



Strong Beginnings, Smooth Transitions, Continuous Learning:

**A Ready School Resource Guide
for Elementary School Leadership**

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Forward

Dear Principal,

As educators and administrators, we know that a strong beginning leads to success in whatever we do, so it is not surprising that a strong beginning is absolutely essential for every child who enters our schools. Greeting a new group of kindergarten children at the school door on their first day of school is always a time of excitement, but it is also a time to reflect upon the responsibility we have as educators and administrators.

For all children to succeed, we must meet each child's unique needs every day of every year. Family traditions, culture, socio-economic status and children's prior experiences all have a profound impact on children's learning long before they walk through the school doors.

This resource is built on the premise that all children can and will succeed if we – families, schools and communities – work together. *Strong Beginnings, Smooth Transitions, Continuous Learning: A Ready School Resource Guide for Elementary School Leadership*, is based on current research that has been synthesized to include several key elements that impact children's academic success. The guide is not meant to be prescriptive, restrictive or inclusive of all that could be undertaken. Instead, it is intended to present several promising practices that highlight continuous improvement and innovation.

It is our role and responsibility to assure that every child achieves academic success. All of our children can succeed if we work together. Our children's future depends upon building the "village" now.



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This publication is due to the hard work, time and commitment of a statewide leadership committee comprised of many dedicated professionals. Committee co-chairs Beth Johnson Christoff, Lisa Usselman and Debbie White thank the leadership committee for its work and for all that its members do on behalf of our youngest learners. We are also extremely grateful for those that took time away from their important work with children to provide us with valuable ideas and feedback on the document.

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SPARK Ohio seeks to create a seamless transition into school for children ages 3 to 6 by building reading, language and social skills. The goal is to ensure that children are ready for school and schools are ready for children by: strengthening connections among children, families, early childhood education and care providers, and teachers; improving quality services and relationships between schools and families; altering institutional policies and procedures, changing systems that serve children in early learning; and fostering local, state, and national resolve to support children and schools.

Introduction

The first of eight national education goals adopted in the 1990's states: "All children in America will enter school ready to learn." Early efforts to achieve this goal centered on improving the environments, experiences and services preceding kindergarten entry. "Getting children ready for school" has been translated into prenatal care, effective parenting, immunizations, proper nutrition and high quality early care and preschool experiences. While the efforts to increase the number of "ready children" entering kindergarten, schools must be ready as well:

- Ready to respond to the diverse learning needs of all the children they receive;
- Ready to look beyond "risk factors" and build upon the social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills of all children as they make the transition from home or preschool to kindergarten and then adjust to school life;
- Ready to make a decisive difference in every child's life.

The Ready School concept is a shift—moving responsibility for successful transitions away from only preparing children just before they come to school to a shared goal. The concept suggests that the responsibility for successful transition lies within systems that bridge the divide as children move from home or preschool to the formal expectations of school. Research tells us that children's future academic success is correlated with their opportunities to be engaged in the life of the school before entering kindergarten (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1999; Ramey & Ramey, 1999; National Research Council, 2000).

As an elementary building principal, you can help build or coordinate the systems that are necessary to maximize the early success of your students. This doesn't necessarily involve additional expenditures. It may take time and a commitment to question and possibly refine current practices. But most of all, you may need to expand the conventional notion of "readiness."

The purpose of this guide is to provide a framework for leading your staff toward the ideals of a Ready School. It can be used as a basis for beginning, refining or becoming exemplary in your Ready School efforts. Even more importantly through a shared ready child, ready school plan, you will make a significant difference in the health, well-being and educational outcomes of *all* the young children who enter your school.

Pianta, R. C., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Cox, M. E. (1999). Introduction: An ecological approach to kindergarten transition. In Robert C. Pianta & Martha J. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 3-12). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Ramey, C. T., & Ramey, S. L. (1999). Beginning school for children at risk. In Robert C. Pianta & Martha J. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 3-12). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Is Your School a Ready School?

A Ready School requires an active, sustained commitment to providing appropriate instructional supports and learning environments. Ready School thinking is different from traditional thinking.

A Different Way of Thinking

Traditional Thinking <i>Teachers and administrators focus on content and believe:</i>	Ready School Thinking <i>Ready Schools put children first and believe:</i>
<i>Many children are at a disadvantage academically when they start school; therefore, we can only do a certain amount in a regular classroom.</i>	<i>All children start school with the ability to learn. We must assess and find ways to narrow and close any gaps as quickly as possible.</i>
<i>Some children aren't ready for school. We do them a favor by suggesting to families that they wait another year.</i>	<i>All children are ready for kindergarten. Some may need extra attention.</i>
<i>Some families need to do a better job of helping their children.</i>	<i>We need to work together with families to ease transitions.</i>
<i>Student diversity means lower performance.</i>	<i>Student diversity is challenging but rewarding for all learners.</i>
<i>We treat all children the same. We help children who are different adjust to the norm and overcome their limitations.</i>	<i>By teaching all children to embrace their own uniqueness and respect differences, we are helping them prepare for a diverse world.</i>
<i>Screening procedures provide data to determine a child's readiness for kindergarten.</i>	<i>Screening procedures provide data that informs instructional practices, the need for additional assessment and the need for supportive services.</i>
<i>Communication with families is limited prior to the start of school.</i>	<i>Communication starts early in the preschool years and is ongoing, providing multiple opportunities for children and families to visit the school.</i>
<i>The learning environment supports the "typical" student.</i>	<i>The school environment is prepared to support the learning and development of all children.</i>

Ohio's Ready Schools Framework

Ohio's framework for a Ready School consists of seven components. These components are based on an extended review of research and national initiatives as well as on survey information collected from Ohio's elementary school principals. While some components may evoke a greater sense of urgency than others for a particular school, all are important, interrelated and complementary. Thus, concerted efforts in one area are likely to bring improvements in other areas. Likewise, major gaps in one area may impede progress in certain other areas.



Sections at a Glance

Each section highlights strategies, ideas and suggestions for a particular Ready School component. The information contained in each section is not an exhaustive listing of all that could be undertaken with respect to that component. However, each section does contain research-based efforts that, if implemented or enhanced, will result in higher levels of student achievement.

Section 1 – Leadership emphasizes planning. The information can be used to assess and track overall progress in creating a Ready School Action Plan that is integrated with existing district or building improvement plans. The information can be used to define specific strategies or as the basis for more targeted action plans.

Section 2 – Transition provides information about developing relationships and activities that will help ease the adjustment process of children entering kindergarten, or moving from grade to grade.

Section 3 – Supportive Environments details the steps for creating a safe and healthy environment that supports children’s social, emotional and cognitive development.

Section 4 – Standards, Instruction and Assessment provides a framework for continuity of early school experiences through effective design and alignment of curriculum and assessment.

Section 5 – Diversity provides guidance for serving children from diverse populations based on culture, language and ability.

Section 6 – Home-School-Community Connections highlights the actions needed for improving relationships and increasing collaboration among all the adults and organizations that affect children.

Section 7 – Adult Learning Communities provides suggestions for the ongoing learning of administrators, teachers and other staff, family members, and community partners.

Use this guide to:

Engage staff in the Ready School conversation

Determine when action planning will occur and who will be involved

Determine area(s) of focus based on the self-assessment at the beginning of each section

Determine priorities using the action planning form at the end of each section

Develop a comprehensive action plan based on priorities

Section Organization

1. Title Page

Each title page introduces a Ready School component that is addressed in that section, lists major strategies and outlines *key understandings* to provide a general idea of the content to be covered. At the bottom of the page is a *connections* box that highlights the interrelationships among that component and the others as a way to help connect the work and leverage outcomes.

2. Self-Assessment

Each section begins with a self-assessment that the building principal can use to generate discussion with staff before planning begins. The self-assessment also can serve to establish a baseline and to periodically gauge progress. It may help to identify which areas the staff feels are most critically in need.

3. Strategies

The strategies are provided for each component and are organized in three stages:



Laying the Groundwork provides ideas for examining research related to the component and beginning the discussion with staff.



Getting to Work discusses each strategy and provides specific examples of associated beliefs, activities and outcomes. The information can be useful in deepening understanding, generating ideas for activities and assessing progress. Avoid taking a formulaic approach to each strategy; your staff may have different ideas that accomplish the same results.




Exemplary Work describes work that is possible through sustained commitment, teamwork and system support. The exemplars selected are not the only hallmarks of success, but they convey the essence of a Ready School.


4. School Profiles describe successful programs and practices found in educational or community settings throughout Ohio and the nation, providing real-life models of the Ready School philosophy.

5. Final Check is a list of indicators that sum up the most important suggestions in the section.

6. Action Planning Form is a template for organizing steps to create the Ready School Action Plan.

7. Resources lists websites that provide additional information, tools and/or examples of the section topic. The  indicates resources. The number next to the mouse icon corresponds with the resource in the listing.

8. References cite the books, articles, and research along with other key readings. Annotations are included for key sources.

9. Samples of forms, surveys and other tools are included where appropriate. The  indicates a sample is provided in this section.

10. Ohio Appendix

Information regarding rules, regulations and resources regarding early learning and kindergarten in Ohio.

1. Leadership

Ready School leaders are committed to the intellectual and social-emotional success of children. Their clear vision of student success builds on the nurturing that families provide and on the effectiveness of the early childhood education community. It is a vision for the professional growth of the school staff that stems from a culture of respect, high expectations and continuous learning. The vision remains at the forefront of the school plan.

A Ready School

1. Ensures that its vision is consistent with the principles of a Ready School;
2. Understands the importance of early learning and educational continuity;
3. Develops and implements a results-driven Ready School action plan.

Key Understandings . . .

- The principal provides leadership by communicating a clear vision through collective leadership with teachers, family members and community partners.
- Recognition of the importance of early childhood education and the ways young children learn is essential. Schools can partner with the early childhood community to improve educational continuity from preschool through the early grades.
- By analyzing data and by engaging in action planning, leaders can ensure strategies to meet the needs of all children.

connections

Transitions—Assessing needs, planning and monitoring progress of transition activities

Supportive Environments—Assessing and improving how the school environment affects student learning

Standards, Instruction and Assessment—Increasing clarity about what it means to teach all children effectively

Diversity—Considering all abilities, languages, cultures and lifestyles in improvement planning

Home-School-Community Connections—Involving families and community members in planning

Adult Learning Community—Deepening understanding of Ready School concepts

Ready
School

Leadership Self-Assessment

Instructions: Using the self-assessment tool below, rate your building practices using the following scale and document any evidence to support your rating for each item. Convene a team of administrators and teachers to reflect on and rate your building as a group. A rating of “1” indicates the work has not yet begun; a rating of “2” indicates the work has begun, but may not be fully implemented or exemplary; a rating of “3” indicates the work is implemented and exemplary. Mark “NI” if you need more information to rate your building.

Practice	1	2	3	NI
1. Staff is familiar with the Ready School concept; time is devoted during staff meetings to discussion and planning.				
Evidence				
2. The importance of learning and experiences prior to school entry is understood, valued and appreciated as a contribution to children’s readiness and success.				
Evidence				
3. The school has a written vision statement that incorporates Ready School principles.				
Evidence				
4. The school/community demographic data has been gathered and analyzed.				
Evidence				
5. A Ready School Action Plan has been created.				
Evidence				
6. Progress toward Ready School Action Plan goals is monitored and refined as needed.				
Evidence				
7. Educational continuity exists from preschool through the early grades.				
Evidence				

Follow-up: After you complete your self-assessment ratings, review your findings as a leadership team. For those areas receiving a rating of “1”, identify the steps you need to take to begin implementation, the resources needed, and timeline for accomplishing these steps. For those areas receiving a rating of “2”, identify what needs to happen to move your building practices to full implementation at the exemplary level. For those areas receiving a rating of “3”, congratulate yourselves and determine how you will maintain this same level of exemplary implementation.

The Ready School and Leadership

Though children come to school from diverse backgrounds and may possess a wide range of skills and abilities based on previous experiences, the belief is that all children can and will succeed. High expectations for all children and staff are the norm. The vision is clearly articulated, improvement efforts are well planned and their effectiveness continually evaluated. Results oriented efforts take time and commitment and the Ready School leader knows this cannot be done alone. Leadership is shared and staff is provided with the time, support and resources necessary for quality continuous improvement.

Characteristics of Leaders of Change

- Has a clear vision
- Focus on learning
- Values human resources
- Is an excellent communicator and listener
- Is proactive
- Is a risk-taker

Source: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Laying the Groundwork

Creating a school that is ready to educate all children, whatever their needs, is an opportunity for a school leader to address important areas in a focused way. Increasing the focus on student learning, creating a more collaborative school culture, and engaging families—all goals that have been linked to successful school improvement initiatives—are important components of the Ready School framework (Louis, et al., 1998).

According to research children who attend high-quality preschool programs, especially those from economically disadvantaged circumstances begin kindergarten better prepared, socially and academically, to meet with the demands of formal school. The brain research is also clear. The early years are windows of opportunity when children are developing the capacity for all future learning. In essence, they are “learning to learn”. Staff in a ready school know this and build upon those early experiences by promoting continuity between the preschool and the early grades (Education Commission of the States, 2001).

The Principles of a Ready School

The concept of the Ready School began with the eight national education goals established by the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) in 1990. In presenting the first of those goals—that all children in America will start school ready to learn by the year 2000—the panel identified three components that contribute to school readiness:

- *The readiness of the child;*
- *Schools’ readiness for children;*
- *Family and community supports and services that contribute to children’s readiness.*

In 1998, the NEGP proposed 10 characteristics of “Ready Schools,” schools that support the learning and development of young children. According to the report, Ready Schools:



- *Smooth the transition between home and school;*
- *Strive for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools;*
- *Help children learn and make sense of their complex and exciting world;*
- *Are committed to the success of every child;*
- *Are committed to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacts with children during the school day;*
- *Introduce or expand approaches that have been shown to raise achievement;*
- *Are learning organizations that alter their practices and programs if they do not benefit children;*
- *Serve children in communities;*
- *Take responsibility for results;*
- *Have strong leadership.*

The Ready School Conversation

It is important that all staff have a clear understanding of what it means to be a Ready School, especially the distinction between expecting *children* to be ready for school and expecting schools to be ready for children.

Questions to facilitate learning and discussion:

- *What does it mean to be a Ready School?*
- *Is the staff familiar with the Ready School movement and its historical context?*
- *What are staff perceptions about being a Ready School? Are those perceptions different from that of the leader?*
- *What is the impact, of being a Ready School on student achievement?*
- *What is the distinction between school readiness and a Ready School?*
- *What unique characteristics of students, families and/or the community come to mind when discussing the Ready School concept?*
- *How might families or the community be engaged to solicit Ready School feedback?*

Developing a common understanding is the first step, but deeper, more extensive conversation and action planning will be needed. Creating opportunities for staff to engage in conversation requires joint planning time. The role of the Ready School leader is to ensure that the organizational structure promotes and encourages an environment of continuous learning – for both staff and students.

The Ready School and Early Childhood Education

It is well known that the early years are critical for building the foundation and setting the trajectory of children's future learning and development. Children who come to kindergarten having had a high quality early learning experience are better prepared to succeed in school, both academically and behaviorally.

Investing in high quality early childhood services and programming generates long-term educational and economic benefits (Schweinhart, et al., 2005; Education Commission of the States, 2001). When schools invest early, the savings to children, families and communities are realized in numerous tangible ways, both short- and long-term, which include:

- Higher student achievement rates;
- Lower retention and special education placement;
- Higher graduation rates.

In essence, the cost associated with intervention and remediation is far greater than that associated with investing in early learning. That does not necessarily mean that elementary schools need to own and operate preschool programs. What it does mean is that schools need to connect with the early childhood community in meaningful, strategic ways to improve educational continuity and thus influence the likelihood of greater student achievement.

Building relationships with the early childhood community is much easier when early childhood classrooms are located within the building. The challenge is when they are not. Some schools may be in the planning stages—identifying and making contact with community-based early childhood programs—while other schools may already know and have established ways of connecting. The ultimate goal is continuity for children between the two settings, and this is best achieved when the school and the early childhood staff view transition as a shared responsibility.

Head Start, public preschool, child-care centers, nursery schools and family child-care providers are all forms of early childhood programs. Some emphasize child care while others may have more of a school-readiness focus.

Learn about your early childhood community by:

- Obtaining a listing of county or regional programs through the local child-care resource and referral agency;
- Obtaining a listing of licensed centers and family child-care providers through the state licensing agency;
- Obtaining a listing of the Federal Head Start Programs in the area.

4 & 6

Getting to Work

1. The Ready School Vision

The Ready School vision is clearly defined, compelling and committed to the success of every child. It is deeply embedded in the school community's values, hopes and dreams. The vision helps focus attention on what is important, motivates staff and children, inspires the community and increases the sense of learning as a shared responsibility.

Creating a shared vision is a way to build enthusiasm and discover what motivates stakeholders to seek improvement. A vision statement can be viewed as a compass for all planning and should guide all decisions and actions. Questions to consider:

10
11
12

- Does the school have a vision statement?
- Does the vision statement reflect the characteristics of a Ready School as described earlier in this publication?
- Was the vision and/or vision statement developed collaboratively?
- Are the children aware of the school's vision/statement?
- Are families aware of the school's vision/statement?
- Is the community aware of the school's vision/statement?
- Is the vision/statement prominently displayed?
- Is the vision/statement kept at the forefront when making school decisions?
- Are school strategies, instructional or otherwise, evaluated against the vision/statement?
- Does the vision reflect the district's vision and goals?

Effective school leaders have not only a vision of high student achievement but also the skills to communicate that vision, which in turn inspires others to work toward the realization of the vision (Sergiovanni, 1990).

2. The Ready School and Educational Continuity

Educational continuity means that all instruction and learning experiences preschool through grade three build upon children's prior knowledge and experiences. These experiences naturally progress toward more sophisticated and complex content and skills. Children make continuous progress, although their rates and styles of learning vary. Educational continuity means designing instruction based on the following concepts:

- *Interactions – Stimulating children’s social, emotional and intellectual growth and development through the use of language is central. The learning environment is intentionally designed to include learning or activity centers that allow children to move about, socialize and talk with one another;*
- *Curriculum is coordinated and aligned vertically across grade levels and disciplines – A thread of meaning runs through various experiences, activities and lessons to enable children to see connections between the past and the present and among the people, objects and events of their world;*
- *Reflection – Opportunities for children to think about what they are learning and to reflect upon their actions. Children are encouraged to represent their learning using pictures, graphs, writing and other means, to talk about and describe what they have learned to others, and to apply and evaluate their learning.*

The ultimate goal is that both preschool and elementary teachers work together to ensure that instruction is designed with these principles in mind.

3. The Ready School Action Plan

Action planning is based on the vision statement. The process involves identifying strategies, outlining timelines, monitoring and evaluation and providing the necessary support that will meet the goals of a ready school. The Action Plan should align with broader school and district improvement planning efforts. A Ready School Action Plan will help keep the planning process focused and ensure that implementation is on track. The plan should include school and community data. Sources of data that can inform ready school strategies include:

- *Percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches;*
- *Retention rates;*
- *Achievement test data;*
- *Data from kindergarten screenings;*
- *The school’s ethnic composition;*
- *Percentage of students referred to special education;*
- *Percentage of students with limited English-language proficiency;*
- *Mobility rates;*
- *Any additional information that helps describe the school population. Data such as mean property values and average size of household, for example, can be obtained through the school administration, regional planning entities, city planners and census data.*

Self-Assessment

Based on the school and community data and the experiences of staff members, analyze areas where improvement is needed. Use the self-assessment checklists at the beginning of each section to determine which areas should be addressed first and most intensively.

Have all staff complete the assessments on their own and then provide time during a regular staff meeting to talk about how staff rated the school.

If a more comprehensive self-assessment would be helpful at this point, the High Scope Ready School Self-Assessment may be utilized (Highscope Educational research Foundation).



Stakeholder Involvement

Consider the following planning activities:

- *Inviting central office staff and other schools to participate;*
- *Developing tools for collecting external feedback from the community and families.*
- *Soliciting, collecting and analyzing data about family and community satisfaction (see TOOL at end of Section 6);*
- *Conducting interviews with staff and other stakeholders;*
- *Creating study groups to explore different sections of this framework and recommended resources in depth.*

The Complete Plan

After conditions have been assessed and areas of concentration have been identified, ensure that the action plan:

- *Is in alignment with the school vision/statement;*
- *Represents the views of teachers, classified staff, students, families, early childhood education personnel and community members;*
- *Includes measurable short- and long-term goals and strategies that are consistent with district improvement plans and other required building plans;*
- *Establishes baseline data and a timetable for monitoring progress and modifying goals;*
- *Outlines staff responsibilities;*
- *Includes a process for evaluating activities and measuring progress.*



Action planning, forming partnerships and working with families will take time. Sharing leadership and collaborating with preschools and other community organizations will change the school culture, requiring adjustments and new assumptions. Most of all, taking responsibility for the learning needs of all children is a shift from a compartmentalized perspective to a systemic view. But collaborative partnerships between Ready Schools that serve elementary-age children and the early care and education system will play a pioneering role in creating a preschool through grade three system, an important goal that is driving reform in many states.

