengths
- distributing leadership at the school building level
- increasing cultural competency
- building a high-quality staff

#### *Encouraging Alignment between Early Care and Education Programs and Elementary Schools*

The Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks serve as a framework for aligning early learning and providing expectations and strategies for caregivers regarding what young children need to know and be able to do when they begin school.<sup>26</sup> Developed to reflect the perspectives, values, and recommendations of diverse stakeholders, the benchmarks apply to children's growth and development prior to kindergarten entry, regardless of their care situation: in their own homes, others' homes, licensed child care, early intervention programs, Head Start, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, or private or public preschools. In this way, the benchmarks offer a common tool for discussion, dialogue, and sharing among parents, early caregivers, early elementary professionals, and community members.

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<sup>25</sup> See the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> See Kagan, Britto, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2005.

## *Challenges*

The recent restructuring of early learning agencies in Washington State has been a welcome challenge. Though implementing this transition smoothly has added to staff members' work loads, the resulting state-level collaboration will facilitate improved collaborations between the agencies that serve Washington's youngest children.

## *Looking Ahead*

The Washington Ready Schools program plans to pursue a number of strategies to strengthen current projects and extend their reach. At the state level, staff members will share information with programs across the K-12 agency and with the state affiliate of the Sequenced Transition to Education in the Public Schools (STEPS) project. Another collaborative opportunity will be learning more about state wide readiness assessments from West Virginia.

Implementation of the state early learning benchmarks will continue. Staff members will also explore integrating Ready Schools principles into the school improvement process at the state, regional and local levels. Though the program aims to expand in general, one focus will be recruiting schools with high proportions of Native American students.

## **West Virginia**

The Taylor County Collaborative Preschool Ready Schools Program grew out of West Virginia's Universal Pre-K program.<sup>27</sup> Funding is provided through a blending of monies from participating agencies, including local boards of education and Head Start programs. Participating agencies oversee the operation of each program. Each year, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services (WV DHHR) reviews and approves county plans for the operation of each collaborative pre-K program, and final review is completed by a panel of representatives from WV DHHR, Child Care Licensing, Head Start and the Board of Education.

There are currently six preschool classrooms throughout Taylor County. Some are housed within Taylor County public school facilities, while others are housed in separate facilities owned and operated by Head Start. All programs eventually flow into one of the three existing elementary schools as kindergarten classes. All operate under the same High/Scope curriculum. Population growth led to the merger of two former facilities to form the West Taylor Elementary School.

The Taylor County sites are listed below:

<b>Site</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Phase</b>
Anna Jarvis Elementary School Preschool	Grafton	Implementation
Flemington Elementary School Preschool	Flemington	Implementation
Lucretia Preschool	Grafton	Implementation
Webster Preschool	Grafton	Implementation
West Taylor Elementary School Preschool	Flemington	Implementation

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<sup>27</sup> See West Virginia Department of Education.

### *Supporting Children's Transition to Kindergarten*

Elements of the Ready Schools principles are apparent in West Virginia's Tadpole Transition Program, which trains staff and parents on the importance of establishing a seamless transition experience for all participants and between all programmatic levels. This initiative encourages school systems to meet on a regular basis to review and discuss activities, as well as address areas identified as needing attention or improvement. Members of the Tadpole Transition Teams include representatives from cooperating organizations such as the local Board of Education, Head Start, Starting Points, Early Intervention, and the Department of Health and Human Resources. Funding is usually the shared responsibility of the major participating agencies.

The following are examples of activities related to kindergarten transition and the alignment between early care and elementary:

- Each spring, Taylor County sponsors Buddy Day, during which preschool children are encouraged to visit their future kindergarten classes to experience a day in the life of a kindergartener. In this way, the preschool children become familiar with the new surroundings including the facility, the playground, and the location of the classroom within the larger building. Preschoolers also meet their new teacher and support staff. Parents are introduced to kindergarten routines and expectations, as well as having the opportunity to ask questions and alleviate their concerns.
- Throughout the school year, parent awareness trainings explore a variety of topics including: (1) expectations about child development; (2) routines regarding transportation, meal payments, and applying for free or reduced price meals; (3) how to assist with homework and set expectations for achievement; and (4) modeling healthy meals and food choices.