Restructuring Time for Planning - One school's response

Children at Happy Elementary School have four days of classroom work each week and a day called Resource Day. On Resource Day, children are involved in art, music, gym, library, and computer lab. The children look forward to Resource Days because of the variety in their schedules and the possibilities for creative and experimental learning experiences. With the teaching staff divided into five instructional teams, each teacher has one free day per week - the Resource Day for students is a planning and study day for teachers. The Resource Day is also economical, since no substitute teacher pay is needed. Students simply rotate their classes. Security monitors and parent volunteers are present throughout the building to oversee the rotations from class to class.

Exemplary Work







Educational Continuity Preschool through Grade Three – A Strategy to Improve Student Achievement

Exemplary practice is a fully integrated education system for preschool through the primary years. Such a system will provide quality early childhood education to all children as part of a seamless continuum of educational experiences extending through the early years of elementary school.

“A perfect P-3 approach is structured in a way that all children have learning experiences that build on past experiences and are connected to those yet to come. This can be accomplished by having clear expectations for children at every grade, aligning what is expected with what is actually taught in the classroom and using assessment to guide instruction (Rice, 2007).”

A Ready School works with preschool programs in the community to create this seamless continuum of educational experiences. Together they plan, align and refine instructional strategies; determine common assessment strategies; and plan professional development.

Final Check

-  *Do staff members understand and appreciate the Ready School concept?*
-  *Has information about being a Ready School been shared with families and the community?*
-  *Is the school's vision in alignment with or inclusive of the principles of a Ready School?*
-  *Has contact been made and/or professional working relationships been established with the community preschool programs?*
-  *Is there a plan to identify areas of improvement?*
-  *Is action planning under way?*



School Profile

Orange School District, Orange, New Jersey

Following the Children

In 1998, the New Jersey Supreme Court took a dramatic step toward the goal of preparing all young children for school with its *Abbott v. Burke V* decision, which mandates state support for high quality preschool in 31 urban districts. Today, the public school systems in those “Abbott districts” not only oversee public preschools but also work with local Head Start programs and private preschool providers to ensure that all 3- and 4-year-old children, regardless of family income levels, receive standards-based early learning experiences from certified teachers. Since the decision, the New Jersey Department of Education reports substantial improvements in preschool quality. Moreover, a study of entering kindergarten students by the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University (Lamey, Barnett, & Jung, 2005) found that the Abbott schools made “statistically significant and meaningful impacts on children’s language, literacy and mathematical development.”

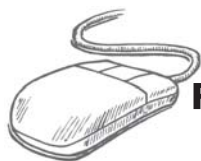
As the results of high quality preschool become increasingly evident, some New Jersey districts have increased efforts to ensure that the gains made possible by improved kindergarten readiness are only the beginning of an upward trend in achievement. They envision a true preschool through grade-three system, which the Association for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) and its partners describe as one in which “all children have learning experiences that build on past experiences and are connected to those yet to come” (Rice, 2007).

Efforts by the Orange Public Schools to align the curriculum and coordinate leadership and professional development are beginning to realize the preschool through grade-three vision. Like most Abbott districts, Orange uses a mixed delivery system for early childhood education that includes public and private preschools and Head Start programs. Dr. Nathan Parker, the district superintendent, has fostered relationships between preschool supervisors and elementary school principals

through regular joint meetings that include substantive discussion and planning. He also has created clear areas of overlapping responsibility for preschool and elementary school language arts and literacy supervisors. Kathleen Priestley, who coordinates the public and private preschool programs that are funded through contracts with the district, says teams representing preschools and each elementary grade hold regular “articulation meetings” that focus on examining the curriculum. Preschool and elementary school teachers also share what they have learned from assessment and engage in joint professional development experiences. Nurses, social workers, inclusion specialists, family liaisons and other support staff also learn and work together. “The biggest barrier is always time,” says Priestley.

Despite the scheduling constraints, the Orange schools continue working toward alignment and coordination. A current focus, says Priestley, is kindergarten transition. She has been working with principals to improve support for kindergarten teachers and is conducting intensive workshops on how teachers can use the detailed documentation that preschools produce through the child study process, as well as how they can benefit from preschools’ experiences with multi-age, inclusive classrooms. “If we follow the children better after they leave preschool,” she says, “elementary school principals and teachers will have information they need to support them and build on their strengths.”

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Resources

Information about the Ready School concept:

1. National Goals Panel Report
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/superintendent/priorities/ready4school/readysch.pdf>
2. W.K. Kellogg Foundation:
<http://www.wkkf.org/>
3. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation (Helping Schools Get Ready for All Children, The Ready School Assessment)
<http://www.highscope.org/>

Locate Local Child-care Centers:

4. National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
<http://www.naccra.org>
5. National Child Care Information Center
<http://www.nccic.org>
6. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families
Head Start Program Locator
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsbl/>

Resources for Research and Evaluation:

7. W.K. Kellogg Foundation Program Evaluation Handbook:
<http://www.wkkf.org> > Foundation Publications >
8. Collaborative Evaluation led by Local Educators—Northeast and the Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium
<http://www.neirtec.org/evaluation/>
9. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child
<http://www.developingchild.net/pubs/pubs.html>

Resources for Building a Collective Vision:

10. Center for Emotionally Responsive Practice
<http://www.bankstreet.edu/bsccerp/resources.html>
11. Center for Adaptive Schools
<http://www.adaptiveschools.com/>
12. Coalition for Essential Schools, Brown University
<http://www.essentialschools.org>

References

Barbour, N. H., & Seefeldt, C. (1993). *Developmental continuity across preschool and primary grades*. Wheaton, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.

Provides advice on how to provide educational experiences that respond to children's developmental progress and support developmental continuity in practice.

Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades. (1996). *Years of promise: A comprehensive learning strategy for America's children*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.
<http://www.carnegie.org/sub/pubs/execsum.html>

Presents findings of a task force consisting of business and political leaders, scientists, educators, researchers and practitioners. The task force conducted extensive reviews of research and programmatic experience, made site visits throughout the country and engaged in formal hearings and informal discussions with parents, teachers, administrators and community leaders.

Education Commission of the States. (2001). *Starting early, starting now*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

ECS cites several long-term academic gains by students from low-income families who were part of the North Carolina Abecedarian Project, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers. Later in life, students in those programs exhibited lower involvement in crime, higher college enrollment and higher income levels than did their peers who did not participate.

Goldenberg, C. (2004). *Successful school change: Creating settings to improve teaching and learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Includes a chapter on setting goals and indicators.

Lamey, C., Barnett, W. S., & Jung, K. (2005). *The effects of New Jersey's Abbott Preschool Program on young children's school readiness*. Rutgers, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research Rutgers University.

Landry, S. H. (2005). *Effective early childhood programs, turning knowledge into action*. Houston, TX: University of Texas.
<http://www.uth.tmc.edu/circle/pdfs/LandryBookSplit.pdf>

Provides practical, research-based strategies for providing high quality experiences in early childhood programs that promote the learning and development of 3- and 4-year-old children.

Louis, K., & Marks, H. (1998). Does professional community affect the classroom? *American Journal of Education*, 106, 532-596.

Marzano, R. F., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Curriculum and Supervision, and Aurora, CO: Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL).

A meta-analysis of 25 years of school leadership research that found a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement. The authors identified 21 essential leadership qualities. They found that those qualities have a positive impact on student achievement only when leaders focus on school and classroom practices that are most likely to have a positive impact on achievement in their particular schools and when leaders properly understand the magnitude of the changes they are attempting.

McEwan, E. K. (2003). *Ten traits of highly effective principals: From good to great performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Describes traits of effective principals and associated behaviors. Includes information on visioning, planning and leading change.

National Association of Elementary School Principals. (2005). *What principals should know and be able to do: A guide for those who care about creating and supporting quality in schools*. Alexandria, VA: NAESP.

Outlines indicators of effective elementary school leadership.

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

The Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, which was established by the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, examined an extensive body of scientific research related to the development of children from birth to kindergarten entry and discussed its implications in policy and practice. The committee's recommendations call for greater investment in addressing young children's emotional, regulatory and social development and reducing the disparities in school readiness among young children of differing backgrounds.

Rice, C. (2007). *Building strong rungs to build sturdy ladders: The status of preschool–3rd grade systems in New Jersey*. (Policy Brief, January 2007). Newark, NJ: Association for Children of New Jersey.

Defines New Jersey's concept of a P–3 system and provides guidelines for assessing and improving P–3 education.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1990). *Value-added leadership: How to get extraordinary performance in schools*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Provides helpful guidance for school leaders.

Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40*. (Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 14). Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

Describes the findings of the High/Scope Perry Preschool study, which documented the effects of high quality preschool experiences.

Zmuda, A., Kuklis, R., & Kline, E. (2004). *Transforming schools: Creating a culture of continuous improvement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD .

Provides helpful guidance for school leaders engaging in planning.



Sample Action Plans

Use the self-assessments at the beginning of each section and the action planning tool at the end of each section to inform your Ready School Action Plan. These sample action plan templates may be used as is or modified to meet the individual needs of the school.





Ready School Action Plan #1 - Ready School Improvement Strategy

Notes:

Tasks/ Action Steps <i>What will be done?</i>	Person Responsible <i>Who will do it?</i>	Resources <i>Funding/Time/People/Materials</i>	Timeline <i>By when? (Day/Month)</i>
1.	1.		1.
2.	2.		2.
3.	3.		3.
4.	4.		4.
5.	5.		5.

Implications for Professional Development

Evidence of Success (How will you know that you are making progress?)

Evaluation Process (How will you determine that your improvement strategy has been reached?))



Ready School Action Plan #2 - Ready School Improvement Strategy

Priority	Action	Performance Indicators	Staff Responsible	Resources Needed	Completion Date
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					

Priority	Action	Performance Indicators	Staff Responsible	Resources Needed	Completion Date
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					

[illegible]



2. Transition

Adopting a purposeful approach to helping children and their families experience and navigate the transition process is essential. Ready Schools view transition from a systems perspective that melds best practices from successful early education and care programs with those of the primary grades. Transition practices actively involve staff, families and the community in creating seamless experiences for children as they enter kindergarten and adjust to school.

A Ready School

1. Builds strong relationships with children and families to support transition;
2. Builds relationships and collaborates with the early childhood community;
3. Has a coordinated system of screening all kindergarten children.

Key Understandings . . .

- Strong relationships with students' families and partnerships with early childhood programs help ease transition.
- Transition activities include screenings to ensure that children are healthy and ready to fully participate in the academic process.
- Transition activities begin well before children enter kindergarten and continue both formally and informally throughout the entire year. Transition approaches also can support all new students and families, including those who transfer to the school after the start of the school year.

connections

Leadership—Assessing needs, planning and monitoring the progress of transition activities

Supportive Environments—Ensuring smooth transitions through positive relationships and nurturing surroundings

Standards, Instruction and Assessment—Supporting transition through continuity in teaching and learning

Diversity—Considering children's abilities, languages, cultures and lifestyles during transitions

Home-School-Community Connections—Partnering with families and community services to enhance transition

Adult Learning Community—Studying and sharing effective transition practices

Transition Self-Assessment

Instructions: Using the self-assessment tool below, rate your building practices using the following scale and document any evidence to support your rating for each item. Convene a team of administrators and teachers to reflect on and rate your building as a group. A rating of “1” indicates the work has not yet begun; a rating of “2” indicates the work has begun, but may not be fully implemented or exemplary; a rating of “3” indicates the work is implemented and exemplary. Mark “NI” if you need more information to rate your building.

Practice	1	2	3	NI
1. Staff is familiar with the research on transition.				
Evidence				
2. The school has a system of screening all kindergarten children, and screening information is communicated to families in a timely manner.				
Evidence				
3. Families are linked with needed resources and services; staff facilitates linkages if necessary.				
Evidence				
4. Data used from screening supports student learning and identifies appropriate and timely referrals.				
Evidence				
5. Staff has assessed communication practices that are part of the transition activities.				
Evidence				
6. Staff welcomes new students and their families throughout the year through defined activities.				
Evidence				
7. Staff plans and communicates regularly with preschool representatives in developing transition activities.				
Evidence				
8. Staff members meet regularly, grade level to grade level, to plan for educational continuity.				
Evidence				
9. School staff and the early childhood community plan shared professional development according to needs.				
Evidence				
10. There is an organized team or group developing transition activities and a person assigned to coordinate the plan and to assure that timelines are met.				
Evidence				
11. Transition practices are evaluated and refined on the basis of results.				
Evidence				

Follow-up: After you complete your self-assessment ratings, review your findings as a leadership team. For those areas receiving a rating of “1”, identify the steps you need to take to begin implementation, the resources needed, and timeline for accomplishing these steps. For those areas receiving a rating of “2”, identify what needs to happen to move your building practices to full implementation at the exemplary level. For those areas receiving a rating of “3”, congratulate yourselves and determine how you will maintain this same level of exemplary implementation.

The Ready School and Transition

Transition is the experience of children and their families as they prepare for and adjust to a new learning environment. All children experience multiple transitions as they move through their educational experiences:

- From home to out-of-home care;
- From preschool or child care to kindergarten;
- From grade to grade;
- From the elementary school to middle school.

In the end, it is the children, and at times the family, who experience the change and the resulting outcomes. As children move from place to place, they experience different organizational structures related to space and time; expectations and rules for behavior and participation in small-group and whole-group activities inside and outside of the classroom; and expectations for participation in learning, either active or passive.

The goal of transition is continuity across the spaces, places and practices that effect the academic lives of our youngest learners. The more that we adults who have the responsibility for organizing and managing learning are consistent in our approach to ways of doing school, the better the outcomes for our children.

Laying the Groundwork

Research indicates that about 20 percent of children entering kindergarten experience “serious” difficulties with transition, while another third have “some” problems (Pianta & Sayre, 2003). Since children’s experience in kindergarten plays a critical role in their adjustment to school and in their later academic success, minimizing those difficulties is a school’s most critical challenge. Results of the National Head Start Demonstration evaluation add further weight. Positive transition experiences can help prevent the “fade-out effect,” in which the gains made through Head Start are lost after the first few years of school (Bohan-Baker and Little, 2002).

According to Pianta et al., (1999), positive relationships between preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers, between the child and peers, and between the child’s family and school can aid transition.

Analyze the differences between preschool and kindergarten and how those differences will affect children. Examine differences in:

- Organizational structures as related to how space and time are used;
- Expectations and rules for behavior and participation in learning, particular levels of activity;
- Participation in small-group and whole-group activities inside and outside the classroom.

Getting to Work

1. The school staff builds strong relationships with children and families to support transition.

Often, a family’s first contact with the formal public education system is when a child enters kindergarten. Listening to families and valuing and involving them and their children in meaningful ways during this critical period set the stage for children’s future adjustment and positive family interactions with the school.

Questions to consider:

- What and when is the family’s first contact with the school?
- How often are transition activities scheduled? Is it only at the beginning of each school year?
- Are transition activities scheduled at times that are convenient for families?
- How does the staff communicate with and build relationships with families?
- Do efforts serve to increase family participation and the flow of information and enhance children’s adjustment?
- How do families feel about or view the transition process? How, if at all, is feedback solicited?
- Are transition practices effective? How is effectiveness measured?
- How do we identify any gaps in services or duplication of efforts?

Transition is often viewed as a set of activities that occur at the beginning of the school year rather than as an ongoing process. According to a national survey of kindergarten teachers, the most common transition practices involve making contact with families after the start of school. According to families interviewed as a part of that same study, contact after the start of school was “too little and too late.” Quality transition practices occur before school starts and throughout the year (NCED, 1999).

Prior to the Start of School

Transition begins as families prepare their children for kindergarten. Ready Schools participate in that preparation process and may include:

- Sending school readiness materials to families in the spring prior to kindergarten. Materials may include a school handbook, family guide, content standards, children's and/or family books, book lists, information on how to obtain a library card, a "get ready for school" checklist, crayons and pencils;
- Providing class lists to teachers as early as possible to facilitate contact. It is nearly impossible to have a listing of all children prior to kindergarten entry, but connecting with the early childhood community is a way to determine some beginning kindergarteners;
- Making contact with families during the summer before school starts to welcome them to the community; Contact from the child's teacher and/or principal may be a telephone call, note, postcard or home visit;
- Holding open houses or pre-enrollment classroom visits for families and children in order for them to experience the school environment;
- Providing pamphlets or newsletters to families on what the school will expect of children and what families can do at home to prepare their children for school;
- Clearly communicating screening and/or kindergarten orientation dates and times and also conducting those events at times that are convenient for working families.



Family Guides

Family Guides may be developed to facilitate the understanding of:

- School-readiness skills;
- Developmental milestones of childhood;
- Academic standards and expectations;
- Health and nutrition.

During the School Year

Standard welcoming practices for children and families transitioning into the school throughout the course of the year help foster a sense of community and belonging. Some possibilities include:

- Providing a welcome packet containing materials that help families get to know the school and its programs and services, answer questions frequently asked by new families and convey an interest in family involvement;
- Contacting new families by telephone or in writing shortly after enrollment to ask how they and their children are doing;
- Hosting social events throughout the year, such as ice cream socials, family style dinners and school concerts. Setting aside time on the agenda to introduce and/or recognize new children and families;
- Assigning older students to show new students around the building and then following up for a month;
- Enlisting older students as peer mentors for younger children throughout the course of the school year;

- Profiling new families in the school newsletter;
- Welcoming new students during morning announcements throughout the year;
- Posting photographs and information about new families on the community bulletin board.

Grade-to-grade Transitioning

Just as kindergarten teachers have much to learn from a child's preschool experience, good transition practices provide time for grade-level-to-grade-level information sharing.

Additionally, as children transition from one grade level to the next, the school should ensure that policies are in place to address the following factors:

- *Heterogeneous grouping* – Information and data about children should be used to ensure that classrooms are balanced, with a range of achievement levels. Average and lower achieving students benefit from exposure to their higher achieving peers;
- *Alternatives to Retention* – Retention should not be an option. According to research, it "would be difficult to find another educational practice on which the evidence is so unequivocally negative" (Holmes, 1989). The effects of retention include less school enjoyment as reported by children, lower third-grade achievement test scores and higher drop out rates. Transitional kindergarten or first grade is retention (Southern Regional Education Board, 1994).

Intervention vs. Retention

Intervention strategies include:

- Intervention assistance teams;
- Before- and after-school programming;
- Peer mentoring;
- One-on-one tutoring;
- Summer school;
- Ability grouping.

2. Staff builds and refines professional relationships with the early childhood community on behalf of young children.

Some schools may have an established relationship with their early childhood community, while others may be in the beginning stages. Regardless of where the school is on the continuum, the connections are important because positive outcomes for students and families are certainly the end result. Opportunities to connect informally to establish relationships with early childhood education may include:

- *Preschool and kindergarten teachers visiting each other's classrooms during the school year;*
- *Preschool children visiting kindergarten classrooms, participating in planned activities, touring the building, having lunch in the cafeteria, and meeting kindergarten teachers and staff in order to have a better understanding of school routines;*
- *Preschool and kindergarten children taking common field trips;*
- *The school inviting preschool children and families to school activities such as holiday programs, plays, concerts, assemblies or other appropriate school activities;*
- *The school sending copies of its newsletters to preschools or preschool families, and preschools having opportunities to contribute items or articles*
- *The school inviting preschool staff members to school meetings when appropriate;*
- *The school informing preschools of kindergarten registration dates to encourage early registration by families;*
- *The school working with other organizations in the community to identify and make contact with families whose children do not attend preschools.*

Formal opportunities include:

- *Partnership agreements, contracts or memorandums of understanding – These formal agreements outline practices, responsibilities and timelines;*
- *Data sharing – Preschool programs share applicable screening and/or assessment data with the school to inform instructional practices or help identify children who may need intervention or support services;*
- *Academic expectations – The school shares kindergarten content, standards and expectations;*
- *Curriculum alignment – The school and preschool staffs work together to ensure educational continuity by aligning curriculum and instructional strategies;*
- *Professional development – The school and preschool staffs conduct joint professional development events.*

3. The school has a coordinated system of screening all kindergarten children.

Health and well-being are inextricably tied to the development and learning of children. Medical and developmental screenings prior to or as early as possible during the new school year will help identify issues that could impede a child's ability to learn. Subsequently, families, the school staff and other professionals can provide appropriate support.

Recommended health and developmental screenings include:

- *Hearing;*
- *Vision;*
- *Dental;*
- *Height and weight;*
- *Speech, language and English language skills;*
- *Gross and fine motor skills;*
- *General health history;*
- *Social and emotional skills;*
- *Developmental (indications of students' cognitive development, including literacy skills).*

Many preschool programs collect valuable screening information on children they serve. It can be extremely beneficial to take the time to establish an efficient and effective mechanism for sharing information and data about children's health and development history as they move from preschool to kindergarten.



Use of Screening Information

Screening results should be used to help shape instructional decisions, determine appropriate interventions and identify needed community-based services.

Principals ensure that staff members:

- *Have access to children's screening information;*
- *Have adequate planning time to discuss, analyze and determine children's needs.*

Principals help families:

- *Understand the purpose and the results of the screenings;*
- *Locate community-based resources and services, if needed. A directory of community-based services and resources, such as local health clinics, is one way to help families take appropriate action based on screening information;*
- *Complete paperwork and access services if needed.*

Important!

Information from screenings should not be used as the basis for keeping children out of school. Children who meet state age requirements for kindergarten entrance should be admitted to kindergarten.



Exemplary Work

Exemplary practice involves making transition part of the school's organizational structure and formal processes. The following series of activities indicates that a school has identified the potential benefits of easing all children's transition.

Building-Level Transition Coordinator

An exemplary practice is to identify a person whose primary responsibility is developing, coordinating, implementing and evaluating a building-level transition plan that includes strategies for:

- Reaching out to families prior to the start of school, including home visits;
- Coordinating and aligning efforts with the district;
- Connecting and coordinating efforts with preschool programs;
- Facilitating community involvement in transition, including volunteer participation.

Transition Team

The transition coordinator works cooperatively with a transition team. The transition team members may include, but are not be limited to, the following representatives:

- Preschool teachers and/or administrators;
- Building staff such as librarian, bus driver and cafeteria personnel;
- Kindergarten and other grade-level teachers;
- District representative(s);
- Community members;
- Families and other caregivers.

Building-level Transition Plan

The transition coordinator works with the transition team to develop a formal transition plan. Some components of the plan may include:

- A menu of transition practices;
- A timeline for transition activities;
- A grade-level-to-grade-level planning outline;
- A preschool-to-kindergarten planning schedule;
- Clear delegation of responsibilities for transition activities;
- A plan for transition activities to be measured, evaluated and refined.



Continuous Improvement

Effective practices are based on detailed planning and clearly defined objectives that have been developed in collaboration with a range of stakeholders. The effectiveness of the program is assessed in relation to these objectives. Evaluating and refining practices are ongoing and include a range of stakeholders.

- Survey data on transition is collected and analyzed at least once annually;
- Informal questionnaires are included in newsletters to families and other communications to identify potential issues and areas of improvement.

Final Check

- 👍 *Is the staff familiar with the research on transition?*
- 👍 *How does the staff work with families to ease transition?*
- 👍 *Are comprehensive screenings conducted and results communicated to families?*
- 👍 *How and when does the staff meet and/or communicate with the preschool community?*
- 👍 *Do staff members from different grade levels meet and plan instruction on a regular basis? Are preschool teachers included in this form of planning?*



School Profile

Stark County Educational Service Center, Canton, Ohio

Common Form, Increased Collaboration

Kindergarten teachers in Northeastern Ohio's Stark County know a great deal about their students' early literacy skills on the first day of school. Sometimes they even know such important facts as which children are terrified of thunderstorms or most likely to be unruffled by the important job of "table leader." Kindergarten teachers' valuable knowledge about their new students comes from a common transition form that preschool programs throughout Stark County provide to schools.

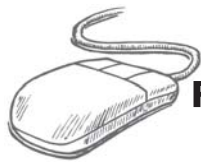
Kindergarten teachers did not always have such easy access to useful information about their students, however. In fact, lack of communication between schools and preschools used to be a common complaint in discussions of kindergarten transition, remembers Susan Tornabene-Keller, an early childhood education consultant on the staff of the Stark County Educational Service Center (ESC).

Keller says Corrine Doege, director of the Stark County ESC's early childhood programs, responded in 2005 by convening representatives of Head Start programs, public and private preschools, and elementary schools in the county's 17 school districts. Inspired by the opening remarks of Dr. Robert Pianta, one of the nation's foremost scholars in the area of transition, attendees began work on a common transition form that would provide receiving elementary schools with a consistently formatted profile of each child entering kindergarten. The resulting form includes a checklist of entry-level academic skills for preschool teachers to complete, as well as space for narrative information.

The communication process now begins every spring, when preschool programs send the forms to each district office. The districts then distribute the information to the appropriate elementary buildings. Stark County teachers say the forms play an important role in their instructional decisions.

Keller says the common transition form has led to other sharing of transition information and resources and also has led to collaboration. Preschool and kindergarten teachers in one district, for example, now meet for a whole day to talk about entering kindergarten students' strengths and needs. "Designing the form was an icebreaker," says Keller. "Now preschools and elementary schools are starting to establish ongoing relationships."

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Resources

- 1.** Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)
<http://www.ude.edu/bateman/acei/>
- 2.** Child Trends
<http://www.childtrends.org/>
- 3.** Foundation for Child Development
<http://www.fcd-us.org/>
- 4.** Get Ready to Read, National Center for Learning Disabilities
<http://www.getreadytoread.org/>
- 5.** Kids Count, Annie E. Casey Foundation
<http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/>
- 6.** National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health
<http://www.nccp.org/>
- 7.** National Association of Elementary School Principals
<http://naesp.org/>
- 8.** National Early Childhood Transition Center
<http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/nectc/>
- 9.** National Center for Early Development and Learning
<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nced/>
- 10.** SERVE Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
<http://www.terrifictransitions.org>

References

Bohan-Baker, M., & Little, P. M. D. (2002). The transition to kindergarten: A review of current research and promising practices to involve families. *Harvard Family Research Project*.

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/research/bohan.html>

A review of research literature on transition indicates that the more families feel welcomed and the more they are involved in a variety of meaningful transition activities, especially prior to their children entering kindergarten, the better children socially adjust and academically succeed.

Dockett, S., and Perry, B. (2001, Fall). Starting school: Effective transitions. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 3(3).

<http://www.ecrp.uiuc.edu/v3n2/dockett.html>

Includes widely referenced guidelines outlined through the Starting School Research Project in New South Wales, Australia.

Hale, D., Brown, G., & Amwake, L. (2004). Planning for terrific transitions (A guide for transitions-to-school-teams). Greensboro, NC: SERVE. Online.

<http://www.terrifictransitions.org>

Contains tools for planning and numerous strategies.

Holmes, C. T. (1989). Grade level retention effects: A meta-analysis of research studies. In L. A. Shepard and M. L. Smith (Eds.), *Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention* (pp.16-33). New York: Falmer Press.

Kraft-Sayre, M., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). *Enhancing the transition to kindergarten: Linking children, families & schools*. National Center for Early Development and Learning.

http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/resources/sps_resource_409.pdf

Reviews research on transition and provides guidelines and suggested strategies for supporting transition.

National Center for Early Development and Learning. (1999, Summer). *Research and policy brief: Transition to kindergarten*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedll/>

Responses to a national survey of nearly 3,600 kindergarten teachers by the National Center for Early Development & Learning indicate that nearly half of all children entering kindergarten experience some difficulties. A major barrier supporting children's transitions into kindergarten, according to respondents, is that class lists are generated too late. They also reported that lack of salary during the summer months, lack of school transition plans, and lack of time pose barriers.

Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. (1999). *The transition to kindergarten*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

A comprehensive review of transition research.

Pianta, R. C., & Kraft-Sayre, M. (2003). *Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families, and schools*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Contains guidance for developing a transition plan and provides a menu of transition activities.

Pianta, R. C., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Cox, M. E. (1999). Introduction: An ecological approach to kindergarten transition. In Robert C. Pianta & Martha J. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 3-12). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, described by Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox highlights the contexts and relationships that interact with each other and with the child during the transition from preschool to kindergarten. The model suggests that the child's relationships with family, teachers, peers and the community develop over time and influence how the child will adjust in school.

Ramey, C. T., & Ramey, S. L. (1999). Beginning school for children at risk. In Robert C. Pianta & Martha J. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 3-12). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

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United States Department of Education. (1993). Readiness for kindergarten: Parent and teacher beliefs. Statistics in brief. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. NCES 93-257.

<http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs93/web/93257.asp>.

A national survey of kindergarten teachers conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics showed that teachers defined children's school readiness as being physically healthy, being able to communicate verbally about needs and wants, and being curious and enthusiastic in approaching new activities. Parents are more likely to define readiness in academic terms, such as being able to count or recite the alphabet.



Kindergarten Readiness Checklist – A Family Resource

The Kindergarten Readiness Checklist was developed by the Ohio Department of Education, Office of Early Learning and School Readiness as a resource for families. Schools and/or programs may duplicate and disseminate to families as needed.



Kindergarten Readiness Checklist

To do well in school, children need to be supported and nurtured in all areas of development. It is also important that your child is physically, socially and emotionally ready for school. This checklist can help serve as your guide. But please remember, young children change so fast! If they cannot do something this week, you may see them do it a couple of weeks later.

Is your child ready for kindergarten? Ask yourself these questions:

Development Area	Tips and Activities to Help Prepare Your Child
<p>Physical Skills Does your child.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy outdoor play such as running, jumping, and climbing; • Draw and trace basic shapes; • Cut with scissors; • Bounce a ball; or • Ride a tricycle? 	<p>Limit TV time. Give your child time each day to play outdoors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materials that will help your child develop the motor skills needed to learn to write include crayons, markers, pencils, glue, scissors, paintbrushes, puzzles, legos and blocks. • Activities that will help your child's coordination include climbing, jumping skipping, playing ball, using playground equipment and riding a tricycle.
<p>Health and Safety Needs Has your child.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had required shots; • Had a dental exam; • Had a vision exam; • Learned own first and last name; • Learned first and last name of parent; • Learned to watch for cars when crossing the street; • Learned to not talk to strangers; • Developed a set routine for going to bed; • Learned to follow rules for safety? 	<p>Children need to be healthy in order for learning to occur. Make sure immunizations are up-to-date and your child has had a recent check-up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help your child learn their full name, address and telephone number. • Help your child to look both ways when crossing the street. • Talk with your child about strangers and who to go to for help. • Use bedtime as the opportunity to read to and talk with your child.
<p>Personal Needs Without your help, can your child.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the bathroom; • Wash hands; • Brush teeth; • Use tissue to blow nose; • Button and zip up shirts and pants; • Put on and take off coat; • Tie and/or Velcro shoes? 	<p>Encourage your child to try things they've learned before asking for help. Praise their attempts whether or not successful on the first try.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create morning and bedtime bathing and tooth-brushing routines. • Allow your child to dress themselves. • Practice putting shoes on. • Help your child learn to use their words to tell other grownups when they are feeling sick or hurt.
<p>Social and Emotional Skills Does your child.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play well with other children; • Separate from a parent without being upset; • Share with other children; • Care about the feelings of others; • Follow routines; • Put toys away when asked? 	<p>Your child needs to feel excited and comfortable about starting kindergarten. Talk with them about what to expect. Listen to their thoughts and ideas about school. Let them know that you are excited too!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your child small chores to learn responsibility. • Help your child learn to follow directions by giving simple steps. • Encourage your child to share. • Help your child understand when it's their turn to speak and when they should listen. • Praise your child when he or she does something well. • Provide guidance when your child is having difficulty. Ask them to talk with you about why and problem solve together.



Kindergarten Skills Checklist – A Common Tool for Program Administrators

This common tool was developed collaboratively between the early childhood and school communities in Stark County, Ohio. The form is completed by the early childhood staff for all children entering kindergarten and forwarded to the local receiving school district.



TRANSITION SKILLS SUMMARY

Student: _____ Name used by Child: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Sex: M / F Early Childhood Service Provider: _____

Parents: _____ Program Director/Title: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Person filling out this form /Title: _____

Family Structure: _____
(single parent, foster, etc.)

Any Suspected Disabilities? _____ Date Form Filled Out: _____

Special Education Services: Yes / No Name of Curriculum Used: _____

Existing Medical Conditions/Allergies: Yes / No

Please List: _____ Assessments Used: _____

Consent for Release of Information: _____

I give permission for _____ to share all information pertinent to the education
(Early Childhood Service Provider)

and safety of my child, _____ with _____
(Child's Name) (School District)

(Parent/Guardian Signature) (School District of Residence)

(Parent/Guardian Printed Name) (Elementary School)

(Date) Right Handed / Left Handed (please circle)

Sample of Name Written by Child:

Attendance Data: _____

Enrolled in program from _____ / _____ to _____ / _____ Attends regularly (please circle): Yes / No
Mo. Yr. Mo. Yr.

Comments: _____
School District

Copies: School District, Early Childhood Service Provider, Parent _____
(Date)

Student: _____

KEY: M = Most of the Time

D = Developing the Skill

N = Not at this Time

CLASSROOM SETTING

- _____ Works/plays independently for short periods
- _____ Follows classroom rules
- _____ Follows classroom daily routine
- _____ Attends for 5-10 minutes in a group setting
- _____ Uses restroom independently
- _____ Makes transition:
 - _____ • from home to school
 - _____ • throughout the building
 - _____ • within the classroom
 - _____ • when there are changes in the daily routine

SOCIAL

- _____ Cooperates with others during play
- _____ Works with others
- _____ Adjusts to changes in routine
- _____ Trusts adults: Yes / No
- _____ Demonstrates cooperative behavior:
 - _____ • turn taking (with children/with adults)
 - _____ • helping others
 - _____ • sharing
- _____ Demonstrates self-control:
 - _____ • waiting for a turn
 - _____ • keeping hands to self

COMMUNICATION

- _____ Responds when name is called
- _____ Communicates wants and needs
- _____ Uses intelligible speech
- _____ Verbally expresses feelings/emotions appropriately
- _____ Answers simple questions about a story
- _____ Follows simple directions
- _____ Recites first and last name when asked

PRE-ACADEMIC

- _____ Identifies colors: Red Blue Green Yellow
Orange Black Brown Purple (*circle known colors*)
- _____ Identifies shapes: Circle Square Triangle
Rectangle (*circle known shapes*)
- _____ Identifies and describes a picture
- _____ Recognizes first name in print
- _____ Recognizes letters in first name
- _____ Prints first name (sample on front)
- _____ Identifies words that begin with the same sound
- _____ Identifies words that rhyme
- _____ Sings simple songs/repeats rhymes
- _____ Identifies and names numerals 0-9
- _____ Counts using 1:1 correspondence to at least 5

MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

Gross Motor:

- _____ • Demonstrates ability to: hop jump climb
balance (*circle skills accomplished*)
- _____ • Demonstrates spatial awareness, position of body
in space

Fine Motor:

- _____ • Works appropriately with scissors
- _____ • Works appropriately with crayons, markers, pencils
- _____ • Works appropriately with puzzles, Legos, other
manipulatives
- _____ • Demonstrates awareness of spatial relationships
- _____ • Manages clothing independently

PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION

Comments: (Is there any information specific to this child that would assist the Kindergarten teacher?
Include information about successful teaching strategies, child's strengths, child's needs, etc.)



Transition Plan – Sample

The activities and timeline included in this sample have been modified from an actual local school district's transition plan. Activities and the month in which they occur should be adapted based on local needs.



Transition Plan

August

- *Get Ready for School* Program for incoming kindergarten students
- Kindergarten teachers send letters to incoming kindergarten students
- Kindergarten teachers call/visit kindergarten students
- Fourth summer mailing of book and activity packets to incoming kindergarten children
- Back to School night orientation meeting
- Kindergarten screenings and meetings with individual parents and children

September

- Hold a Transition-Readiness Committee meeting with community kindergarten teachers, preschool teachers, and program administrators
- Schedule visits of preschool and kindergarten teachers to each other's classrooms
- Determine students and activities for *Let's Talk* program; contact families to register.
- (*Let's Talk* is a program to teach parents ways to elicit oral language from their children, and to give children practice in oral language skills. The program runs for seven weeks, once per week)
- Transition surveys to parents asking for input on transition practices

October

- Readiness and Transition surveys to kindergarten teachers
- Readiness and Transition surveys to elementary principals
- Readiness and Transition surveys to preschool teachers
- Readiness and Transition surveys to preschool directors
- *Let's Talk* program continues

November

- Refinement of activities or process for next school year based upon survey results

December

- Refinement of activities or process for next school year based upon survey results

January

- Meet with kindergarten and title teachers to plan for spring and summer programming

February

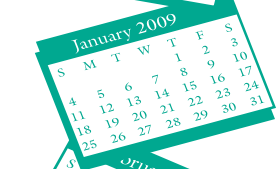
- Order materials for kindergarten registration gift packets for families
- Assemble registration gift packets and deliver to school buildings

March

- Hold a Transition-Readiness Committee meeting
- Deliver Common Transition forms to area preschools for information about incoming kindergarten children
- Meet with kindergarten teachers to plan *Let's Talk*, kindergarten visitations by classrooms and individually with parents, kindergarten screening, and *Get Ready for School* program
- Call preschools to give them dates of kindergarten registration

April

- Send postcards to all district residents reminding families about kindergarten registration
- Prepare Sign-up sheets for kindergarten visitations in May, which parents may sign up for at kindergarten registration
- Kindergarten registration
- Determine numbers of children registered during kindergarten registration
- Arrange for preschool classes to visit elementary buildings and kindergarten classes
- Letters to parents of children enrolled in speech therapy about summer speech opportunities



May

- Plan and purchase materials for summer mailings of books and related activities to incoming kindergarten children
- Arrange for buses to be at kindergarten visitations
- Kindergarten visitations

June

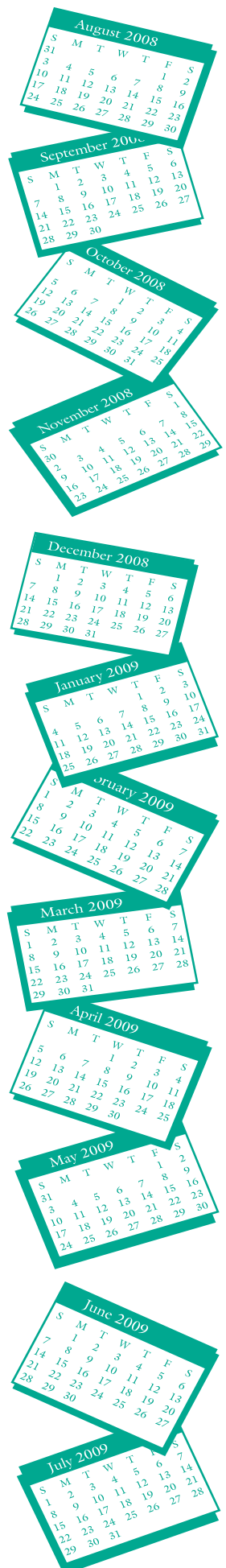
- Letters out to kindergarten parents about *Get Ready for School* registration. (*Get Ready for School* is a program conducted in August, prior to the beginning of school that introduces children to the school environment and staff, as well as covering social-emotional and standards-based opportunities for learning)
- First summer mailing of book and activity packets
- *SPARK Speech Spectacular* (A summer speech program--IEP's to Service Provider)
- Receive Common Transition Forms and deliver to correct building and teacher
- Review Ready Schools Activities with building principals

July

- Conduct *SPARK Speech Spectacular*
- Second summer mailing of book and activity packets
- Third summer mailing of book and activity packets
- Planning meeting for *Get Ready for School* program
- Prepare for Kindergarten Screening

Throughout the Year

- Send Elementary Newsletters to Preschools
- Invite preschool staff to in-service meetings/workshops of common interest
- Invite preschool students to assemblies at elementary school, as appropriate





Partnership Agreement -- Sample

Partnership Agreements can be used to define roles and responsibilities between the early childhood and the elementary school program staff. The purpose is to enhance collaboration and relationships; and coordinate an effective system of activities, policies and procedures between the early childhood and school program. The items in the agreement are examples and should be adapted to meet the individual needs of the community.



Partnership Agreement

This Partnership Agreement is made on _____
Month, Day, Year

Between _____ and _____
Elementary School Preschool Program

The duration of this Partnership Agreement is _____
Month, Day, Year through Month, Day, Year

The purpose of this Partnership Agreement is to establish the roles and responsibilities of each party in the service of children and their families as children enter kindergarten.

1. Responsibilities of the Preschool Program:

2. Responsibilities of the Elementary School:

3. Joint Responsibilities:

4. Resources (if applicable): Considerations include: transportation for children making site visits, professional development costs, supplies and/or meeting materials, announcements, newsletters, invitations and or refreshments for family gatherings, etc.,

Signature, Preschool Official Date

Signature, Elementary Official Date



3. Supportive Environments

Schools that are ready for all children recognize that safety, security, engagement and belonging can have a significant impact on students' attitudes toward learning and on their ability to pay attention, think and remember subject matter. Therefore, staff, families and communities in a Ready School support children's learning by creating a safe, healthy, pleasant environment.

A Ready School

1. **Creates a welcoming atmosphere;**
2. **Meets the individual needs of all children;**
3. **Promotes the physical and social-emotional well-being of all children.**

Key Understandings . . .

- **Healthy and supportive environments influence student achievement.**
- **Safe, clean and pleasant buildings and grounds affect learning in powerful ways.**
- **A building environment that is designed with children in mind supports learning.**
- **How a school staff interacts with students, families and one another demonstrates respect and caring.**
- **Children's learning and their social-emotional development are interdependent.**

connections

Leadership—Assessing and improving how the school environment affects student learning

Transitions—Easing transitions through positive relationships and surroundings

Standards, Instruction and Assessment—Creating surroundings that are conducive to academic learning

Diversity—Creating surroundings that are appropriate for a diverse range of abilities, languages, cultures and lifestyles

Home-School-Community Connections—Involving families and community members in making the school a great place for children

Adult Learning Community—Learning about how the surrounding environment affects student learning

Supportive Environments Self-Assessment

Instructions: Using the self-assessment tool below, rate your building practices using the following scale and document any evidence to support your rating for each item. Convene a team of administrators and teachers to reflect on and rate your building as a group. A rating of “1” indicates the work has not yet begun; a rating of “2” indicates the work has begun, but may not be fully implemented or exemplary; a rating of “3” indicates the work is implemented and exemplary. Mark “NI” if you need more information to rate your building.