### *Ensuring High Quality Learning Environments*

West Virginia is supporting high-quality learning environments in several ways. The West Virginia Early Learning Standards Framework (WV-ELSF) addresses the academic content standards for pre-K. Pre-K staff members separated the WV-ELSF standards into nine week sections and aligned them with the High/Scope curriculum. Student progress is monitored, logged, and reported to parents. Additionally, a review of individual students' progress is used to determine the direction of subsequent lessons and planning.

Chief among the West Virginia project's accomplishments are assessment and planning activities. West Virginia successfully introduced and completed the High/Scope Ready School Assessment tool during the tool's pilot phase.<sup>28</sup> This tool allows the programs to link school improvement planning to the Ready Schools program, and it is used to identify areas needing improvement. Each school developed an individualized and program-specific action plan for addressing weaknesses identified with the tool. The state has been following up on these findings through both periodic monitoring of program curricula, as well as annual preschool student

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<sup>28</sup> See High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

monitoring using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale–Revised Edition to identify challenges.

### *Challenges*

The nature of the broad collaboration between agencies involved with the West Virginia program invited challenges. Initially, some local boards of education were unwilling to allow outside agencies to be involved with the planning and operation of the preschool programs. Other county school systems were more amenable to working cooperatively, which led to smoother collaborations. One issue of contention for some districts was resolving which collaborating agency would finance each component of the program. In response, preferences were negotiated.

Another conflict involved confusion about which agency's regulations to follow. Some collaborators wanted to continue their current practices as best practices, which caused conflicting regulations across agencies, staff frustration, and parent confusion. Over time, school boards developed clarifying language for all participating agencies. In addition, the annual requirement of the development of a Collaborative Preschool Plan, including the scripting of specific membership or "Core Partners" has helped minimize these frustrations.

The initial lack of strategic and financial support from state legislators was another challenge. To address this concern, education staff members have successfully worked with state legislators to develop more support and recognition of the importance of preschool as an investment in the future. In addition, the new governor's focus on education has supported the sustainability of the preschool program.

### *Looking Ahead*

To sustain and grow the program, West Virginia staff members are depending on continued gubernatorial and legislative support. Plans for growth include a focus on increasing the number of full-day kindergarten programs.

West Virginia hopes to broaden academic opportunities for staff, parents and children through the Tadpole Transition Team. The West Virginia Early Childhood Training Opportunity Resources project continues to encourage Tadpole activities by sponsoring an annual Celebrating Connections Conference for participating agencies and representatives. This event includes parents and staff from the Board of Education, child care agencies, the Department of Health and Human Resources, Head Start, and other support agencies (i.e. Early Intervention and Birth-to-Three). The conference intends to build on its prior success.

At the November 2005 CCSSO Ready Schools meeting, West Virginia indicated plans to publish transition materials for teachers and parents. So far, informational brochures have been developed and are distributed each year for the purpose of advertising and encouraging parents of potential participants to enroll in preschool. Packets of information regarding transitioning from pre-K to kindergarten have been developed and are distributed during Buddy Days. During the annual spring Birth-to-Four screening, an informational packet entitled "Getting Ready for School" is also distributed. In addition to distributing informative materials, Taylor County has

initiated assistance to help families pay to obtain a certified birth certificate, which is necessary for enrollment into any state school program. This nominal assistance has eliminated a previous barrier to school enrollment for eligible families.

## **IV. Responding to Common Challenges**

In this section, we take a closer look at how states are responding to two challenges:

- incorporating school improvement planning into Ready Schools efforts
- securing and sustaining project funding over time

### **School Improvement Planning at Ready Schools**

CCSSO's School Readiness Project targets schools in low-income communities. Nationwide, these communities house the highest proportions of schools identified in need of improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act. Therefore, schools in low-income neighborhoods are more likely to need assistance with school improvement. As states, districts, and schools become aware and knowledgeable of Ready Schools practices, an ongoing objective of the School Readiness Project has been to support the integration of these practices into school improvement planning. In this way, Ready Schools becomes part of the comprehensive support system for students.

The case study project provided an opportunity for states to identify how they are bringing Ready Schools and school improvement strategies together. During the 2005-06 school year, eight of the 31 Ready Schools sites were in school improvement status under No Child Left Behind based on test scores from the previous school year. Effective integration of Ready Schools and school improvement requires time for staff members from early childhood and school improvement to collaborate in planning, implementation, and continuous evaluation. Preliminary efforts to forge this connection are summarized below from the case studies:

- School improvement plans in **Arkansas** include a pre-kindergarten-to-kindergarten transition plan. Readiness activities are supported through Title I funding. A helpful resource in this work was using the High/Scope Ready School Assessment data to develop school improvement plans at the April 2005 Ready Schools conference.<sup>29</sup> During the conference, state teams were led in developing a vision for Ready Schools; identifying principles to include in school improvement plans to ensure that schools are ready to receive all children; and prioritizing strategies for achieving their vision. The strategies were then matched to current state policies, and the current policies were rated in terms of their implementation status, from emerging to sustainable.
- Ready Schools strategies in **Connecticut** have been introduced by the state as a way to support school improvement goals. One example of this alignment is using Ready Schools strategies to improve two school improvement goals at Julian Curtiss School: student achievement and parent involvement. Another example is using Ready Schools

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<sup>29</sup> Council of Chief State School Officers, a.

activities to inform the development of school improvement plans in New Britain schools.

- In **Washington**, staff members plan to focus on integrating Ready Schools principles into the school improvement process at the state, regional and local levels.

### **Securing and Sustaining Funding**

Funding was a common challenge identified by states, and the fragility of current funding was noted by all. However, the challenge varied across states, from a complete lack of state-funded early childhood programs to a lack of district funding or inadequate resources. Early childhood staff members depend on relationships with education leaders and the legislature to protect their funding sources. Staff members aim to secure and increase their budgets by obtaining state, local and private funding.

Overall strategies include the following:

- increasing state legislators' awareness of the benefits of early childhood programming
- increasing practitioners' awareness of projects that will improve the transition and alignment between early care and the early grades
- aligning project goals with other state-funded early care initiatives
- aligning project goals with gubernatorial platforms
- applying for private funding and supporting local sites in securing their own funding

Each state is situated within a unique history of early care programs with varying amounts of support from the state legislature and other leaders. Local control is another important variable that affects state support for early care funding.

Specific approaches for maximizing funding are below:<sup>30</sup>

- **Arkansas** has approached funding in a creative way, by patching together state and federal funding along with nominal parent fees for preschool.
- In the absence of state funding earmarked for Ready Schools, **Connecticut** has aligned the program with other early childhood initiatives. Ready Schools staff members also use existing venues such as conferences, trainings, and documents to promote Ready Schools principles. In addition, some schools have partnered with businesses or applied for their own grants.
- **Indiana** uses staff development opportunities to bring together districts in the early and advanced phases of kindergarten transition work to promote peer learning, as well as supporting schools in applying for state grants.
- **Oregon** staff members maximized a small grant by using it to pay teachers to develop transition materials during summer 2005. The state also capitalizes on existing events by

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<sup>30</sup> See the state profiles for more information.

sharing school successes with Ready Schools principles and refining and rolling out transition materials. Further, staff members promoted the year-long transition planning process by asking colleagues outside of the early childhood division for feedback.

- State grants have launched school-based efforts in **Washington State**.
- **West Virginia** has leveraged the state funding for universal pre-kindergarten to support Ready Schools efforts. District and federal resources are also used to support Ready Schools.