Practice	1	2	3	NI
1. The school’s physical environment is clean and in good repair.				
Evidence				
2. Research related to the importance of the physical learning environment is known and used to make decisions.				
Evidence				
3. The learning atmosphere is warm and welcoming to children and families.				
Evidence				
4. The learning environment is designed to meet the needs of young children.				
Evidence				
5. Learning activities are designed with an understanding of the principles of how young children learn.				
Evidence				
6. Classroom materials are sufficient in quantity and are in good condition.				
Evidence				
7. The school promotes the physical well-being of children.				
Evidence				
8. The school promotes the social-emotional well-being of children.				
Evidence				

Follow-up: After you complete your self-assessment ratings, review your findings as a leadership team. For those areas receiving a rating of “1”, identify the steps you need to take to begin implementation, the resources needed, and timeline for accomplishing these steps. For those areas receiving a rating of “2”, identify what needs to happen to move your building practices to full implementation at the exemplary level. For those areas receiving a rating of “3”, congratulate yourselves and determine how you will maintain this same level of exemplary implementation.

The Ready School and Supportive Environments

The school environment is a critical factor in children's educational experience. Children thrive when they feel safe and believe that adults in the school care about them, have high expectations for their education and are there to provide the support essential to their success. The Ready School is a safe, nurturing and challenging environment where children and all members of the community benefit and succeed.

Laying the Groundwork

According to research, the significance of the physical learning environment cannot be underestimated. Physically unsafe, threatening or unhealthy conditions in a school clearly interfere with students' learning, but less noticeable conditions such as lighting, acoustics, air quality and ventilation also influence how well the brain functions. The school's physical environment can enhance or detract from learning. In addition, research is being used increasingly as the basis for designing learning environments and teaching techniques that are compatible with how children learn (Jensen, 2005). Finally, safety measures and a clean and well-maintained school convey a message of respect for children and their learning environment.

An Environment for Learning

- The school campus is clean and free of litter;
- Buildings, furniture and equipment are safe, clean, well organized and in good repair;
- Temperatures, lighting, ventilation and acoustics are controlled for comfort;
- Physical activity is provided, including play, dance and opportunities to take short breaks for stretching and movement;
- Natural lighting and opportunities to go outdoors are provided;
- Aesthetic stimulation is provided through fine arts instruction and the use of pleasant colors and décor in the school environment;
- Opportunities to learn in ways compatible with interests and learning styles are provided;
- Attention is given to the emotional climate;
- Positive relationships with adults and peers are evident.

Evaluating the School Environment

The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a software program to help schools evaluate and manage their school facilities, environment, and safety and health issues. The software can be downloaded free from the EPA website.



Getting to Work

1. *The school atmosphere is warm and welcoming.*

Staff welcomes all who walk through its doors with courtesy and respect. When the school creates such an atmosphere, children and their families are more likely to feel a sense of belonging, pride and attachment. Staff members demonstrate this by:

- Treating children, families and each other with respect, compassion and dignity;
- Making time to meet with families upon request and according to families' schedules;
- Returning telephone calls to families immediately;
- Modeling respect through word choice, nonverbal communication and actions;
- Helping families and children get to know the school by giving tours, sharing opportunities for activities and volunteerism, and introducing families to one another.

First Impressions

Visitors and new families get a sense of a school's culture immediately. What conclusions could a visitor draw about the school's environment based on what they see or how they are treated?

- Does someone greet visitors and acknowledge their presence in the building?
- Does a stroll through the building reveal teachers teaching and children engaged in learning?
- Do building displays reflect the culture and contributions of families?
- Does children's work show evidence of learning, self-expression and individuality?
- Are academic, athletic and artistic excellence represented equally?
- Do children and adults walk through the building with a sense of purpose?
- Do children treat each other with respect?
- Do staff members treat each other and children with respect?

2. The learning environment meets the individual needs of all children.

Children in preschool through third grade learn best in small groups. They learn and construct knowledge not only through teacher-directed instruction but also through direct sensory encounters with the world, often by seeking out activities that stretch and validate their thinking abilities.

The learning environment in a Ready School is designed to support the ways young children learn. It encourages children to explore, discuss and analyze to create meaning. It allows for movement and promotes collaboration among children. (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001).

Use of Time and Grouping Practices

Consider the following activities when determining how to design the learning environment to best meet children's needs:

- *Creating smaller class sizes to promote greater opportunity for individual interactions;*
- *Looping, so that a teacher is with the same class for more than one year;*
- *Scheduling time so that children can become absorbed in their learning experience without interruptions;*
- *Engaging children, especially children from diverse backgrounds, in cooperative learning projects to promote peer-to-peer friendships and networking;*
- *Providing time for children to express and expand upon their unique interests.*

Activities and Materials

- *Learning materials and objects encourage hands-on for manipulation;*
- *Activities are varied and hands-on;*
- *Books and materials represent the range of genres, are age appropriate and are in good repair;*
- *Books and materials are easily accessible for students with motor or visual disabilities;*
- *Assistive technology equipment is available for children who need it;*
- *Whole-group, small-group and individual activities are balance;*
- *Opportunities are provided for child choice.*

3. The school promotes the physical and social-emotional well-being of children.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) has called for the education community to engage “the whole child” (2007). In addition to a challenging curriculum, ASCD calls for a “healthy and emotionally supportive climate.” ASCD has developed an online “Grade Your School and Community” questionnaire that provides immediate feedback as well as tips according to the results.



Physical Well-being

Ready Schools support children's healthy development. They adopt local school wellness policies that address healthy eating and physical activity. Recognizing children's biological drive to use their physical skills and benefit from physical activity, the staff follows the National Association for Sports and Physical Education's recommendations that school-age children:

- *Should be engaged in 60 minutes or more of physical activity every day;*
- *Should avoid periods of inactivity lasting two hours or more.*

As a result, children are more alert and engaged as teachers provide high quality instruction.

School Nutrition Facts

Schools play a major role in children's physical health and nutrition habits. Since 1980, obesity rates have doubled in children and tripled in adolescents (Ogden et al., 2002). An effective nutrition and wellness policy can help students learn the skills they need to make healthy choices.

The Child Nutrition and WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Reauthorization Act of 2004 required that, each school district participate in the National School Lunch Program by the first day of the school year in 2006.

To assist school districts as they create policies, the School Nutrition Association developed model guidelines. The guidelines allow for flexibility in designing policies to meet unique school characteristics, including school size, multicultural populations, rural versus urban schools, language differences, financial issues and other community variants. The guidelines include multiple strategies and online resources.



Social-emotional Well-being

Effective, lasting academic and social-emotional learning is built upon caring relationships and warm but challenging classrooms and school environments. Research shows that social-emotional skills can be taught to children and that the climate those skills help create in classrooms and schools improves academic learning (Kriete & Bechtel, 2002).

Practical applications include:

- Greeting all students by name when they enter the school or classroom;
- Beginning and/or ending the school day with brief periods of time for children to reflect on what they have learned recently and what they might want to learn next;
- Creating classroom rules that recognize positive behavior such as cooperation, caring, helping, encouragement and support, and ensuring that discipline rules and procedures are clear, firm, fair and consistent;
- Showing interest in children's personal lives outside the school;
- Using preventative methods to discuss ways of handling conflict before it happens, such as asking children how they calm themselves down when they are upset or teaching them self-calming strategies and reminding them to use those strategies when they encounter frustrating or difficult situations.

Committee for Children, developer of the Second Step program, is a nonprofit organization seeking to improve children's lives by providing research-based violence prevention, anti-bullying, child abuse prevention for schools, families and communities. The program starts at preschool and continues through middle school, to support social and emotional learning across the school district.

5

The work of creating supportive environments is all-encompassing, and it will never be finished. Moreover, it is difficult to isolate definitive evidence that a clean classroom, a friendly note to a parent, an hour spent helping two children resolve a dispute, or the smile, song, game or individual attention that were woven through the fabric of the school day made a difference in academic outcomes. It is more intuitive than analytical. But while the power of supportive environments cannot always be measured, a Ready School knows it is real.



Exemplary Work

Social-emotional Learning Education

This section has emphasized the importance of a school's physical and social-emotional climate. A next step toward exemplary practice is to create a comprehensive program to promote social-emotional learning (SEL). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) recommends:

1. School-based interventions such as programs to reduce bullying and lessons that explicitly teach respect and cooperation;
2. After-school programs that provide positive activities and emphasize personal and social development;
3. Family programs.

Studies show a range of positive outcomes for these interventions, including improved academic performance, reduced numbers of disciplinary actions and reduced incidents of aggression (Elias & Arnold, 2006).



Final Check

- 👍 ***Are the building and campus clean, safe, and academically stimulating?***
- 👍 ***Is the atmosphere warm and welcoming to families of all cultures?***
- 👍 ***Does the school environment tell the story of its students and their positive relationships with peers, family and community?***
- 👍 ***Are classroom environments rich with opportunities for learning and discovery?***
- 👍 ***Are classrooms modified for students with special needs?***
- 👍 ***Are classrooms designed to meet the learning needs of young children?***
- 👍 ***Does the school environment nurture children's social-emotional well-being?***



School Profile

Everyone Speaks to Everyone

Everyone Speaks to Everyone

“Good morning, Skyview family!” That simple daily greeting speaks volumes about the climate experienced by the 760 students at Skyview Elementary, a Title I preschool-through-fifth-grade school in Lizella, Georgia. “Family” expresses not only the staff’s commitment to a supportive climate but also the support children give to one another. “When you walk through the hallways, you can feel the warmth,” says former principal Gail Gilbert. “Everyone talks to everyone.” Gilbert assumed the principalship when the school was established in 2002 and was reassigned to Rutland High School in 2007.

The concept of family plays a vital role in how the school is organized and operated.

Gilbert says her Skyview staff visited families at home during the summer before the new school opened and still makes contact through phone calls or visits with every family at the start of the school year. Each student is connected to a multi-grade “family” that is identified by special colors, a “buddy” in his or her own class and a student in an older “buddy class.” Lunch tables are like an extension of home; students take turns serving as hosts and a school-wide “book of the month” provides a topic of conversation.

A character education program that includes engaging lessons designed by staff and a culture-and-climate team that meets monthly and interacts with other “school effectiveness” teams play important roles in keeping the family spirit at the forefront.

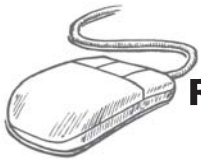
Despite its increased size, the school has kept the number of disciplinary incidents below the baseline levels established before it opened in 2002, and the school’s performance on state tests is strong. The Character Education Partnership has also honored Skyview as a 2007 National School of Character.

Contact: Gail Gilbert, Principal,
Rutland High School (Formerly Skyview Elementary)
(478) 779-3100
Ggilbert.rutlandhs@bibb.k12.ga.us

Action Planning Form - Use this form to outline next steps for each section

Priority	Action	Resource (\$)	Needed	Timeline

Notes:



Resources

- 1.** Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Grade Your School and Community Questionnaire
<http://www.wholechildeducation.org/grade/>
- 2.** A U.S. Department of Education crisis planning guide
<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf>
- 3.** A template, training and other resources for crisis planning
<http://www.ebasedprevention.org/>
- 4.** Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning
<http://www.casel.org/>
- 5.** Committee for Children
<http://www.cfchildren.org>
- 6.** National Education Association – School safety guide and other resources
<http://www.nea.org/schoolsafety/nearesources-schoolsafety.html>
- 7.** The Environmental Protection Agency, HealthySEAT
<http://www.epa.gov/schools.healthyseat/basicinformation.html>
- 8.** School Nutrition Association Guidelines
<http://www.schoolnutrition.org>
- 9.** Collaborative for the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
<http://www.casel.org>
- 10.** Jensen Learning, Brain-Based Learning Quiz
<http://www.jlcbrain.com/BBLearn/quiz.asp>
- 11.** Environments for Learning
http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/learning_environments/front_lrnenvironments.htm

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- Chan, T. C., & Petrie, G. (1998). The brain learns better in well-designed school environments. *Classroom Leadership (Online)*, (2), 3. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Outlines the characteristics of a physical school environment that is designed to promote learning.
- Deal, T., & Peterson, K. (1993). Strategies for building school cultures: Principals as symbolic leaders. In M. Sashkin, & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *Educational leadership and school culture* (pp. 89-99). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
- Elias, M. J., & Arnold, H. (2006). *The educator's guide to emotional intelligence and academic achievement: Social-emotional learning in the classroom*. CA: Corwin Press.
- Explains eight elements of SEL that create a strong connection with academic learning.
- Jensen, E. (2005). *Teaching with the brain in mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Provides practical techniques for applying brain research in the classroom.
- Jensen, E., with Dabney, M. (2000). *Learning smarter: The new science of teaching*. San Diego, CA: The Brain Store.
- Provides an overview of the research that informs brain-based learning.
- Katch, J. (2003, September). On listening to children. *Educational Leadership*, 61(1), 62-64.
- Explores how, by listening to kindergarten students involved in a dispute and analyzing their conversation, a teacher helped them become more open, more willing to see other points of view and more able to compromise.
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Provides a process for gathering data about professional collaboration, efficacy and other aspects of a positive school culture.

National Association of Elementary School Principals. (2001). *Standards for quality elementary schools: Kindergarten through eighth grade*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Simmons, S. (1995, December). Drawing as thinking. *Think Magazine*, 23-29.

Wessler, S. L. (2003). It's hard to learn when you're scared. *Educational Leadership*, 61(1), 40-43.

Describes how teachers can become more aware of harassment, create a classroom climate in which every student feels respected and make it clear that harassment is unacceptable.

4. Standards, Instruction and Assessment

It is imperative that schools hold high expectations for all students regardless of their age, ethnicity, gender, special needs or socio-economic status. If schools are to be successful in addressing an achievement gap, they must provide high quality instruction designed to meet the needs of each child whenever and however they arrive at the school door.

A Ready School

1. Ensures curriculum, assessment and instruction are standards-based and are vertically and horizontally aligned preschool through the elementary grades;
2. Delivers high quality, research-based instruction, according to the individual needs of children;
3. Uses assessment data to increase the effectiveness of instruction and learning experiences.

Key Understandings . . .

- Using academic standards as the starting point for all learning experiences is imperative.
- Aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment with standards and mapping curriculum and assessment provide continuity young children need.
- Using formative assessment to refine instruction and provide individualized support helps ensure that children make continuous academic progress.

connections

Leadership—Increasing clarity about what it means to teach all children effectively

Transitions—Supporting transition through continuity in teaching and learning

Supportive Environments—Creating surroundings that are conducive to learning

Diversity—Providing instruction that is appropriate for a diverse range of abilities, languages, cultures and lifestyles

Home-School-Community Connections—Helping families and communities support student learning

Adult Learning Community—Learning to improve practice based on classroom assessment results

Standards, Instruction and Assessment Self-Assessment

Instructions: Using the self-assessment tool below, rate your building practices using the following scale and document any evidence to support your rating for each item. Convene a team of administrators and teachers to reflect on and rate your building as a group. A rating of “1” indicates the work has not yet begun; a rating of “2” indicates the work has begun, but may not be fully implemented or exemplary; a rating of “3” indicates the work is both implemented and exemplary. Mark “NI” if you need more information to rate your building.

Practice	1	2	3	NI
1. Staff members are knowledgeable about state academic content standards.				
Evidence				
2. Teachers have regularly scheduled planning time across and within grades.				
Evidence				
3. School staff members have a common understanding of formal and informal assessment practices.				
Evidence				
4. Teachers use data to understand their teaching practices and work toward more effective strategies.				
Evidence				
5. Teachers set learning goals that align to the standards and share those goals with students.				
Evidence				
6. Staff members have mapped the curriculum across the grades and use the academic content standards to vertically align instructional experiences.				
Evidence				
7. Teachers use formative assessment to monitor progress toward meeting grade-level indicators and convey clear expectations to students and families.				
Evidence				
8. Teachers analyze assessment results to evaluate and improve their lessons and to design instructional strategies.				
Evidence				
9. Teachers deliver research-based lessons and inform students about the skills they will be learning.				
Evidence				
10. Teachers for each grade use assessment mapping to align instruction to assessment.				
Evidence				
11. Teachers engage in collaborative discussions and demonstrations designed to enhance their knowledge base about teaching and learning.				
Evidence				

Follow-up: After you complete your self-assessment ratings, review your findings as a leadership team. For those areas receiving a rating of “1”, identify the steps you need to take to begin implementation, the resources needed, and timeline for accomplishing these steps. For those areas receiving a rating of “2”, identify what needs to happen to move your building practices to full implementation at the exemplary level. For those areas receiving a rating of “3”, congratulate yourselves and determine how you will maintain this same level of exemplary implementation.

The Ready School and Standards, Instruction and Assessment

Young children learn best when they are provided with meaningful instructional experiences that build upon and connect to their previous experiences and everyday lives. Naturally curious, young children work and play to make sense of the world around them. Their learning style in kindergarten and the early grades lends itself to an integrated approach to curriculum rather than a content-specific preschool approach.

Laying the Groundwork

To ensure that young children are provided optimal learning experiences, staff members need to understand the principles of child development and learning. In addition, staff must be clear about academic expectations, the value of sound assessment practices for young children and effective instructional strategies.

Principles of Child Development

Children learn and grow in an integrated manner.

Children learn best when their physical and emotional needs are met and they feel safe and secure. The child's self-image strongly affects his or her eagerness to learn and ability to do so.

Children learn through active engagement and through conversation and dialogue concerning their experiences.

Young children are concrete learners who construct knowledge based on direct sensory experiences. For children, play is serious work.

All children can learn and, in appropriate settings, want to learn. Children are persistent, curious and creative; they want very much to make sense of their world.

Children learn quickly when material is presented in meaningful ways at appropriate times. Children learn best when actively involved in activities they have a role in initiating.

Children exhibit different learning styles. Classrooms should offer multi-sensory experiences and opportunities to choose from a variety of materials appropriate to their individual learning styles. Cultural and linguistic diversity should be viewed as opportunities to expand children's learning.

Children grow and develop through predictable stages, but at individual rates. Learning is not a lockstep, linear progression; effective schools and classrooms must respond to the unique needs and learning styles of different children.

Adapted from: Continuity of Learning for Four-to-Seven-Year-Old Children, Southern Early Childhood Association, Little Rock, Arkansas

It is critical that staff members be provided time to collectively examine their practices and beliefs. Staff members should know and understand:

- The academic standards for the grade they teach, as well as standards for the previous and succeeding grades;
- The extent to which standards build upon one another from one grade level to the next;
- Early childhood learning standards and how they align to school-age standards;
- The importance of examining their underlying beliefs about the purposes of assessment and the usefulness of the information;
- The need to use frequent and embedded assessments to guide instruction and monitor progress;
- A wide array of effective instructional strategies designed to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Assessing Young Children

Assessments for young children are:

*Artifacts of children's understanding
Ongoing and embedded
Aligned to academic standards
Used to inform instructional practice*

Assessments for young children are not:

*Pen-and-pencil tests
Infrequent events
Narrative and unfocused
Used to judge children's abilities*

Authentic assessments for young children include:

- Observations
- Ongoing documentation of children's work
- Running and narrative records
- Interviews with children and their families



Getting to Work

A Ready School uses academic standards to make decisions about the content knowledge and skills to be taught. The curriculum content and learning experiences are seamless, both horizontally and vertically. This means the instruction that children receive in a typical day is integrated across subject areas so that key content and skills are reinforced. It also means that instruction in each grade builds upon what was learned in earlier grades and lays a strong foundation for subsequent grades.

1. Curriculum, assessment and instruction are standards-based and are vertically and horizontally aligned, from preschool through the elementary grades.

Ready Schools work with the preschool community to align early childhood and school-age standards, as well as to define instructional strategies that would systematically help children progress. Suggestions for working together include:

- Developing curriculum maps based on early learning and school-age academic standards;
- Identifying any curricular gaps or redundancies;
- Determining key areas for vertical alignment of standards-based lessons from preschool through grade three;
- Developing lessons and assessments to share within grade levels;
- Sharing assessment data to develop uniform teaching strategies.



Ready Schools make standards-based education accessible by:

- Using family-friendly language rather than edu-speak;
- Using graphic representations to depict learning goals;
- Addressing how learning goals are a part of everyday routines.

Ready Schools provide families with standards in family-friendly form. Suggestions include:

- Publishing family-friendly standards for display in locations where families gather;
- Conducting “meet and greet” events for families at the beginning of the school year covering the grade-level standards, expectations and grading rubrics;
- Sending families the grade-level standards before the school year begins, along with ideas about how they can engage their children in supporting activities at home;
- Sharing kindergarten standards with the preschool community and the parents they serve.

2. High quality, standards-based instruction is delivered according to the needs of individual children.

Standards frame the learning experiences. Teachers inform children daily about the skills they will be developing, and learning expectations are clearly worded so that children and their families understand them. Assessments are integrated and are progressively challenging and provide children with numerous opportunities to demonstrate mastery of grade-level indicators and to monitor their own progress. Ready School leaders ensure that:

- A process is in place to help teachers develop standards-based lessons;
- Teachers have opportunities to share their best lesson plans with colleagues;
- Lessons that integrate instruction with assessment are used as models;
- Case studies and scenarios are used to analyze and address instructional challenges and explore effective interventions;
- Scaffolds and pathways to learning are provided to build students’ skills in weak areas, engage students who are uninterested and challenge students who are exceeding standards.

Lesson Study

The Japanese method of lesson study begins with teachers working together to develop a “research lesson.” One teacher then teaches the lesson while the others observe the teaching and learning that occur. Finally, the group shares its observations and works to improve the lesson until it is exemplary.



Effective teachers use their knowledge of children’s learning styles and differing abilities to differentiate their instruction. Ask staff to consider the following questions and engage them in conversation about evidence supporting their answers:

- Are my students fully engaged in the learning activities I provide? How do I know this to be true?
- How do standards-driven lessons differ from those that are topic driven?
- To what extent am I confident that the strategies I use are the most effective? How do I know they are effective in outcome and design?
- What tools or resources do I need to help me meet the diverse needs of my learners?
- How do I determine the learning styles of my children, and how will I use this information in my instructional practices?

3. Assessment data is used to increase the effectiveness of instruction.

Assessment is not an event. It is a process for knowing what students know and how they come to know it. The process of sound, useful assessment for young children requires that the staff develop strategies to determine the extent to which students are progressing toward learning goals in ways that are seamlessly woven into classroom activities. Assessments serve to inform instructional practices. They are also used to communicate progress to students and their parents. The challenge is to be able to gauge the relative strength of currently used assessments and to establish a robust, consistent and appropriate assessment system from preschool through grade three.



Assessment Design

Using assessment data. Staff members:

- Work to align preschool and kindergarten assessments;
- Share assessment results between and among preschool, kindergarten and succeeding teachers;
- Implement a balanced assessment system that includes ongoing classroom-based assessments of children's progress and standardized measures;
- Integrate assessments with teaching;
- Assure that assessments match the learning goals;
- Develop formative classroom assessments to support learning and monitor progress;
- Evaluate student work using rubrics that are developed collaboratively among teachers.

Teacher Practices of Embedding Assessment Strategies

- Keeping running records of specific skills exhibited by students;
- Documenting detailed observations of specific children or groups while children are engaged in learning tasks;
- Using tools such as checklists to guide observation and make data collection easier and more efficient;
- Involve students in monitoring their own progress.

Effective Use of Assessment Data: Guiding Questions

- What does children's work tell us about their response to instruction?
- Errors or misunderstandings may be linked to the instruction children received. What does this mean for instruction?
- What further evidence is needed that children have met the targeted indicators or benchmarks?
- What alternative strategies can be used to increase learning?
- Is staff guided to use assessment data to drive decisions about how to better differentiate their instruction?

Student Involvement

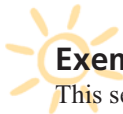
Children are an integral part of assessment practices. They enjoy monitoring and seeing tangible examples of their progress. Make sure that children are:

- Provided with descriptive feedback about their performance;
- Supported in monitoring their own progress and reflecting on their learning. Children can document their own progress by selecting favorite examples of their own work and by charting or graphing skill acquisition.

Administrative Support

School leaders support the system of assessment by assuring that:

- Staff members have time to analyze and share results regularly;
- Staff members meet regularly with the preschool community to share data and discuss implications;
- School-wide improvement activities are guided by assessment data;
- Decisions about professional development priorities are based on student assessment data;
- Plans to improve learning outcomes in key areas are in place;
- Resources are allocated based on needs identified through assessment.



Exemplary Work

This section has emphasized the seamless integration of standards, instruction and assessment into daily practice. We can achieve high quality outcomes when key stakeholders collectively design and systematically evaluate how well the standards-instruction-assessment chain is being implemented. Moreover, developing processes with preschool providers potentially could serve to align efforts and aid in communications. Some ideas for driving collaboration and focusing on the quality of the instructional program being delivered include:

- *Creating an assessment panel to review and critique teacher-made assessments for clarity, alignment and level of rigor;*
- *Developing common assessment tools such as observation records, anecdotal records and portfolios spanning from preschool to kindergarten and from one grade level to the next;*
- *Replacing the “typical” report card with an aligned, standards-based progress report that has been designed collaboratively by teachers and families of students in all grades;*
- *Using cross-disciplinary teams to engage learners and teach in an integrated manner;*
- *Making instructional coaches available to teachers to provide fresh ideas and guidance and also to model instructional practices;*
- *Videotaping and viewing lessons with teachers in a collegial environment as means of exploring opportunities for professional growth and capturing excellence.*

Final Check

- 👉 *Are standards the basis for lesson planning and assessment design?*
- 👉 *Do teacher teams align curriculum, lessons and learning experiences with standards?*
- 👉 *Is assessment data used to adjust teaching and to provide helpful feedback to children?*
- 👉 *Do preschool through third-grade staff share standards-based lessons and assessments*
- 👉 *Do children and their families have a clear understanding of academic expectations at each level?*



School Profile

Dorr Street Elementary School, Springfield Township, Ohio

The Power of Inclusion

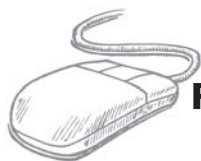
“Playing catch-up” with first- and second-graders whose literacy skills were below grade level was how Title I reading teachers Denise Walsh and Amanda Schlageter once spent the bulk of their days at Dorrr Street Elementary School. With 74 percent of students finishing kindergarten at Level 3 or below on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) in 2000, the need for remediation was urgent in this School-wide Title I building on the outskirts of Toledo. But as the two teachers worked with first-graders and examined DRA data, they began to explore a new possibility. “Most students’ reading problems did not seem to stem from developmental delays or learning disabilities,” says Schlageter. “We became convinced that they just needed accelerated literacy instruction in kindergarten.”

The ideal starting point for identifying students at risk for reading problems was the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L), a screening assessment that Ohio schools administer to all entering kindergarten students in late summer or early fall. The KRA-L is used to identify students who will need extra help with oral language, letter recognition, rhyming and other early literacy skills. Walsh and Schlageter developed a program for students in the lower range of KRA-L scores that included doubling the amount of reading instruction they received and using detailed performance monitoring to design highly individualized intervention. “It is a complete inclusion model,” says Walsh. “We are in the kindergarten classroom working closely with the teachers.” She says first-grade teachers also have modified their reading instruction to ensure continuity.

Because of Principal Ken Newbury’s emphasis on progress monitoring, benchmarking and action research, the school has seven years of performance data that he describes as “evidence for the power of inclusion.” His steadfast focus on data and research-based strategies also lays the groundwork for continuous improvement: “Our ultimate goal is a DRA score of 4 or higher for every entering first-grader,” he says. “Research shows that students who enter first grade at DRA Level 4 or greater have a 90 percent chance of meeting the first-grade standards.”

Prospects look promising. In 2007, only 7 percent of the school’s entering first-graders scored below DRA Level 3, and 73 percent scored at Level 4 or above. Moreover, the school’s performance on Ohio’s 2007 third-grade achievement test in reading was at 92.4 percent, which is well above the district and state averages.

Contact: Dr. Ken Newbury, Principal
Dorr Street Elementary School
(419) 867-5661



Resources

- 1.** Center for Public Education—Concise information on scheduling and use of time in schools
<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org>
- 2.** Janet Hale's Curriculum Mapping 101
<http://www.curriculummapping101.com/>
- 3.** Japanese Lesson Study
<http://www.lessonresearch.net/res.html>
- 4.** Richard Stiggins, Assessment Training Institute of the Educational Testing Service
<http://www.assessmentinst.com>
- 5.** SERVE Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro—Assessment Resources
<http://www.serve.org/Assessment/>
- 6.** Understanding By Design Exchange
<http://www.ubdexchange.org/>
- 7.** Ways of Knowing (Reggio)
Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement—Alternative scheduling research and practical information
<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei/>

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- Dean, C. B., & Bailey, J. A. (2003). *A report documenting the process for developing an integrated standards-based instructional unit*. Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Examines principles and processes for developing and implementing standards-based lessons.
- Jacobs, H. H. (Ed.). (2004). *Getting results with curriculum mapping*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Describes how to plan a mapping project and integrate it with data-driven decisions and school improvement planning.
- Kowal, J., & Steiner, L. (2007, September). Instructional coaching. *Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement Issue Briefs*.
- Defines and describes instructional coaching, reviews research on effective coaching and provides guidelines for school leaders. <http://www.centerforcsri.org>
- Lewis, C. (2002). *Lesson study: A handbook of teacher-led instructional change*. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Better Schools.
- Outlines the key ideas of Japanese lesson study and provides practical tools and resources for groups using the approach.
- Marzano, R., Pickering, D., & Pollock, J. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Identifies nine categories of instructional strategies for maximizing student learning and provides research background and guiding principles for each strategy.
- O'Shea, M. (2005). *From standards to success*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Examines the principles and processes for developing and implementing standards-based lessons.
- Stiggins, R., Arter, J., Chappuis, S., & Chappuis, J. (2007). *Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right-using it well*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Presents a rationale for classroom-based assessment that enhances learning and provides guidelines.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Curriculum and Supervision.
- Provides strategies for differentiating instruction, assessment and the learning environment to meet the needs of all students.
- Udelhofen, S. (2005). *Keys to curriculum mapping: Strategies and tools to make it work*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- A practical reference on curriculum mapping that includes tools and templates.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Describes a coherent process of designing curriculum, instruction and assessment that promotes understanding.

5. Diversity

A diverse student population includes families and children of different ethnicities, languages and cultural traditions; varied learning, physical and cognitive abilities; and disparities in the earlier educational experiences that preceded kindergarten entry. When schools are ready for all children, they work to ensure that learning is engaging and successful for all children, regardless of differences.

A Ready School

1. Bridges children's home and school cultures, languages and traditions;
2. Responds to the unique differences among children;
3. Provides learning experiences that are culturally relevant.

Key Understandings . . .

- When discontinuities exist between school and home culture, the school staff can build bridges.
- Every aspect of the learning environment can be adapted to meet the needs and cultures of all children.
- Children respond best to learning experiences that build on their individual, family and cultural strengths.

connections

Leadership—Considering all sub-groups in continuous improvement planning

Transitions—Considering children's cultures in easing transition

Supportive Environment—Reflecting the arts, traditions and values of all cultures in the school environment

Standards, Instruction and Assessment—Creating surroundings that are conducive to academic learning

Home-School-Community Connections—Working with families and community groups to reflect and celebrate diversity

Adult Learning Community—Learning about other cultures and how to teach diverse students

Diversity Self-Assessment

Instructions: Using the self-assessment tool below, rate your building practices using the following scale and document any evidence to support your rating for each item. Convene a team of administrators and teachers to reflect on and rate your building as a group. A rating of “1” indicates the work has not yet begun; a rating of “2” indicates the work has begun, but may not be fully implemented or exemplary; a rating of “3” indicates the work is implemented and exemplary. Mark “NI” if you need more information to rate your building.

Practice	1	2	3	NI
1. Staff understands the research on culture and diversity and its effect on student achievement.				
Evidence				
2. Staff is knowledgeable about the different cultures from which their children come.				
Evidence				
3. Formal and informal structures are in place to solicit information from families regarding home culture.				
Evidence				
4. Staff differentiates instruction for all children when needed.				
Evidence				
5. Staff utilizes the principles of Universal Design for Learning.				
Evidence				
6. Staff utilizes research-based methods for working with English language learners.				
Evidence				
7. Staff understands the effects of poverty on children and works to minimize the effects.				
Evidence				
8. All children have individualized learning plans.				
Evidence				

Follow-up: After you complete your self-assessment ratings, review your findings as a leadership team. For those areas receiving a rating of “1”, identify the steps you need to take to begin implementation, the resources needed, and timeline for accomplishing these steps. For those areas receiving a rating of “2”, identify what needs to happen to move your building practices to full implementation at the exemplary level. For those areas receiving a rating of “3”, congratulate yourselves and determine how you will maintain this same level of exemplary implementation.

The Ready School and Diversity

A Ready School respects and values the diversity of its student population. Because staff members believe that all children come to school ready to learn, they seek ways to engage every student and to identify and build on strengths as well as to adapt instruction and assessment to each student's needs. They create a caring environment where every child belongs and contributes. They view differences among students as opportunities to expand understanding, explore perspectives and share new experiences.

Laying the Groundwork

The quality of relationships with teachers plays an important role in the achievement of diverse student populations. Getting to know each child as an individual is the heart of a caring relationship (Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1992; Rice, 2001). In schools with diverse populations, this may mean:

- Learning about various cultures and how to communicate with children who speak limited English;
- Learning about different ethnicities;
- Observing carefully and waiting patiently in order to provide the appropriate type and amount of support that a child with a disability needs;
- Looking closer at "disruptive" behaviors and asking how they may be related to the child's home or neighborhood;
- Seeking good intentions and powerful lessons in each family's approach to parenting and sharing their perspectives whenever possible;
- Rejecting labels and stereotypes.

Questions to Consider

Important questions for staff to reflect on and discuss while examining achievement data on culturally responsive instruction include:

- How can children's diverse backgrounds become rich sources of information for teaching and learning and vital supports for social, emotional and academic development?
- How do teachers' personal beliefs influence curricular decisions and teaching?
- Are there biases that affect language and behavior with children and families?
- How can preconceived ideas and misunderstandings be made visible to staff?
- Are certain children and families excluded or treated differently from others, for example, children with disabilities or low socio-economic-level families?
- Do staff members have the knowledge and skills to effectively deal with diverse students and their families? What training or professional development is needed and provided?

Getting to Work

1. The school bridges children's home and school cultures.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1995) encourages schools to "recognize that all children are cognitively, linguistically and emotionally connected to the language and culture of their home." The greater the degree of discontinuity between the behaviors and practices in school and those in a child's home, the more teachers must find ways to build bridges that will allow students to connect to both.

Communication

Families are the most important information source about how to meet the needs of their children. Utilize families as a resource by:

- Translating written and oral communications;
- Training bilingual parent mentors and volunteers to help work with families;
- Engaging families in conversation as early as possible about their hopes and aspirations for their children, their sense of what their children need and suggestions about ways teachers can help;
- Conducting a needs assessment or survey to determine what families expect of the school community. Provide the survey in all families' first languages;
- Creating a family and staff committee that meets regularly to support ongoing dialogue about diversity to enhance the school community.

Understanding and Acceptance of Differences

According to Ladson-Billings (1994), "If teachers pretend not to see students' racial and ethnic differences, they really do not see the students at all and are limited in their ability to meet their educational needs." The staff in a Ready School discovers and explores the uniqueness of each student in an open and accepting way. Some ideas include:

- Learning more about the language, daily rituals and customs that students practice at home, and incorporating them in the school routine and environment when possible;
- Explaining the significance and value of practices in a student's culture to other students;
- Exploring ideas of acceptable behavior and discipline with families and finding common approaches when possible;
- Asking families to share their culture and heritage by creating displays in common areas of the school from which all can learn;
- Asking families to speak to classrooms or at school functions about the nature of their cultures and experiences.

Diversity Projects

Trace children's foreign-born ancestry and create images that respect each family's origins. Use the images to create a quilt, mosaic or display in the school hallway or auditorium.

Create a cultural heritage exhibit featuring art, artifacts and histories of the diverse races, cultures and nationalities that are part of the school's community.

Add a second language section to the school newsletter.

2. The school responds to the unique differences among children.

Ready Schools honor and respect differences among children, but they also recognize that children at risk due to disabilities, limited English language skills and poverty require not only understanding and acceptance but also additional support. Ready Schools develop strategies for preventing such differences from adversely affecting children's success as learners.

Children with Disabilities

A Ready School ensures that children who are identified with a disability are full members of the classroom educationally and socially. Teachers provide differentiated instruction to support each student's ability to access the general curriculum in the least restrictive environment.

13

Components of a high quality approach to educating children with disabilities include:

- *Professional development* – The staff is trained in a variety of strategies to enable them to meet the various needs of children;
- *Research-based curriculum* – The staff appropriately uses curriculum specific to a child's level of instruction;
- *Adaptive equipment* – The staff has access to the equipment necessary to make adaptations;
- *Universal Design for Learning (UDL)* – The staff understands and uses the principles of UDL, including approaches for designing and delivering environments and also curriculum and instruction that accommodate a wide variety of learning needs.

English Language Learners

Methods for working with children learning to speak English as a second language are varied, and while research does not suggest one particular approach, it appears that instruction in both English and the child's native language is the most supportive for many children (Center for the Study of Language and Education, 2000).

General guidelines for working with English language learners include:



- *Using students' native languages to teach key academic content and/or to increase the amount of academic content in the students' English language instruction;*
- *Ensuring that children who do not speak English are able to engage in rich, productive learning experiences while they are still learning to understand, read and speak English;*
- *Supporting alternative methods of understanding comprehension and competency;*
- *Providing multiple opportunities for children to read literature that is age-appropriate and suitable to the child's proficiency level;*
- *Creating scheduled time for children to work on group assignments;*
- *Focusing on what children communicate rather than on how they communicate;*
- *Avoiding interrupting communication to correct children's language mistakes and looking for progress in developing second language skills in children's errors.*

Universal Design for Learning

According to the Center for Applied Special Technology (2007), the principles of Universal Design for Learning are:

- *Multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge;*
- *Multiple means of expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know;*
- *Multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges and increase motivation.*

Suggestions for Teaching Multilingual Classes

- Pay attention to pacing and articulation when speaking to students. Use vocal emphasis, gestures and facial expressions to convey meaning whenever possible. Be careful about choices of words and use of slang expressions;
- Provide tape recordings of key discussions that students can listen to at home;
- Create a word wall that incorporates all languages spoken by students and uses images to convey the meaning of important words;
- Involve children in journal writing;
- Organize a casual conversation club where English language learners and children who speak only English can meet and converse.

Just as important as learning the English language is children's need to feel good about themselves and their relationships with others in second language learning situations (Collier, 1995). Facilitate positive social-emotional experiences for English language learners by:

- *Fostering friendships among English language learners and their peers;*
- *Promoting cooperative learning activities;*
- *Arranging for peer study partners;*
- *Using language skills and cultural knowledge of children as resources in the classroom;*
- *Having children create bilingual dictionaries for different content areas;*
- *Having children provide information on things such as food, music, dance and games;*
- *Discussing how every person's culture influences his or her likes and dislikes, social behaviors and reactions to certain situations.*

Children and Poverty

All children are rich in their capacity to reap the rewards and benefits of a high quality education. Although schools have no control over family income, they can work to minimize the effects of poverty. Consider these ideas:

- *Recognize that language is a powerful tool that can be used to level the classroom playing field. For example, teachers talk to all children in a way that respects their abilities as learners separate from their socio-economic status;*

- *Seek to understand how the "hidden rules" of generational poverty (Payne, 1998) differ from the unspoken rules observed by the school staff and how those hidden rules can influence students' perceptions about school and learning. Help students and families understand alternative rules when appropriate, and expose them to positive role models who grew up in the same neighborhood or community or whose lives within the community are exemplary;*
- *Realize that family support for learning and educational experiences differs widely. Expose students to new opportunities and experiences, such as field trips, classroom projects, and the arts and humanities;*
- *Think about children's varied access to resources, educational opportunities and adult support outside school when giving assignments. Create opportunities for students to experience and explore art and culture, nature and interesting workplaces.*

The Hidden Rules of Poverty

According to Payne (1998), families of poverty that has spanned two or more generations may live by "hidden rules" that differ from those of "middle class" life. Consequently, some behaviors and attitudes that are discouraged or punished at school may be viewed as logical or may even be rewarded in a child's culture outside of school. Examples include:

- Being liked is much more important than being successful;
- One's destiny has little to do with choices. What happens is a result of fate, and little can be done to change it. Therefore, living in the moment is what counts;
- Conflicts are usually settled by fighting, one must show strength.



3. Learning experiences are culturally relevant to the lives of children.

When the school environment and classroom experiences are natural extensions of children's everyday lives, learning is meaningful. Research indicates that helping children connect what they already know to what is being taught and incorporating children's cultural assets into instructional activities are powerful teaching approaches. Instructional approaches need to be both theoretically sound and culturally responsive (Allen and Boykin, 1992; Boykin, 2000).

To maximize learning opportunities, teachers:

- Know the cultures represented in their classrooms and adapt lessons to reflect ways of communicating and learning that are familiar to the children;
- Integrate knowledge and traditions of different cultures throughout the entire curriculum;
- Select instructional materials that recognize diverse customs and experiences within cultures, without the use of stereotypes that support flexibility in gender roles and that depict people with disabilities as capable and contributing members of society;
- Allow children the opportunity to share their cultural knowledge;
- Create an environment that encourages and embraces different cultures and that creates a shared culture in the school community;
- Allow children to discuss and reflect upon their beliefs. Facilitate conversation that challenges biases and stereotypes;
- Provide experiences in social studies, literature, the fine arts and physical education that immerse all students in other cultures and ways of life;
- Actively involve the classroom and school in community multi-cultural and ethnic celebrations;
- Invite experts or other community members of various ethnicities to speak to the school or classroom, sharing their unique perspectives.

Diversity and the Arts

The fine arts are an excellent way to celebrate diversity. Consider activities such as:

- Forming a racially diverse drama club to create sketches and plays dealing with issues of diversity;
- Collecting oral histories from people of different backgrounds and creating a book, video or dramatic retelling of these histories to present to the rest of the school;
- Planning an artist residency using an artist or ensemble that reflects the culture of students in the school, or inviting artists with disabilities to exhibit or perform.



Exemplary Work

Individualized Student Learning Plans

This section has emphasized the importance of responding to differences in culture, background and abilities among children. The next step to exemplary practice is a formal, individualized learning plan for each child. Creating a plan that captures the child's learning abilities, styles and unique experiences helps to inform instruction in meaningful ways. Following the child from year to year, the plan can be a cumulative record of progress and can provide teachers with a rich resource.



The plan is developed in cooperation with the family and includes, but is not limited to, addressing:

- The child's unique learning needs;
- The child's physical health;
- The child's social-emotional well-being.