Additional funding strategies are in place throughout the country:

- Districts use Title I funds for a variety of pre-K and school readiness efforts, including facilities, enrollment, bringing schools and parents together prior to pre-K entry, and providing pre-literacy and remedial help for three- and four-year-olds.
- The New America Foundation recommended using a variety of federal funding sources-- Title II and Title V of No Child Left Behind, along with Title II of the Higher Education Act--to support PK-3 programming.<sup>31,32</sup>
- Early childhood efforts in counties like Miami-Dade (Florida) and Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) have benefited from dedicated tax levies. These efforts were led by Miami-Dade's Children's Trust and Bright Beginnings in Charlotte to change the environment for early childhood development.
- In Georgia, funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) initiative has been combined with other state resources to expand the Parents As Teachers (PAT) project state wide. SPARK sites create and nurture partnerships of communities, state agencies, and schools regarding the alignment between the early learning and early school settings.<sup>33</sup> PAT was developed 30 years ago in Missouri as a collaboration between the department of education and a foundation.<sup>34</sup> The project works with parents to support child development from birth and is now available in all 50 states and other countries.

Another resource is Pre-K Now, a national advocacy organization for universal preschool. A recent satellite conference and national conference call focused on successful advocacy techniques for early childhood.<sup>35</sup> Though targeted at preschool, their online resources provide information that can be generalized to support Ready School efforts. For example, the universal preschool effort in West Virginia facilitated Ready Schools in that state. Advice from researchers and state legislators on the conference and conference call websites included lobbying with state legislators; basing proposals on clear research and data; and building coalitions.

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<sup>31</sup> See King, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> See King and Luebchow, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> See W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

<sup>34</sup> See Parents as Teachers National Center.

<sup>35</sup> See Pre-K Now a, b.

## V. Supplemental Resources

In addition to sharing successes and challenges, this report aims to contribute to Ready Schools projects by drawing together information on programs that serve similar goals. For more information about state, district, and private projects, please visit the CCSSO Ready Schools e-newsletter.<sup>36</sup>

### **Countdown to Kindergarten**

A state respondent requested more information on Countdown to Kindergarten, a year-round transition program housed within the Boston Public Schools (BPS) and co-founded by the Boston Children's Museum with a variety of funding including the Kellogg Foundation SPARK initiative. Countdown is a collaboration between the Boston Public Schools, the mayor's office, the Boston Public Library, the city's Head Start program, and more than two dozen other non-profit and government organizations.<sup>37</sup> As profiled in the August 2005 issue of the CCSSO Ready Schools e-newsletter, Countdown to Kindergarten Boston engages families, educators, and community members in a city wide effort to strengthen and expand early education opportunities and to celebrate and support the transition into kindergarten.

Countdown's goals are as follows:

- ensure that Boston's families with young children take advantage of the academic and social benefits kindergarten provides, by raising public awareness about the value of kindergarten, the availability of full-school-day programs, and the steps they can take to support their child's kindergarten experience
- in collaboration with community partners, coordinate and expand social and learning activities that help children prepare for school and help them transition from home or preschool into kindergarten
- lay the groundwork for primary caretakers (parents, grandparents, guardians) to be active partners in their children's education at home and at school, from birth through their education in BPS elementary school and beyond
- support the Boston Public Schools in their work to ensure that the process of choosing schools, registering and entering kindergarten within BPS is clear and welcoming for all families

In 1999, staff from the Children's Museum and Head Start that were collaborating to improve school readiness for Head Start students recognized gaps between what was being taught and school expectations. Kindergarten teachers also identified school readiness as a problem. These concerns prompted a convening by the mayor's office for about a dozen organizations involved in early childhood development, from United Way to the local libraries and Community Partnerships for Children. All stakeholders agreed that a gap in readiness existed, and Countdown was created to channel efforts, generate consistency and cooperation with the school district, and strengthen supports for families, providers and teachers.

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<sup>36</sup> See Council of Chief State School Officers, b.

<sup>37</sup> See Countdown to Kindergarten.

Countdown harnesses the resources from educational, health, community, and corporate partners to support the transition into kindergarten. Approximately 6,000 children per year enter the Boston Public Schools in kindergarten, and the project works to reach each of these families, hoping to connect with them at least once and optimally three times. To do so, nearly 10,000 copies of their materials are printed in different languages, and partners help with distribution. Once families have registered with the project, staff members are available to communicate directly with them. The project aims to engage families a full year in advance of the child's anticipated start date, which is the September before the child turns five years old. Registration for kindergarten is recommended in January, when choices are optimal.

Countdown has produced numerous transition materials including information sheets and activity brochures in eight languages. The brochures are disseminated throughout the community, at child-care centers, doctors' offices, libraries, and housing projects. Information includes how to choose schools; what to look for when visiting schools; activities for parents to do at home with their children to support learning; school contacts and visiting schedules; and free summer family activities. An easy-to-read grid displays policies on school uniforms by school. Colorful gift bags and tee-shirts brand the organization and welcome students. In addition, the project produces materials tailored to early education providers and elementary principals including resources and information on supporting families. Licensing agreements for developing Countdown to Kindergarten projects in other states are available, and some products can be purchased.

One transition activity is the annual city wide Countdown to Kindergarten celebration, now in its seventh year. Children board their first school bus, meet teachers, try out school readiness activities, meet PBS characters Clifford and Arthur, and enjoy complimentary healthy snacks and goodies, including a pass to return to the Museum with their family. Library staff members help children fill out library cards, and Boston Public School staff members are on hand to help resolve parents' last minute questions. This activity welcomes families and orients them to academic and health resources in the community. More than 2,000 children and parents attend each year. Kindergarten Days are another transition event, held during the week before school begins. Countdown coordinates a number of community sponsors to provide free or reduced-price school supplies, snacks, haircuts, and shoes.

As with the Ready Schools projects, funding remains a challenge. Though the seed money is slowly disappearing, Countdown has engaged the district to increase its investment. Communication is also an issue, as Countdown aims to communicate effectively with speakers of other languages. While it is also a strength, a third challenge is Countdown's collaboration with 27 partners and agreeing on a definition of school readiness. Finally, the project struggles to obtain buy-in from all of Boston's schools. While some understand and value the importance of early and intensive parent engagement, others see the project as one more demand on their time.

Looking ahead, Countdown took a significant step during the 2005-06 school year to extend the work to include families with children aged birth to five years old. A readiness DVD will be used to show parents images of Boston kindergartens, outline the curriculum, and provide tips on nurturing children's learning at home for parents of three to five-year olds. Countdown is also in

the early planning stages of a parent engagement campaign, to support parents as their child's first teacher. Finally, Play to Learn Groups are being piloted in schools. In these groups, parents and children model play, build social networks, and introduce children aged one to four to a formal school setting, while strengthening the school's role as a community resource for families.

### **English Language Development**

A district with a high proportion of English language learners (ELLs) requested information about programs that stimulate language development. Nationwide, 10 percent of America's pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students are learning to speak English, representing a 48 percent increase during the past decade alone.<sup>38</sup> According to the Urban Institute, ELLs present unique risk factors due to the disproportionately high levels of poverty and disproportionately low levels of school completion, English proficiency, and center-based early child care among immigrant families.<sup>39</sup> In response to these data, advocacy organization Pre-K Now recently called for states to eliminate obstacles to pre-K access for Hispanic communities, adopt a bilingual or Spanish language pre-K curriculum, and measure how well programs provide first-language development and second-language acquisition.<sup>40</sup>

The following resources provide research, strategies, and materials for working with ELLs in the early grades:

- Recent research on English language development includes the review and analysis of the literature on second language acquisition in the 2006 report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth edited by Diane August and Timothy Shanahan.<sup>41</sup> A 2003 report by Diane August focuses on the key role of English oral proficiency in acquiring English literacy.<sup>42</sup> Another resource is the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, which developed an annotated bibliography on academic achievement in early education and K-3, as well as several demographic reports on young English language learners.<sup>43</sup> A wealth of information can also be found at the Resources on Early Childhood Education page on the National Clearinghouse on English Language Acquisition website.<sup>44</sup>
- ¡Colorín Colorado! is a bilingual website for educators and Spanish-speaking families of ELLs, with an emphasis on how children learn to read, obstacles to success, and how to overcome these barriers. The project is a service of WETA Reading Rockets. The Educators section includes separate pages on teaching reading in kindergarten, first grade, and the second and third grades.<sup>45</sup> Classroom strategies and issues to consider are

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<sup>38</sup> See National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> See Urban Institute, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> See Pre-K Now, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> August and Shanahan, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> See August, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> See The National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics.