Final Check

- 👉 **Do staff members understand the experiences of the diverse groups they serve and communicate with all families as a way to improve learning?**
- 👉 **Are students with disabilities included in the general curriculum? Do they receive the instruction and interventions they need to be both challenged and successful?**
- 👉 **Are the Universal Design for Learning principles of multiple representation, multiple expression and multiple engagement incorporated into many classroom learning experiences?**
- 👉 **Do English language learners receive appropriate instruction and support?**
- 👉 **Are students' languages and cultures reflected in the school and in classroom learning experiences?**



School Profile

Eugene Field Elementary, Albuquerque, New Mexico

A Win-Win-Win Situation

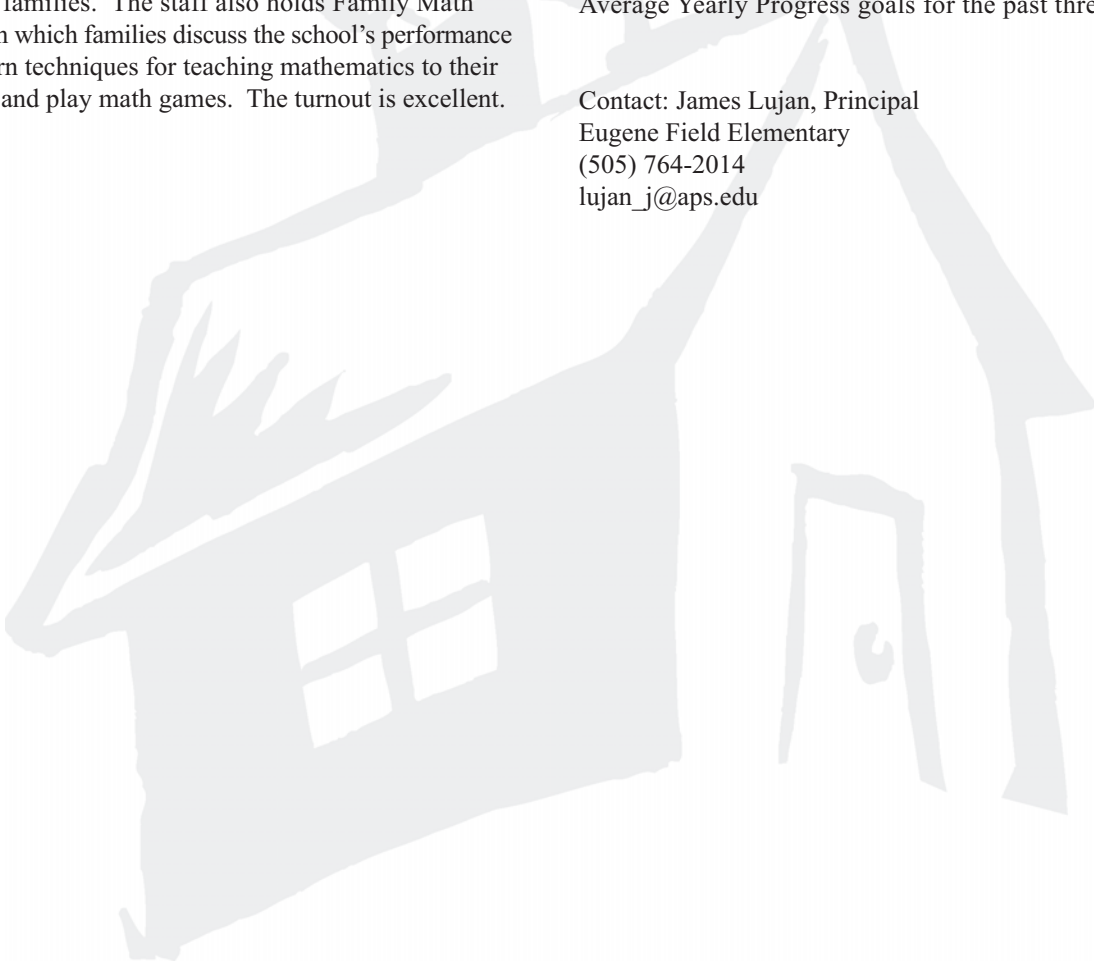
Eugene Field Elementary, a preschool-through fifth-grade school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, serves 460 students. Since approximately 85 percent of the student population is Hispanic and about 20 percent speak only Spanish, it is not surprising that results of a family survey indicated a need for help learning to speak English. Principal James Lujan considered referring the adult learners to programs at a nearby community college or university but then decided to teach the class himself at the school. "All they needed to do was sign contracts agreeing to spend an hour each night helping their children with math or reading," he says. "It was a win-win-win situation."

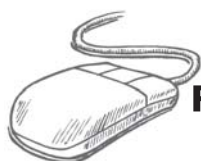
Lujan's English classes for the adults who support his students' learning are just one way the school opens its doors to families. The staff also holds Family Math Nights, in which families discuss the school's performance data, learn techniques for teaching mathematics to their children and play math games. The turnout is excellent.

While food is sometimes served at the evening gatherings, it is not what attracts the families. Lujan says they come out of genuine interest in helping their children learn. But building the trust that makes such commitment possible requires more than a typical parent participation program. "The whole staff goes out into the community in pairs and knocks on doors," he says. "It's unbelievable how families open up to you when you go to their territory." Lujan says the more a staff knows about its students and their needs, the better they become at working with families.

Eugene Field is a Title I school with a 126 percent mobility rate. Its students live in some of the most depressed areas of the city. Despite those challenges, the school continues to retain its highly qualified teachers and has met its Average Yearly Progress goals for the past three years.

Contact: James Lujan, Principal
Eugene Field Elementary
(505) 764-2014
lujan_j@aps.edu





Resources

- 1.** Ruby Payne's work related to students in poverty
<http://www.ahaprocess.com/>
- 2.** Center for Collaboration and Practice
<http://cecp.air.org/cultural/>
- 3.** WestEd—Bridging Cultures in our Schools Report
http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/bridging
- 4.** Teaching Diverse Learners—Brown University
<http://www.alliance.brown.edu/tdl/>
- 5.** In Time (Integrating New Technologies Into the Methods of Education)—Conceptual and practical information on multicultural education
<http://www.intime.uni.edu/>
- 6.** Tolerance.org—A variety of articles on diversity issues that arise among children
<http://www.tolerance.org/>

Resources on multicultural materials

- 7.** Cooperative Children's Book Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Suggestions for multicultural books for all age groups.
<http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/multicultural.asp>
- 8.** Scholastic—How to Choose Multicultural Books
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/instructor/multicultural.htm>
- 9.** Fostering Academic Success for English Language Learners: What Do We Know? —WestEd
<http://www.wested.org/policy/pubs/fostering/>
- 10.** National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Program (NCELA)
<http://www.ncele.gwu.edu>
- 11.** Center for Applied Special Technology—Information and tools, including videos and lesson builder
<http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/>
- 12.** Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW—Good general information about cultural groups, including how they tend to view disabilities
<http://www.mdaa.org.au/publications/ethnicity/specifcommunities.html>
- 13.** U.S. Department of Education, Technical Assistance Center—Resource on inclusion of children with disabilities
<http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php>
- 14.** Office of Special Education Programs—Tool kit for teaching and assessing children with disabilities research and practical information
<http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/toolkit/index.asp>

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- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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- Analyzes data from the U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) and suggests that achievement gaps begin early and are largely the result of low socioeconomic status.
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Personalized Learning Plan

This sample personalized learning plan can be modified to meet the individual school, classroom or child needs.





Personalized Learning Plan

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Grade Level: _____

Student Address: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____ Parent/Guardian Phone: _____

Parent/Guardian Address: _____

Date of Initial PLP: _____ Date of Follow-up: _____

NAME OF ASSESSMENT:	DATE OF ASSESSMENT:
RESULTS OF ASSESSMENT:	

FAMILY: List family goals for the child, child interests, concerns, traditions and culture, and home language.

CHILD: Provide details from child interview that outlines interests and strengths.



Personalized Learning Plan HEALTH & DEVELOPMENTAL

1. List any health and/or developmental related goals:
2. Under each of the following headings, list the strategies to be used to address goals. Include ways the teacher/program, family, and community will be involved with the strategies.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Strategy	Date Implemented	Assessment/Evaluation/Evidence	Comments

SUPPORTS AND CONDITIONS

Strategy	Date Implemented	Assessment/Evaluation/Evidence	Comments

BEHAVIORAL

Strategy	Date Implemented	Assessment/Evaluation/Evidence	Comments



Personalized Learning Plan LEARNING GOALS

1. Determine the area (examples, literacy, mathematics, social/emotional, etc.):

2. Under each of the following headings, list the strategies to be used to address the learning goal. Include ways the teacher/program, family, and community will be involved with the strategies.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Strategy	Date Implemented	Assessment/Evaluation/Evidence	Comments

SUPPORTS AND CONDITIONS

Strategy	Date Implemented	Assessment/Evaluation/Evidence	Comments

BEHAVIORAL

Strategy	Date Implemented	Assessment/Evaluation/Evidence	Comments

6. Home-School-Community Connections

Schools that are ready for all children build strong, positive connections with families and the community because learning and academic success are affected by children's lives, in and out of school. The basis of those connections is mutual respect and a desire to be partners is the most important task of all—promoting the physical, cognitive, social-emotional health and growth of children.

A Ready School

1. Provides ongoing opportunities for families to participate in the life of the school;
2. Provides organized support to help families participate in their children's learning;
3. Connects with the community at large in the service of the school community.

Key Understandings . . .

- Schools encourage family participation by seeking their feedback, communicating consistently and providing varied opportunities to volunteer and participate.
- Most families want to help their children succeed. School leadership can help by providing guidance and direction, sharing information about curriculum and involving families in classroom learning activities.
- Community organizations play an important role in supporting student success. Schools can help by identifying community resources and sharing them with families, as well as by establishing relationships and partnerships with the community.

connections

Leadership—Involving families and community members in planning

Transitions—Partnering with families and community services to ease transition

Supportive Environments—Involving families and community members in making the school a great place for children

Standards, Instruction and Assessment—Helping families and communities support student learning

Diversity—Working with families and community groups to support learning in diverse classrooms

Adult Learning Community—Learning collaboratively with families and community groups

Home-School-Community Self-Assessment

Instructions: Using the self-assessment tool below, rate your building practices using the following scale and document any evidence to support your rating for each item. Convene a team of administrators and teachers to reflect on and rate your building as a group. A rating of “1” indicates the work has not yet begun; a rating of “2” indicates the work has begun, but may not be fully implemented or exemplary; a rating of “3” indicates the work is implemented and exemplary. Mark “NI” if you need more information to rate your building.

Practice	1	2	3	NI
1. Staff is familiar with the research and literature on family involvement in the education process.				
Evidence				
2. Staff is aware of the community-based services and resources.				
Evidence				
3. Relationships are established with community-based providers to support children and families.				
Evidence				
4. Staff provides families with information about how to access community-based services and resources if needed.				
Evidence				
5. Staff solicits feedback from families regarding how they want to be involved in the life of the school.				
Evidence				
6. Families are provided with multiple opportunities to volunteer or to be involved in school activities.				
Evidence				
7. Families can access information about school events in multiple ways.				
Evidence				
8. School events are scheduled at times that are convenient for working families.				
Evidence				
9. Families receive information on a regular basis about classroom learning experiences.				
Evidence				
10. Families are provided with information and support about how best to support learning at home.				
Evidence				
11. The school has a family resource center.				
Evidence				

Follow-up: After you complete your self-assessment ratings, review your findings as a leadership team. For those areas receiving a rating of “1”, identify the steps you need to take to begin implementation, the resources needed, and timeline for accomplishing these steps. For those areas receiving a rating of “2”, identify what needs to happen to move your building practices to full implementation at the exemplary level. For those areas receiving a rating of “3”, congratulate yourselves and determine how you will maintain this same level of exemplary implementation.

The Ready School and Home-School-Community Connections

Family members and school staff share responsibility for the daily well-being of children. Community programs and services provide expertise, resources and support for a variety of needs, from safety nets to new opportunities.

Ready Schools seek to make the most of these essential connections and to create new ones. The goal is to help families remain involved in their children's lives at school, support learning at home and access community support when needed.

Laying the Groundwork

Research indicates that effective home-school partnerships are linked to higher student performance in reading and mathematics as well as to improved attendance and behavior (Epstein, 2005). A synthesis of research by Henderson and Mapp (2002) suggests that "a philosophy of partnership" is essential to the goal of increasing family and community participation in schools.

Discussing the idea of partnerships with staff, families and community members is a good first step. Using research-based models such as Epstein's six types of parent involvement (2002) as a framework for discussion will further deepen understanding. As ideas emerge, teachers may need professional development and in-service training in how to work in partnership with families and community organizations. Potential resources include:

- Local institutions of higher education;
- Human service agencies;
- National Education Association or American Federation of Teachers.

Six Types of Involvement

1. **Parenting:** Schools assist families with parenting, child rearing and other skills that will improve the home environment. Families assist schools in understanding families;
2. **Communicating:** Schools communicate with families about school programs and student progress;
3. **Volunteering:** Schools provide opportunities for families to volunteer;
4. **Learning at home:** Schools help families support their children through learning activities at home that are linked to the curriculum;

continued next column

5. **Decision making:** Schools include families as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy;

6. **Collaborating with the community:** Schools coordinate community resources and services for families and provide services to the community.

Getting to Work

1. Staff members provide ongoing opportunities for families to participate in the life of the school.

Family friendly schools create an open, helpful climate. Families that are actively involved feel appreciated. Families that are not yet involved can choose from a variety of opportunities to become more connected, and they receive help with any obstacles to participation. All are treated as partners in meeting the shared goal of student success.

Family Feedback

Surveying families is a good way to determine what they need and how they would like to become involved. The survey data also can be useful in assessing and analyzing the school's family involvement practices. Also consider meeting with families to discuss how they would like to be involved and how they prefer to communicate with the school.

Effective Communication Practices

Communication practices should be designed to ensure frequent, consistent, positive contact between the school and families. Effective communication practices include:

- Creating a consistent schedule for disseminating newsletters and other external communications;
- Translating written and oral communications for families who first language is not English;
- Monitoring the school's Web site to make sure outdated information is removed and new information is added in a timely manner;
- Providing links from the school's Web site to community resources or programs that might be beneficial to families;
- Establishing and publicizing regular ways of communicating with families that provide flexibility for varying schedules, literacy levels, preferences and other differences;
- Providing a designated place in the school building to post information about school meetings and functions as well as services offered by the school or community;
- Establishing multiple ways for families to communicate with teachers and to provide feedback to schools.

Multiple and Varied Opportunities for Participation

Finally, Ready Schools work to make participation in school activities more comfortable, convenient and rewarding. Improving family participation requires thought and effort. For example, schools can:

- *Help remove barriers to involvement through alternative scheduling for events and conferences and through transportation assistance;*
- *Work with families to identify projects and tasks that will allow them to make meaningful contributions to the school's vision and goals;*
- *Include families in decisions about school fundraisers and in making sure that fundraising activities do not burden or exclude economically disadvantaged families;*
- *Schedule a day or more each month for family members to share lunchtime with their children. Invite volunteers, such as senior citizens or high school students, to join students whose family members are unable to come;*
- *Establish school-wide community projects that are geared to the interests and abilities of families, such as planting a garden or improving the school grounds;*
- *Help family members who have not been active in the school by outlining roles they can play in projects, field trips and other activities.*

Using Technology

Using technology can be both an excellent way to communicate with families and the community and a new avenue for partnership.

- *Asking a family member, college student or business partner to provide technical expertise with Web design, the addition of multimedia to the Web site or the use of newer electronic tools;*
- *Podcasting the school newsletter. This may be a better option for busy family members or those with limited reading skills;*
- *Creating class Web sites;*
- *Raising funds to provide inexpensive CD players for families that would benefit from audio transmission of school communications.*

2. The school responds to the unique differences among children.

Many studies have documented the significance of parent and family involvement in supporting their children's learning in the home, but families may need help understanding homework concepts or creating appropriate activities to help children learn those concepts. Families may experience reading or language barriers that prevent them from helping students with some assignments. Even well educated adults may feel inadequate in assuming a teaching role or may not know what kind of support is appropriate for their children's developmental level. Ready Schools develop strategies for helping less involved parents or other significant family members participate in their children's learning (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000).

Focus and Direction

Help families understand how to help their children with homework. Consider these ideas:

- *Provide families with monthly schedules of upcoming lessons or assignments, suggesting books, activities and prompts for stimulating conversation about lesson topics;*
- *Identify some essential areas of the curriculum that would benefit from extra support. Create resources that explicitly describe to family members why those areas are important, what is expected, how to assist students with study and practice, and how to look for signs that children are making progress;*
- *Provide information about what students are assigned to do, what standards are being addressed and why the work is important;*
- *Suggest multiple ways to work on the same skills, drawing insights about individual children and from research on learning styles or multiple intelligences.*
- *Share rubrics or other information about how assignments will be assessed;*
- *Use school newsletters, the school's Web site and other communication tools to share clear, engaging strategies for supporting children's learning at home. Provide a single, consistent way to alert families when updates are available.*

Ongoing Information Sharing

Exchanging information with families often benefits both teaching and children's learning.


- *Place a high priority on sharing good news, providing early warning about difficulties and highlighting children's unique qualities;*
- *Show interest in how children learn in their home environments. Provide families with journals they can use to record children's activities. Share and ask for insights about children's thinking and approach to homework;*
- *Ask family members to share successful strategies they use for encouraging learning at home.*

Involvement


Family members are contributors to classroom learning experiences.

- *Set aside a day or more each month when family members can visit classrooms to witness instruction; Arrange opportunities for sessions with teachers or other professionals the same day. Also schedule some evening demonstrations of important lessons so that families who work during the day can attend;*
- *Involve family and community members in planning field trips and projects that enhance curricular goals;*
- *Give family members opportunities to share their unique knowledge and skills with students or to find ways to integrate a family member's knowledge and skills into lessons.*

3. The school connects with the community at large in the service of the school community.

Ready Schools respond immediately and effectively when students and families need help. In fact, they often play the unseen but vital role of helping prevent crises. They connect students and families with enriching experiences and opportunities to improve their circumstances. Helping to make life better for children and families is the result of creating and sustaining community partnerships. 

Awareness of Community Assets

Ready Schools are consistent in their efforts to learn about their communities and the roles different organizations play in the lives of children. Consider: 

- *Identifying community-based services and providers to help families in crisis (food banks, mental health services, homeless shelters, crisis hotlines, faith-based communities);*
- *Identifying types of financial assistance available for families who are unable to pay for services;*
- *Partnering with community organizations for translation services;*
- *Identifying sources of volunteers or experts who can assist the staff in meeting important goals;*
- *Identifying any service-based learning initiatives or projects. Develop a directory or links to community organizations that will benefit children and families on the school's Web site.*


Communication Connections

Ready Schools create a visible presence in the community by sharing information and getting involved in projects. Greater visibility helps improve the effectiveness of family participation strategies and positions the school to identify and seize opportunities that support school goals.

- *Work with local media outlets, such as newspapers, television and radio, to share story ideas and important news;*
- *Use cable access and other community bulletin boards to make community-wide announcements;*
- *Add all community partners to the school's mailing list and invite them to school events;*
- *Invite business and community leaders to visit the school and to talk with students about careers or community projects.*

Look for opportunities to recognize and support work in the community that benefits children. Speak out on behalf of community services that benefit children and families.

Relationships

Ready Schools develop ongoing relationships with community partners. They make it as easy and rewarding as possible to partner with the school. Ideas for strengthening relationships include: 

- *Always acknowledging community partners' involvement in external communications, such as school newsletters, Web sites or media releases. Provide them with photos they can use in their company or organizational newsletters;*
- *Inviting key service providers and representatives from community organizations to participate in brainstorming or study group sessions;*
- *Creating volunteer opportunities that are geared to specific groups, such as senior citizens or business professionals. Send them personalized thank-you letters and involve students in conveying appreciation.*

Learning Links

Ready Schools link learning in school with learning in the community. Ideas include:

- *Working jointly with educational programs in the community to create learning experiences;*
- *Inviting business and community leaders to participate in designing community projects;*
- *Incorporating community events, landmarks and assets into the curriculum whenever possible;*
- *Expanding or enhancing a successful community program or project through school-based activities.*

As Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox (1999) have pointed out in their work on transition, each child develops and learns in an "ecosystem" of school, family, peers and community. Each part of the ecosystem influences the health and success of the others.



Exemplary Work

The School as a Center of Family and Community Life

This section has emphasized the importance of family and community participation in a Ready School, both during the school day and after school. One exemplary practice is opening a family resource center in the school. The resource center can be a place where families visit during the school day to obtain information about supporting their children's learning, connect to support services or enrichment opportunities offered by the community, use computers, connect with teachers or counselors, network with other families, and organize volunteer activities. Giving a family member a coordinator role, paid if possible, also can help increase usage of the center and ensure that it becomes a more integrated part of the school's life.