<sup>44</sup> See U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>45</sup> See Colorín Colorado, b.

provided, along with links for further information. The ¡Colorín Colorado! T.ELL.E-GRAM is a monthly e-newsletter for preK-12 educators of English language learners with research-based information, best practices, tips, and resources that help all children succeed.<sup>46</sup>

- The Early Care and Education Program at the National Council of La Raza has several initiatives that work with parents and early childhood educators to promote English literacy in ELLs.<sup>47</sup>

## **Other Resources**

Other large-scale resources that may be of interest to Ready Schools states and colleagues are highlighted below:

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation *Making Connections* initiative focuses on improving outcomes for families and children in tough or isolated neighborhoods by strengthening neighborhoods.<sup>48</sup> Effectiveness in the 10 sites around the country is measured in terms of six core results. Those related to Ready Schools principles include school readiness, civic participation, informal support networks, and high-quality community services. There are *Making Connections* sites in three Ready Schools states: Connecticut (Hartford), Indiana (Indianapolis) and Washington (Seattle).
- The High/Scope Ready School Assessment evaluates eight dimensions of school readiness. Please see Appendix A for more information.
- Dr. Robert Pianta of the University of Virginia has developed resources helpful to several Ready Schools states. Please see Appendix B for more information.
- The What Works Clearinghouse funded by the U.S. Department of Education collects, screens, and identifies studies of effectiveness of educational interventions.<sup>49</sup> The Clearinghouse has recently released reviews of interventions focused on beginning reading, early childhood education, and English language learners.
- As mentioned earlier, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) initiative sponsors five-year plans to support ready schools, children, and communities in seven states and Washington, DC.<sup>50</sup> SPARK creates and nurtures partnerships of communities, state agencies, and schools regarding the alignment between the early learning and early school settings.
- The First 5 California Student Readiness Initiative targets low-performing schools and includes a focus on “schools’ readiness for children/school capacity.”<sup>51</sup> Aligning closely

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<sup>46</sup> See Colorín Colorado, a.

<sup>47</sup> See National Council of La Raza.

<sup>48</sup> See the Annie E. Casey Foundation, b.

<sup>49</sup> See the U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>50</sup> See W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

<sup>51</sup> See California Children and Families Commission.

with Ready Schools, this principle encompasses transparency of kindergarten standards, outreach to parents, kindergarten transition programs, substantive collaboration between early care and early grades practitioners regarding training, curriculum, and planning, as well as seamless provision of health, social services, after-school programs, and other supports for children and families. Periodically assessing the schools' readiness is also important. Activities vary by district, but examples include Pre-Kindergarten Academies and disseminating tips to parents, such as implementing a school bedtime and waking schedule before school starts, daily reading at home, planning learning adventures, singing together, and visiting the school.

- Local chapters of the United Way run a variety of early education projects in collaboration with local school districts and other community partners, including Success By 6 and Child Watch. Success By Six summer readiness projects engage kindergarten students with several weeks of activities before they start school in the fall. Child Watch family bus tours orient families of young children with local academic and health resources, supported through broad collaborations that may include the local school system, public libraries, businesses, and a variety of health and educational agencies.
- The Fort Worth Independent School District (Texas) prepares pre-K students and their families for the expectations of the K-12 system through partnerships with the City of Fort Worth, Camp Fire USA First Texas Council, and the University of Houston's Center for Improving Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE). First, funds from the Fort Worth Extended Learning Opportunities Act pay for a district coordinator and two specialists to teach parents strategies that will support their children's learning in literacy and math. Classes are held in the evening at recreation centers, and childcare is provided. Second, through Camp Fire, child development specialists train childcare center staff and early childhood education providers on developmentally-appropriate instruction and the district's literacy standards.<sup>52</sup> Third, the district uses the Texas Early Education Model to engage faculty and childcare providers in joint professional development guided by the University of Texas Center for Improving Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE) program and paid for by the state.<sup>53,54</sup> District pre-K faculty and childcare providers learn research-based instruction techniques and strategies while developing and implementing improved services and curriculum.
- One of the Foundation for Child Development's major programs is Mapping the PK-3 Continuum (MAP), which focuses on improving students' outcomes by aligning standards, curriculum, and assessment from pre-kindergarten through kindergarten and into the early elementary grades.<sup>55</sup> Components of PK-3 include (1) voluntary, full-school-day pre-kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-old children; (2) mandatory full-day kindergarten that builds on pre-kindergarten school experiences; (3) PK-3 alignment between standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grades; (4) curriculum focused on social skills and self-discipline as well as reading and math; (5)

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<sup>52</sup> See Camp Fire USA First Texas Council.

<sup>53</sup> See Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education.

<sup>54</sup> See Texas Education Agency.

<sup>55</sup> See Foundation for Child Development.

PK-3 qualification for all teachers; (6) PK-3 compensation based on public elementary school teacher compensation; and (7) family-teacher collaboration to insure the success of all children.

- The Foundation for Child Development also funds the Early Education Initiative at the New America Foundation.<sup>56</sup> This initiative promotes a comprehensive, coordinated education PK-3 system. Policy recommendations support the Foundation’s focus on universal access to preschool; full-day kindergarten programs; and innovative strategies to align state and national early learning standards, support and expand a highly qualified PK-3 workforce, and extend learning time options for young children. The Early Education Initiative engages national constituency groups, members of Congress and their staff, educators, and parents—among others—in an effort to craft new policy solutions that create a seamless system of high-quality early education experiences and help close the achievement gap and ensure that all of our nation’s children are prepared for a global economy.
- The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) supports PK-3 as a research-based strategy for creating an environment of continuous improvement that helps young children come to school ready to learn and achieve in later grades. In “Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities,” the NAESP issued recommendations on how principals can advocate at the federal, state and local levels to support PK-3.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the organization used funding from the Foundation for Child Development to create case studies on schools where principals are leading successful efforts to align PK-3 and improve results for children.<sup>58</sup> Core elements of successful PK-3 programs gleaned from the case studies, which were co-created by Collaborative Communications, are summarized in a companion document.<sup>59</sup>

## VI. Implications

Despite the promising team efforts outlined in this report, linking early care with K-12 is still in its infancy. While a growing volume of projects are connecting high school with postsecondary efforts, information on system wide projects that link state early care with K-12 has been sparse. Interest in creating, growing, and improving state-funded pre-kindergarten is high, and many of the state early education specialists working on Ready Schools programs also focus on this work. However, few of these resources reach beyond pre-K to connect the worlds of early care and K-12 education. The experiences of the six states in the CCSSO School Readiness Project demonstrate the value of aligning early care with the early grades and can inspire and contribute to other states’ efforts.

The School Readiness project at CCSSO has worked with the six states profiled in this report to facilitate the sharing of promising practices that ease students’ transition into kindergarten, align early care with K-12 education, and improve the quality of education in the early grades. This

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<sup>56</sup> See New America Foundation.

<sup>57</sup> See National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> See National Association of Elementary School Principals.

<sup>59</sup> See National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2006.

report brings together strategies employed in diverse states that have made a commitment to improving the continuum of services for young children. The participating states have initiated partnerships with higher education, districts, schools, researchers, state legislatures, and foundations to support and sustain these efforts. Ideas about project organization, staffing, and funding are shared, in addition to tools and resources.

There is enormous potential for these projects as states scale up effective strategies, integrate Ready Schools practices into comprehensive school improvement plans, and address such challenges as funding and collaboration. We hope that this publication will add to previous efforts and encourage the development of new initiatives so that states can continue to provide the best start for students.