Other approaches that complement the family resource center include:

- *Becoming a community center by keeping the school open beyond school hours. The center can offer new opportunities for students and adult citizens to learn, network, share their knowledge and participate in learning opportunities, cultural opportunities and community projects;*
- *Becoming a "full-service school," where families can easily access health care and other vital services for their children and where educators work collaboratively with other professionals involved in their students' lives.*

Final Check

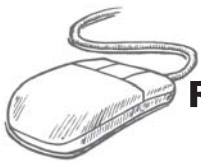
Do staff members:

- 👍 ***Periodically assess family communications and involvement activities?***
- 👍 ***Involve families and community members in the life of the school in a variety of ways?***
- 👍 ***Talk frequently with families about ways of supporting learning at home?***
- 👍 ***Identify community resources and share the information with families on a regular basis?***
- 👍 ***Explore new, potential community relationships and partnerships?***
- 👍 ***Take advantage of community resources to improve learning and the school environment?***

Action Planning Form - Use this form to outline next steps for each section

Priority	Action	Resource (\$)	Needed	Timeline

Notes:



Resources

- 1. Head Start Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**
<http://acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/>
- 2. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory**
A comprehensive planning guide for family and community involvement initiatives
<http://www.nwrel.org/partnerships/cloak/booklet-one.pdf>
- 3. National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools**
<http://www.sedl.org/connections/>
- 4. National Network of Partnership Schools—**
Promising partnership practices in a variety of areas, including transition, multicultural awareness and academic subject areas
<http://www.partnershipschools.org>
- 5. Annie E. Casey Foundation**
A variety of resources about family and community partnerships
<http://www.aecf.org/>
- 6. Harvard Family Research Project**
Provides information useful for developing and evaluating family services
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/>
- 7. Annenberg Institute for School Reform**
A variety of resources about family and community partnerships
<http://www.annenberginstitute.org/>
- 8. Foundation To Advance Childhood Education**
Newly developed! The Learning Lunchbox Family Resource
<http://www.learninglunchbox.com/outreach/>

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Summarizes research on family and community involvement.



Epstein's Framework

Epstein's framework of six types of involvement. Includes sample practices, challenges, redefinements, and expected results.



Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, Redefinitions, and Expected Results)

TYPE 1: PARENTING

Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.

Sample Practices

- Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level.
- Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age and grade level.
- Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy.)
- Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.
- Home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school. Neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.

Challenges

- Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.
- Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs.
- Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school.

Redefinitions

- "Workshop" to mean more than a meeting about a topic held at the school building at a particular time. "Workshop" may also mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read any where, any time, in varied forms.

Results for Students

- Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents.
- Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family.
- Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework.
- Good or improved attendance.
- Awareness of importance of school.

Results for Parents

- Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school.
- Awareness of own and others' challenges in parents.
- Feeling of support from school and other parents.

Results for Teachers

- Understanding families' background, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children.
- Respect for families' strengths and efforts.
- Understanding of student diversity.
- Awareness of own skills to share information on child development.

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, Redefinitions, and Expected Results)

TYPE 2: COMMUNICATING

Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.

Sample Practices

- Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed.
- Language translators to assist families as needed.
- Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments.
- Parent/student pickup of report card, with conferences on improving grades.
- Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.
- Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools.
- Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions.

Challenges

- Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and nonprint communications.
- Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type.
- Review the quality of major communications (newsletters, report cards, conference schedules, and so on).
- Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.

Redefinitions

- "Communications about school programs and student progress" to mean two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community.

Results for Students

- Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades.
- Understanding of school policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of student conduct.
- Informed decisions about courses and programs.
- Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator.

Results for Parents

- Understanding school programs and policies.
- Monitoring and awareness of child's progress.
- Responding effectively to students' problems.
- Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with school and teachers.

Results for Teachers

- Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly.
- Appreciation for and use of parent network for communications.
- Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress.

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, Redefinitions, and Expected Results)

TYPE 3: VOLUNTEERING

Recruit and organize parent help and support.

Sample Practices

- School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.
- Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families.
- Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers.
- Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information.
- Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs.

Challenges

- Recruit volunteers widely so that all families know that their time and talents are welcome.
- Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable parents who work to participate.
- Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognize efforts so that participants are productive.

Redefinitions

- "Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time -- not just during the school day and at the school building.

Results for Students

- Skill in communicating with adults.
- Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers.
- Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parent and other volunteers.

Results for Parents

- Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carry-over of school activities at home.
- Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education.
- Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school.
- Gains in specific skills of volunteer work.

Results for Teachers

- Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school.
- Awareness of parents' talents and interests in school and children.
- Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers.

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, Redefinitions, and Expected Results)

TYPE 4: LEARNING AT HOME

Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

Sample Practices

- Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade.
- Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.
- Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments.
- Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class.
- Calendars with activities for parents and students at home.
- Family math, science, and reading activities at school.
- Summer learning packets or activities.
- Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.

Challenges

- Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bimonthly) that gives *students* responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork.
- Coordinate family linked homework activities, if students have several teachers.
- Involve families and their children in all-important curriculum-related decisions.

Redefinitions

- "Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life.
- "Help" at home to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing -- not "teaching" school subjects.

Results for Students

- Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and classwork.
- Homework completion.
- Positive attitude toward schoolwork.
- View of parents as more similar to teacher and of home as more similar to school.
- Self-concept of ability as learner.

Results for Parents

- Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year.
- Discussions of school, classwork, and homework.
- Understanding of instructional program each year and of what child is learning in each subject.
- Appreciation of teaching skills.
- Awareness of child as a learner.

Results for Teachers

- Better design of homework assignments.
- Respect for family time.
- Recognition of equal helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning.
- Satisfaction with family involvement and support.

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, Redefinitions, and Expected Results)

TYPE 5: DECISION MAKING

Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.

Sample Practices

- Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation.
- Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.
- District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement.
- Information on school or local elections for school representatives.
- Networks to link all families with parent representatives.

Challenges

- Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school.
- Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents.
- Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups.

Redefinitions

- "Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas.
- Parent "leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families.

Results for Students

- Awareness of representation of families in school decisions.
- Understanding that student rights are protected.
- Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students.

Results for Parents

- Input into policies that affect child's education.
- Feeling of ownership of school.
- Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions.
- Shared experiences and connections with other families.
- Awareness of school, district, and state policies.

Results for Teachers

- Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions.
- View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles.

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, Redefinitions, and Expected Results)

TYPE 6: COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY

Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Sample Practices

- Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services.
- Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.
- Service integration through partnerships involving school; civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses.
- Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others).
- Participation of alumni in school programs for students.

Challenges

- Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities.
- Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, business partnerships.
- Assure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services.
- Match community contributions with school goals, integrate child and family services with education.

Redefinitions

- "Community" to mean not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also any neighborhoods that influence their learning and development.
- "Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools.
- "Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools.

Results for Students

- Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences.
- Awareness of careers and of options for future education and work.
- Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with community.

Results for Parents

- Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services.
- Interactions with other families in community activities.
- Awareness of school's role in the community and of community's contributions to the school.

Results for Teachers

- Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction.
- Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practices.
- Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services.





Family Survey

This survey was adapted from the Indiana Center for Family School & Community Partnerships and can be used as is or refined to meet the individual needs of the school.



Dear Parent or Guardian:

We want to make sure that we are a family-friendly school! Please help us understand how we are doing and where we might improve by filling out the following survey. If you have additional comments, feel free to add them on the back. Please circle the response that fits best and return the completed survey to the school office.

Survey: Are We Family-Friendly?

I like walking into my child's school.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

School personnel are friendly to me when I visit.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

School personnel are friendly to me when I call.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

I feel included in my child's school.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

My child's school keeps me well informed about:

how my child is doing in school.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

what my child is learning in school.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

how I can help my child at home.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

school policies and procedures.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

school activities and events.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

PTA, PTO or other parent-teacher organizations.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

At my child's school:

Our family's culture, ethnicity and religion are respected.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

I feel listened to.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

continued on back

Survey: Are We Family-Friendly? (continued)

My opinions are sought and valued.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

I am treated like a partner in my child's education.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

My child's school lets me know when and where volunteer help is needed.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

My child's school has made good use of my talents.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

I have been asked to help out with a school activity.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

I have been invited to participate on a school committee.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

I feel appreciated for things I've done to help the school.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

I can easily reach my child's teacher if I need to.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

If there is a problem at school, I know whom to contact.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
-------	--------	-----------	---------	--------

Problems related to my child are addressed quickly and fairly.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
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To be more family-friendly, my child's school or teacher could.... (Please share your thoughts in the space provided and, if necessary, on the back of this form.)

7. Adult Learning Communities

In a Ready School, the teaching and administrative staff, volunteers, service providers, students' families and all others who provide care or support for children are a community of learners with the common goal of student achievement. All are continually learning to improve the quality of what they do. Individually and as teams and networks, they share their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm.

A Ready School

1. Supports high quality job embedded professional development;
2. Provides family learning opportunities;
3. Collaborates with other educational programs and organizations.

Key Understandings . . .

- Student achievement is the principal goal of all professional learning. Using student needs data as its guide, a school staff can engage in high quality professional development that includes not only offsite workshops and conferences but also job-embedded learning experiences.
- Schools can make a greater impact on students' lives by connecting families with the learning experiences they need.
- Schools can find important knowledge and opportunities to develop new skills in their communities.

connections

Leadership—Deepening understanding of Ready School concepts through adult learning activities

Transitions—Studying and sharing effective transition practices

Supportive Environments—Learning about how the surrounding environment affects student learning

Standards, Instruction and Assessment—Learning to improve practices, basing them on classroom assessment results

Home-School-Community Connections—Learning collaboratively with families and community groups

Diversity—Learning how to teach and support diverse students

Adult Learning Communities Self-Assessment

Instructions: Using the self-assessment tool below, rate your building practices using the following scale and document any evidence to support your rating for each item. Convene a team of administrators and teachers to reflect on and rate your building as a group. A rating of “1” indicates the work has not yet begun; a rating of “2” indicates the work has begun, but may not be fully implemented or exemplary; a rating of “3” indicates the work is implemented and exemplary. Mark “NI” if you need more information to rate your building.

Practice	1	2	3	NI
1. Staff members are provided with time, coaching and mentoring to enhance their teaching practices.				
Evidence				
2. Student achievement is the focus of professional learning.				
Evidence				
3. A process is in place to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development.				
Evidence				
4. Families are provided with learning opportunities that support student achievement.				
Evidence				
5. Families are connected with learning opportunities in the community, if needed.				
Evidence				
6. Staff members engage in shared professional development with the early childhood community.				
Evidence				
7. Staff members connect with other community-based organizations to promote children’s and families’ well-being.				
Evidence				
8. Staff members design and conduct action research in the service of learning.				
Evidence				

Follow-up: After you complete your self-assessment ratings, review your findings as a leadership team. For those areas receiving a rating of “1”, identify the steps you need to take to begin implementation, the resources needed, and timeline for accomplishing these steps. For those areas receiving a rating of “2”, identify what needs to happen to move your building practices to full implementation at the exemplary level. For those areas receiving a rating of “3”, congratulate yourselves and determine how you will maintain this same level of exemplary implementation.

The Ready School and Adult Learning Communities

The concept of a learning community is inclusive and fluid and works to extend the learning community outside its own boundaries. To ease students' transition into kindergarten, knowledge is exchanged with early childhood educators and families. To minimize risk factors that could adversely affect students' learning, they exchange knowledge with service providers and community organizations. Each learning connection strengthens the total environment that protects, nurtures and teaches children as they move through the preschool-through-grade-three system and prepares them for the advanced challenges to come.



Laying the Groundwork

Studies of how adults learn indicate a need for experiences that are goal-oriented. The goal that guides adult learning communities in Ready Schools is simple: increase student achievement through adult learning opportunities that lead to improvements in existing strategies and the development of new ones made evident by research (Speck, 1996).

Challenges

The key to laying the groundwork for more effective, collaborative adult learning is assessing the needs of the children. Using research-based criteria for selecting quality learning experiences and finding models for increasing the impact of job-embedded learning opportunities is essential to the work. Talking with families, the early childhood education community and other partners about their needs also will pave the way for a more effective adult learning community.

Time and Resources for Learning

Although determined in part by individual commitment, the quality of teachers' professional learning depends on the time, space, materials, resources and support (National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 1994). Support teacher learning buy:

- *Providing space for professional learning activities. If possible, equip a quiet area with professional journals and books, computers and comfortable furnishings for reflection and conversation;*
- *Creating a schedule that provides educators the flexibility to observe each other's practices and to learn and work collaboratively with colleagues, families and community partners;*

- *Freeing time for experienced teachers to model effective practices and to provide feedback as those practices are tried;*
- *Helping teachers who propose collaborative team projects to adjust members' schedules, gain access to resources and enhance the visibility of their work.*

Freeing Time and Resources for Job-embedded Professional Learning

- Create common planning periods for teachers who share the same students or work on joint projects;
- Prepare standards-based, independent learning activities that can be supervised by volunteers.
- Use one substitute to cover multiple one-hour blocks for several different teachers;
- Establish sustained team-teaching projects that allow two teachers to alternate teaching duties;
- Make arrangements for teachers to take half days off after they have attended several after-school meetings.



Getting to Work

1. The school supports high quality professional development.

Educators are continually enhancing and refining their knowledge and skills through professional learning. Every teacher in a Ready School has an individual plan for professional development that includes long-term learning goals tied both to student achievement and to a school-wide, professional development plan.

A Focus on Student Data

Evidence of students' learning needs is the basis of all professional learning. The evidence is continually collected from a variety of sources, especially classroom assessments, and is intensively analyzed. It sparks inquiry, reflection and conversations that often frame and define the staff's individual and group learning experiences.

Quality Offsite Learning

Staff members in a Ready School select workshops, conferences and offsite professional development experiences that are linked to both their professional learning goals and the needs and goals of their children. They evaluate learning experiences according to how effectively they:

- Address classroom content and promote content-specific teaching practices;
- Connect to theories and research behind the teaching practices;
- Encourage active learning through demonstration and opportunities for initial guided practice;
- Provide opportunities to receive prompt feedback about initial efforts to apply learning;
- Provide opportunities for sustained coaching.

Any offsite learning experience is only as effective as the follow-up activities of those who attend. Outlining how the new knowledge and skills will be used, developed and shared will increase learning retention (Joyce & Showers, 1988).

Job-Embedded Professional Development

Teachers in Ready Schools recognize that what they learn and the work they do with children are inseparable. Therefore, they support teacher professional development within the context of school improvement and classroom instruction.



Job-embedded opportunities can take a variety of forms such as:

- *Professional Book Talks or Study Groups* – Colleagues can meet to discuss a professional book or study factors that influence classroom practice, student outcomes and the school as an organization;
- *Use of Models* – Staff members may visit the classrooms of colleagues or other schools to share and learn through exemplary practices;
- *Action Research* – An individual or team can pose a research question and collect student data in their own classrooms to answer the question in a methodical way (Sagor, 2000);
- *Observation and Lesson Study* – Colleagues can observe one another's teaching performance live or on videotape, analyze it and identify areas of strength as well as strategies to enhance practice. They also can collaborate to develop "research lessons," which they can then study and refine as a group (Lewis, 2002; Lewis, Perry, & Hurd, 2004);
- *Coaching/Peer Coaching* – A more experienced member of the staff or an outside expert may provide support, feedback and coaching while a lesson is being taught or immediately afterward (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Perkins, 1998).

Planning and Evaluation

Staff members in a Ready School evaluate their professional learning (Guskey, 2000). While not all learning can be documented, staff members recognize the value of examining their major professional learning practices. The staff members consider how they can:

- Add structure and intensity to job-embedded learning experiences;
- Collect evidence that allows them to assess and document the impact of their learning on student achievement;
- Ensure that the results of their learning activities are shared with other staff.

For teachers in a Ready School, professional development is more than an event. It is a lifelong process of gaining, applying and sharing knowledge in the art and science of good teaching. It occurs when:

- Teachers attend an offsite workshop and then plan how they will apply the concepts they learned;
- Teachers meet at school to discuss student performance data and to identify goals for improving practice;
- Teachers observe one another's classrooms and work together on standards-based lessons.

The Value of Follow-up and Coaching

According to research only about 10 percent of learners will transfer theory into practice after attending a presentation or seeing a demonstration. Opportunities to practice outside the classroom only increase transfer to 15 percent. But 80 percent of learners will transfer theory into practice if they are given feedback and coaching in the workplace (Joyce and Showers, 1988).

2. The school provides family learning opportunities

Learning is important in everyone's life, including that of the adults in students' families.

Student Support

Learning experiences are created to help families understand the school's expectations for students and include:

- Helping families understand standards and expectations by sharing and explaining examples of assessments and grade-level work;
- Helping families learn about standards by holding regular exhibitions of student projects;
- Exposing families to creative vehicles, student exhibitions, book fairs, games or projects that incorporate the standards;
- Conducting regular workshops to teach family members how to work with children having difficulties, as well as how to pursue more in-depth learning in areas of interest.

Adult Education

Low literacy and educational attainment are often the reasons families do not help their children with homework. While the staff helps children in the short term, they also try to help family members plan for a better economic future by connecting them with resources in the community such as:

- GED classes;
- Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) classes;
- English language acquisition classes;
- Training in areas like basic computer literacy and employability skills;
- Sessions with job search experts;
- Presentations by certificate or associate degree programs;
- Presentations by employers in areas experiencing shortages, such as health care.

Adult Literacy Facts

According to the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), “Parental literacy is one of the single most important indicators of a child’s success. . . . Youngsters whose parents are functionally illiterate are twice as likely to be functionally illiterate themselves.”

The NCFL estimates that 30 million adults in the United States have extremely limited literacy skills. The Hispanic population is the largest minority in the United States and has the highest school dropout rate. More than two in five Hispanics living in America age 25 and older have not graduated from high school.

Family literacy programs include literacy training for parents, age-appropriate literacy activities for young children, interactive literacy activities between parents and their children, and training that helps parents learn to support their children’s literacy.



Prevention

Learning opportunities for the adults in a child’s life can help prevent family crises that make it difficult for children to learn. Making community-based offerings a regular part of the school calendar and encouraging all family members to attend may help some families confront issues in the home before negative patterns have been established. These include:

- Basic parenting skills;
- Specific topics of interest to any caring person in a parenting role, such as discipline and communication;
- Special challenges, such as dealing with disabilities or raising a grandchild;
- Stress reduction, conflict management and other coping techniques.

3. Collaborating with other educational programs and organizations

Success in meeting all children’s needs is connected to the work of other professionals in the community.

Early Childhood Educators

Elementary school teachers engage in shared professional development with early childhood educators. Topics include:

- Curriculum alignment;
- Curriculum embedded assessments;
- Lesson planning;
- Continuity and transition practices;
- Preschool through kindergarten learning experiences;
- Joint data analysis;
- Family involvement activities.

Community-based Learning Opportunities

Learning opportunities exist throughout the community. In addition to learning experiences designed specifically for educators, other sources of knowledge and ideas may include:

- Education programs at hospitals may spark insights on health or behavioral problems that affect achievement;
- Cultural programs offered by museums, libraries and other community organizations help staff understand the diversity in the student population;
- Seminars conducted by the Chamber of Commerce or other business organizations help the staff with operational or organizational development issues such as leadership, team building, marketing and project management.

External Resources

Ready Schools seek specialized knowledge from experts in both education and other areas that affect student learning, as well as feedback from educators and administrators in other schools and districts. Consider these ideas:

- *Identify a university faculty member to explore the research with staff and act as a “critical friend” as strategies are developed and implemented;*
- *Use new Web-based technologies, such as blogs and wikis, to engage in dialogue with offsite teachers and administrators and to share lessons and ideas;*
- *Ask leaders from the business and nonprofit sectors to share their knowledge, expertise and experiences as they examine student needs.*

The adult learning that leads to high student achievement often requires alternative paths to educator knowledge and skill. A learning community in a Ready School is open to following those paths.



Exemplary Work

The next step toward exemplary practice is the creation of open-ended adult learning experiences designed for in-depth learning. For example:

- *Defining school research projects that require participants to examine the literature in depth, collect and share data, and propose theories;*
- *Observing each other implementing existing practices related to strategies and then sharing feedback, as a professional development experience;*
- *Designing cooperative projects that will result in products or models, like interdisciplinary lessons that foster social-emotional learning, new strategies for teaching an essential skill, or a program that will benefit families or the community.*

Final Check

- 👍 *Are teachers meeting regularly to look at data and discuss practice?*
- 👍 *Do families and community members also participate in data analysis and problem solving?*
- 👍 *Does the school evaluate the impact of all professional development on learning outcomes?*
- 👍 *Do teachers, families and community members regularly share knowledge with each other and learn together?*
- 👍 *Do teachers share practice with colleagues and partners?*
- 👍 *Is adult learning built into the school day?*
- 👍 *Does the school staff actively seek ways of engaging in learning activities with depth and intensity?*



School Profile

Willow Brook Elementary School, Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Learning Something New Every Day

Willow Brook Elementary serves a much higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students than do the other three elementary schools in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Yet the kindergarten-through-fourth-grade school's scores on Tennessee's standardized mathematics and reading tests keep pace with the district's overall high performance. Willow Brook's success can be attributed to full-day kindergarten, a year-round school calendar, an engaging learning environment, an after-school program, the presence of a fulltime guidance counselor, and a Family Resource Center staffed by two social workers. Underlying all of those activities is a belief in "learning something new every day."

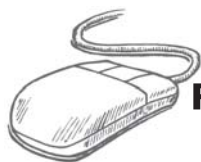
The school's belief in the power of learning extends to students' families, who are considered to be essential partners in student success. The entire staff is involved in family learning experiences centered on study skills and subject matter in the curriculum. Dr. Michael Bundy, the school's guidance counselor, coordinates a range of group learning opportunities, from basic parenting courses that are especially helpful to young, first-time parents, to "special topic workshops" that help equip families for challenging situations. Families also learn by participating in student activities that center on responsibility, respect and other positive character traits.