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## **Appendix A**

### High/Scope Educational Research Foundation Ready School Assessment

The High/Scope Ready School Assessment (RSA) evaluates the following eight dimensions of school readiness, to provide school teams with information on their strengths and weaknesses:

- leaders and leadership
- transitions
- teacher supports
- engaging environments
- effective curricula
- family, school, and community partnerships
- respecting diversity
- assessing progress

The pilot ended in 2005, and the tool is now available online through High/Scope. Please contact Paula Dowker at (734) 485-2000 x 241 or visit [www.readyschoolassessment.org](http://www.readyschoolassessment.org) for more information.

## **Appendix B**

Research from Dr. Robert Pianta

Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, and Oregon identified Dr. Robert Pianta's materials as helpful to the development of their transition processes. These states adapted Dr. Pianta's research, planning guides, and conference presentations to support their own systems.

Dr. Pianta is director of the Center for Advanced Study in Teaching and Learning at the University of Virginia. He is the Novartis US Foundation Professor of Education and also teaches in the Department of Psychology. His professional positions include principal investigator on several major grants: the National Center for Early Development and Learning, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care, MyTeachingPartner, and the IES Interdisciplinary Doctoral Training Program in Risk and Prevention

A former special education teacher, Dr. Pianta is a developmental, school, and clinical child psychologist whose work focuses on how children's experiences at home and in school affect their development. He is particularly interested in how teacher-parent relationships and classroom experiences can help improve outcomes for at-risk children and youth. Editor of the *Journal of School Psychology*, Dr. Pianta is the author of more than two hundred journal articles, chapters, and books in the areas of early childhood development, transition to school, school readiness, and parent-child and teacher-child relationships. He consults regularly with federal agencies, foundations, and universities. For Dr. Pianta's curriculum vitae, please visit [http://www.virginia.edu/vprgs/CASTL/files/Bob\\_VITA\\_July2006.pdf](http://www.virginia.edu/vprgs/CASTL/files/Bob_VITA_July2006.pdf).

Dr. Pianta's research regarding the kindergarten transition includes the following:

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## **Appendix C**

### CCSSO Ready Schools Survey

#### **Section 1. Introduction**

This survey will gather information about the six Ready Schools state programs. I hope that this survey will help you express the progress you have made and help you learn from other states. The more specific you are in your responses, the better. At the end of the survey, I will ask you for the contact information for others in your state who you feel should complete this survey, in order to develop a full picture of your state's program.

After I draft your state's case study from your responses, I will ask you and possibly others from your state to review the draft and provide clarifying comments and/or edits.

Please complete the survey by May 26, 2006. The survey automatically saves on your computer once you begin. You will not be able to access what you have started from another computer. If you want to start the survey and come back to it, don't hit Finished until you are completely done.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact Alyssa Alston at (202) 336-7050 or [alysaa@ccsso.org](mailto:alysaa@ccsso.org)

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#### **Section 2. Program Description**

1. Your state \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the current status of your Ready Schools program? List all sites and indicate whether they are in the *planning* or *implementation* phase.

Site	Phase
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. How did your state's Ready Schools program come to be?  
(Probe: What partnerships facilitated the program? How is the program funded? How is the program involved with pre-service efforts?)

4. What are your Ready Schools program's major accomplishments over the past few years?

### **Section 3. State Support and Alignment to School Improvement**

5. How is your state's Ready Schools program linked to school improvement planning?

6. How is your state supporting the alignment between early care and the early grades?

7. How is your state supporting children's transition to kindergarten?

8. How is your state supporting high-quality learning environments in the early grades (i.e. teacher preparation and professional development focused on the academic and social-emotional needs of young children; research-based practices; focus on results and leadership)

### **Section 4. Reflections**

9. What are your program's major obstacles?

10. How have you overcome these obstacles?

11. Which research has been most helpful to you?

### **5. Looking Ahead**

12. How do you plan to sustain your current program?

13. How do you plan to grow your current program?

### **6. Other**

14. What else should we know about your program?

15. Please list some programs related to Ready Schools that you would like to learn more about.

16. Please provide the contact information for others in your state who should complete this survey: name, title, phone, and email.