Mary Jo Bruce, director of the school's Family Resource Center, says some of the most important family learning is one-on-one. "Sometimes you have to address what's going on with them in particular before you talk about the curriculum," she says. In fact, she considers listening to families a necessary first step in helping them support their children. "Their goals are my priority," she says. "I let them tell me what they need and then we figure out how we're going to do it."

The Family Resource Center regularly educates the community about the needs of students. For example, when the Health Department held a dental clinic at the school and found that several families could not afford the dental work their children needed, the Family Resource Center went to the community and obtained the necessary help. That is just one example of many, and it alone helped 1,400 families and 2,500 children in a single year.

The Family Resource Center is one of 13 established in Tennessee through a federal grant. The effectiveness of Willow Brook's Family Resource Center has helped it obtain continued state and district funding. Bruce says Tennessee's network of Family Resource Centers has expanded to 30 sites that regularly exchange knowledge of what has worked well in their settings.

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Resources

- 1.** Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory—Teacher quality toolkit
http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/TeacherPrepRetention/5052IR_TQToolkit.pdf
- 2.** National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality
<http://www.ncctq.org/>
- 3.** National Staff Development Council
<http://www.nsd.c.org/Natio>
- 4.** Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
<http://www.nwrel.org/request/june98/index.html>
- 5.** Supporting Job-Embedded Professional Development
http://www2.selu.edu/Academics/Education/TEC/job_embedded.htm
- 6.** National Center for Family Literacy
<http://www.famlit.org>

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Ohio Appendix



OHIO -- EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Children are ready for school as the result of access to health services, relationships with adults that foster social skills and a sense of self worth, and the opportunities and experiences associated with learning and early reading skills. Therefore, families, schools, early learning settings and communities all have critically important roles to play in helping young children get off to a good start.

In Ohio's state-funded early learning programs, particular attention is paid to academic content, program quality and accountability for programs. Content learning is defined in Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards. With indicators that identify concepts and skills that are representative of what young children should know and be able to do by the time they enter kindergarten. The Early Learning Content Standards in English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies are aligned to the Ohio Academic Content Standards K-12 and grade level Benchmarks, and provide a seamless transition from preschool to kindergarten.

In addition, Ohio's Early Learning Program Guidelines (ELPG) identify aspects of high quality early childhood care and education programs. The ELPG are organized around four research-based themes:



All children are born ready to learn



Environments matter



Relationships are influential, and



Communication is critical.

Within these four themes, indicators define elements that must be in place to ensure programs are organized and accountable in meeting the health, developmental and educational needs of children and their families.

Finally, Ohio has in place a system of data collection to ensure accountability at the child, classroom and program levels. The Get it! Got it! Go! literacy assessment provides data to track child progress and inform instruction. The Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) instrument provides data of the classroom environment and teacher-child interactions relative to literacy learning. ELLCO data are also used by the state to design high-quality professional development. Together these assessment measures provide an evaluation of our current practice and inform our continued work on behalf of Ohio's children and families.

To learn more about Ohio's Early Learning Initiative, other programs and resources visit:
<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEPrimary.aspx?Page=2&TopicRelationID=463>



OHIO LEGISLATION GOVERNING KINDERGARTEN

Choices on Kindergarten Entrance Date (ORC 3321.01)

Beginning with the 2001 school year, school district boards may choose to adopt either the first day of August or the thirtieth day of September as the date by which a child must be five years of age to be admitted to kindergarten and six years of age to be admitted to first grade.



Age Requirements

A student must be age 5 to enter kindergarten or age 6 to enter grade one.

Compulsory school age is 6. However, if a child enters kindergarten at age 5, they are considered to be of compulsory school age.

No district shall admit to the first grade any child who has not successfully completed kindergarten, except as provided below:

Pupil Personnel Services Committee

Upon the request of a parent, the pupil personnel services committee may waive the kindergarten experience requirement if the child turns age 6 by Sept. 30 of the year of admittance and demonstrates to the satisfaction of the committee the possession of the social, emotional and cognitive skills necessary for first grade.

The responsibilities of the pupil personnel services committee shall be limited to the issuing of waivers allowing admittance to first grade without the successful completion of kindergarten. The committee shall have no other authority. The committee shall be composed to all of the following members to the extent such personnel are either employed by the district or employed by the governing board of the educational service center:

- (1) The director of pupil personnel services;
- (2) An elementary school counselor;
- (3) An elementary school principal;
- (4) A school psychologist;
- (5) A teacher assigned to teach first grade.



Request for Early Entrance

If a child does not turn age 5 or 6 by the district cut-off date (Aug. 1 or Sept. 30), but turns age 5 or 6 by Jan. 1, the parent may request that the child be tested for possible placement in kindergarten or first grade respectively. Districts conducting such tests shall:

- Utilize a standardized testing program; and
- Establish the necessary standards it will accept for the purpose of early admission.



Successful Completion of Kindergarten

No school district shall admit a child to first grade that has not successfully completed kindergarten except as outlined above. Successful completion of kindergarten means that the child has completed the kindergarten requirements at one of the following:

1. A public or chartered nonpublic school OR
2. A kindergarten program that is all of the following:
 - a. Offered by a day-care provider licensed under Chapter 5104 of the revised code.
 - b. If offered after July 1, 1991, is directly taught by a teacher who holds one of the following:
 - (i) a valid certification/educator license issued under Section 3319.22 of the revised code;
 - (ii) a Montessori preprimary credential or age-appropriate diploma granted by the American Montessori Society or the Association Montessori Internationale;
 - (iii) certification for teachers in nontax-supported schools pursuant to section 3301.07.01 of the revised code.
 - c. Determined to be developmentally appropriate.

**Screening (ORC 3313.673)**

By Nov. 1 of the school year in which a child is enrolled for the first time, the child must be screened for:

- Vision
- Hearing
- Speech and communication
- Medical problems
- Developmental disorders

If the screening reveals the possibility of potential learning needs, the district must provide further assessment. Schools must note that screenings are not intended to diagnose educational disability or to be used for placement procedures.

**Instruction Time and Length of School Year (ORC 3313.48)**

For the purpose of instruction, schools must be open a minimum of 182 days in each school year including a maximum of 2 days for individualized parent-teacher conferences, 2 days for professional development and 5 days for calamity. For kindergarten, public school districts are only required to provide 2.5 hours of instruction per day.

**Full-Day Kindergarten (ORC 3321-05)**

Any school district may operate all-day kindergarten. If a district provides full-day kindergarten and the parent requests half-day services (minimum hours), the district must accommodate that request.

It is permissible for districts providing full-day services and not receiving Poverty Based-Assistance (State Formula Funding) funding to charge a fee for providing the full-day services. School districts must charge families based on a sliding fee-scale.

**Teacher-to-Student Ratio (ORC 3301-35-05)**

The ratio of teachers to students in kindergarten through fourth grade on a district-wide basis shall be at least one full-time equivalent classroom teacher per 25 students in the regular student population.



OHIO'S STATEWIDE KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT

KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT – LITERACY (KRA-L)

Purpose:

The assessment is designed to help educators evaluate young children's literacy skills at the beginning of the kindergarten year.

Legislation:

Ohio Revised Code 3301.07.15 mandates that all public and community school districts assess all first time kindergarten students. The KRA-L is the only statewide kindergarten assessment required for kindergarten. Results are reported via EMIS during the October Reporting Period.

Administration Window:

Districts must administer no sooner than four weeks prior to the start of school and not later than October 1st. Change effective March 1, 2007 per H.B. 276.

Length of Assessment and KRA-L Components:

The KRA-L is administered individually and takes approximately 15 minutes for each child. The components include: Answering Questions, Sentence Repetition, Rhyming Identification, Rhyming Production, Letter Identification and Initial Sounds.

KRA-L Score and Score Bands:

The assessment yields a total composite score of 29. There is no "cut-score" as this is not a high stakes or a pass or fail assessment. The scores should be used to determine if further assessment is needed as follows:

- 0-13: Assess broadly for intense instruction
- 14-23: Assess for targeted instruction
- 24-29: Assess for enriched instruction

KRA-L Resources:

How to KRA-L: A Manual for Teachers and Other Education Professionals

The manual provides a more in-depth look at the purpose of the KRA-L, how and why it was developed. It contains scenarios to help educators gain a better understanding of assessing for pre-reading readiness, strategies for collecting and organizing assessment data, sharing the information with parents and using the results to inform instruction.

Administration DVD

This five-part administration DVD was developed as a training tool for teachers and staff to understand the purpose and how to administer the assessment. It contains children in authentic settings being assessed with the KRA-L.

KRA-L Score Interpretation Workbook

The workbook was developed especially for kindergarten teachers. It provides guidance to help organize and use the scores as well as essential intervention strategies.

A Family Guide to Understanding Early Reading Skills: The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment – Literacy (KRA-L)

This guide is provided to schools on an annual basis for the purpose of sharing with families. This guide was developed for families to explain the types of activities involved in the assessment. It also includes suggestions for how families can help their children at home, a book list and online resources.

ODE Online Results:

The KRA-L score results are available on the web. The results are listed by county by district and include the number of children assessed, the district average and the percentages within each score band.

www.ode.state.oh.us, Keyword: KRA-L

OHIO'S DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Goals of Ohio's Diagnostic Assessments

The role and nature of the diagnostic assessments is different than that of other state-developed tests (proficiency and achievement). Diagnostic assessments serve as tools that assess student strengths and weaknesses to inform instructional decisions. They are flexible tools designed to help Ohio administrators, teachers and students reach two overarching goals:

- Increase student learning of the Academic Content Standards
- Inform and strengthen classroom instruction

Assessment is only one of the many methods for achieving these goals. Diagnostic assessment is integral to a comprehensive, statewide system of improving learning and instruction. Questions districts should consider:

- How do teachers communicate observations/results from assessments to other teachers, students and parents?
- How will the observations/results from assessments be used to inform instruction?
- How are students motivated to achieve a better understanding of Ohio's Academic Content Standards?
- How can these diagnostic assessments complement existing assessment programs within districts?

Components of Ohio's Diagnostic Assessments

The diagnostic assessments have four components:

Short Screening Measure: Provides a six- to eight-item assessment that can be used to quickly determine whether students are on track to meet end-of-year expectations.

Screening Measure: Provides an analysis of key or fundamental concepts and skills. These carefully selected tasks identify students who may be at risk and need early intervention to learn successfully at their grade level. The screening measure may be used in a variety of ways, including with all students early in the school year, with students new to the district or classroom during the course of the school year, and with at-risk students as evidence of learning key concepts and skills.

Diagnostic Measure: Provides a more in-depth assessment of students' strengths and needs for continued success in meeting the standards. It provides a profile that can be used as a formative or summative assessment at key checkpoints during the school year or as a measure of progress that students have made as a result of the instruction provided during the school year.

Observation Measure: Provides curriculum-embedded assessment strategies to document student progress. This includes a variety of mechanisms for observing and collecting work samples as a means for monitoring students' progress and intervention needs. Available only on the Ohio Department of Education Web site at: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/proficiency/Diagnostic_Achievement/default.asp.

Diagnostic Assessment Requirements

According to House Bill 3 (2003), Amended Substitute Senate Bill 2 (2004) and Amended Substitute House Bill 66 (2005) ALL districts must use diagnostic assessments as follows:

Kindergarten: A kindergarten diagnostic assessment must be administered to transfer students only as described below. There is no annual requirement in the law to use kindergarten diagnostic assessments with all kindergarten students. (The KRA-L is the only state assessment that must be administered to all kindergarten students. The KRA-L may not be substituted as a diagnostic assessment for transfer students.)

Grades 1 and 2: All students must be administered a diagnostic assessment in reading, writing and mathematics at least annually. Districts that met AYP in the previous school year may use a diagnostic assessment of their choice. Districts who have not met AYP the previous year must use a state-developed diagnostic assessment (short screening measure, screening measure or diagnostic measure) in order to meet the requirement.

Grade 3: Only buildings in “School Improvement” status must administer a grade 3 writing diagnostic assessment to all third grade students. A state-developed diagnostic assessment (screening measure or diagnostic measure) must be used if the district has not met AYP the previous year. If the district met AYP the previous school year then the building in “School Improvement” status may use a diagnostic assessment of their choice.

Transfer Students (K – 3): ALL districts regardless of “School Improvement” status or AYP:

- Must assess students (K-2 in reading, writing and mathematics and grade 3 in writing) who transfer into the district or to a different school within a district if each applicable diagnostic assessment was not administered in the previous district or school;
- May assess students who transfer into the district or to a different school within a district if it cannot be determined that the student was administered a diagnostic assessment in the previous district or school.

Districts who have not met AYP the previous year must use a state-developed diagnostic assessment (short screening measure, screening measure or diagnostic measure) in order to meet the transfer requirement. Districts that met AYP the previous year may use a diagnostic assessment of their choice with transfer students.

Districts are required to administer a diagnostic assessment with transfer students within 30 calendar days of a student’s enrollment. Students are considered to be transfer students for the purpose of diagnostic assessment after the EMIS October count week (usually the first full week in October).

Reading First schools may use federal diagnostic tests to meet the state diagnostic testing requirements.

Intervention Policy Requirement

Among the many elements of Senate Bill 1 (2001) is the requirement (Section 3313.6012, Ohio Revised Code) that each district must adopt a policy governing the conduct of academic prevention/intervention services for all grades and schools. The policy must include all of the following:

- Procedures for using diagnostic assessments to measure student progress toward the attainment of academic standards and to identify students who may not attain those academic standards as determined through the use of the diagnostic assessments;
- Plan for design of classroom-based intervention services to meet the instructional needs of individual students as determined by results of diagnostic assessments;
- Procedures for the regular collection of student performance data;
- Procedures for using student performance data from proficiency, achievement or diagnostic assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention services and, if necessary, to modify such services.

In addition to the district policy, each district has to provide prevention/intervention services in pertinent subject areas to students who score below proficient on proficiency or achievement tests or who do not demonstrate academic performance at their grade level based on the results of the diagnostics.

District Policy Decisions

Legislation governs which districts and/or schools must administer diagnostic assessments. However, it is the districts decision as to how the diagnostic assessments are to be administered locally. Districts should determine, based on an evaluation of their current assessment requirements, when and how the diagnostic assessments best fit the district needs within the requirements of the law. In making these decisions it is very important to involve classroom teachers, building administrators and curriculum supervisors, since these decisions will impact instruction, curriculum and intervention.

In guiding district policy decisions, some questions districts might ask to determine what is best for their district are:

- What assessments are currently used in the district? – Districts should first take time to look at the assessments currently administered and identify strengths and weaknesses of their assessment program and its alignment to Ohio’s academic content standards. Districts may determine which assessments could be replaced with the state-developed diagnostic assessments. Districts may determine which state diagnostic assessments could be used to complement assessments within their program.
- How will these diagnostic assessments best meet the needs of the student? – When districts are required to administer a state-developed diagnostic assessment they must administer an assessment at least once a year. There is flexibility in terms of when and how the assessments are used. For instance, districts can choose to use either the short screening measure, screening measure or the diagnostic measure, or any combination of the three measures. Districts can choose when during the school year to give the measure(s). Teachers may choose to give the full measure at one time or to use sections or activities before and/or after instruction is provided on a particular skill. Teachers may select activities from either the screening or diagnostic measure to give to students at the beginning of the year, and then move to additional activities (either easier or more difficult) based on individual student performance. Teachers may decide to administer some of the activities in small group rather than individually (see section -Modifying “Administrative Type” for the Diagnostic Assessments).

Use of any of the above procedures would meet the requirement for administration of a Diagnostic Assessment.

- Who should administer? – While administering individually or in small groups, it is the students’ teacher who gains the most insight by administering these assessments. However, this does not preclude the district from finding alternative ways of assessing students, while still benefiting the student and teacher. As one example, some districts utilize assessment teams. These teams administer the test while the teacher continues with instruction and after the assessment takes place, the team provides input to the teacher about each student’s identified strengths and weaknesses.
- How should scores be used? – The diagnostic assessments are informal, standardized, and criterion-referenced to help teachers identify student strengths and weaknesses relative to Ohio's academic content standards. They were designed for the purpose of informing instruction to improve student achievement of grade-level indicators. However, in order to use the scores for individual student performance, the entire measure should be administered at a point in time rather than sections throughout the school year. They should be administered according to the standardized administration procedures in the Administration Manual. Altering the administration type from individual to small group may have some impact on test scores if students within the small group can benefit from other student’s responses. It should be noted that teachers benefit from observing student performance and those observations can be more important than obtaining a score. This is why, unlike with the achievement tests, flexibility is given to districts as to how they can benefit most from these diagnostic assessments.

Modifying “Administration Type” for the Diagnostic Assessments

The common question arises – Can teachers modify the activities from an individual administration to a small group administration? The answer is yes. There were two underlying decisions in determining administration type when these assessments were developed. The first decision relates to the type of activity – whether it is essential to perform the activity individually, so that other students would not benefit from another student’s response i.e., oral reading. Secondly, the number of manipulatives which could be supplied to each classroom had a direct effect on the administration type.

Small and large group activities would require a significant increase in the number of manipulatives to be provided for each classroom. Districts having similar manipulatives in their classrooms already could assess more than one student at a time, as long as the other students in the group are not influenced by another student’s responses.

Classroom Management Tips

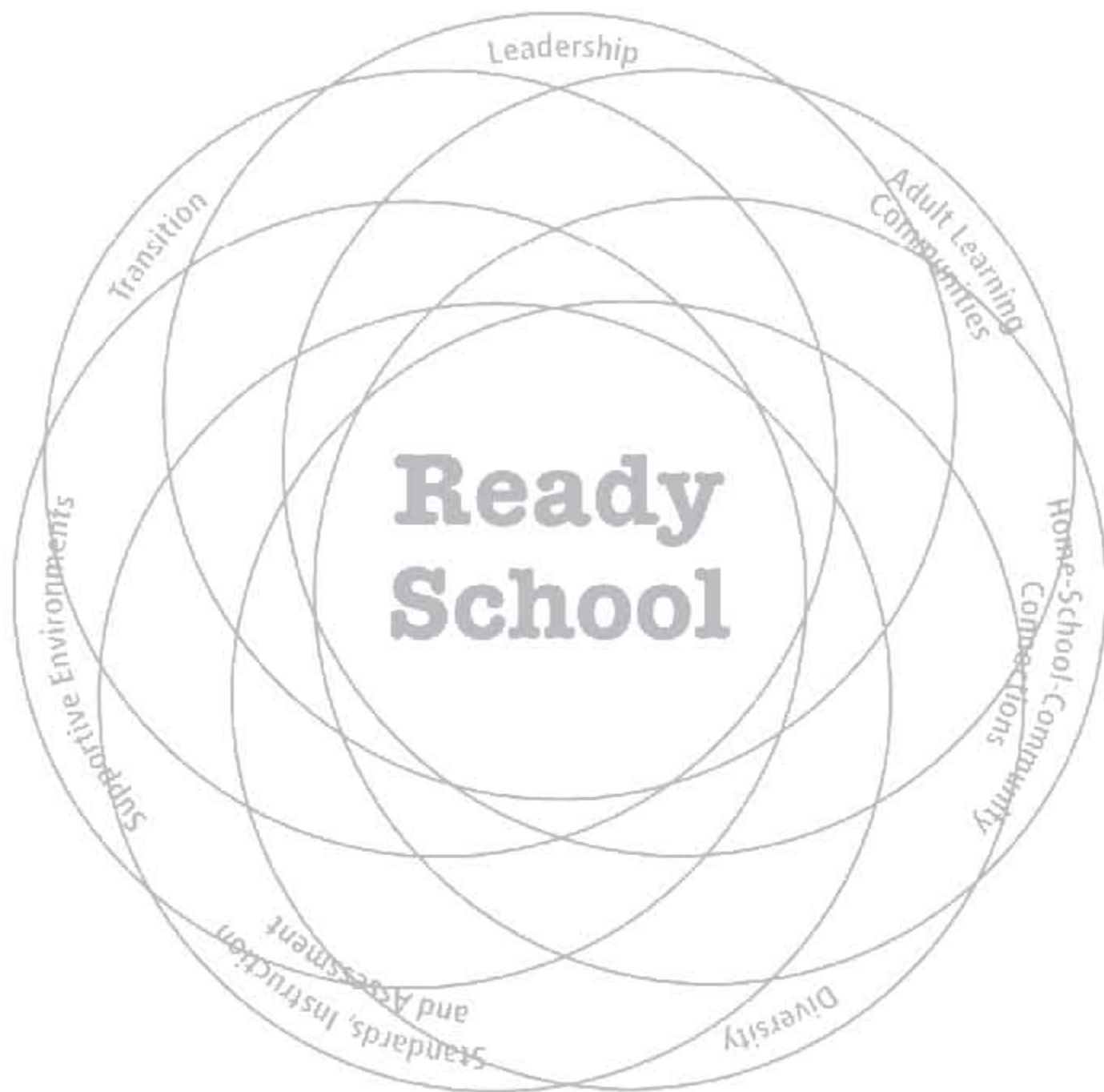
Planning

- Educators should review all material prior to administration.
- Educators should determine the assessment needs of their students.
- Educators should identify student(s) to be assessed and the amount of time allotted to administer the activity(s).
- Educators should gather all material prior to administration.
- Educators should decide what they will have the remaining students do while they administer the activity(s).
- Educators should introduce and have students work in activity centers prior to using this management strategy during diagnostic administration.

During Administration

- Embed the administration of activities into everyday classroom instruction.
- Have students who are not a part of the diagnostic assessment work in activity centers.
- Have students divide into small groups working with games/activities that are closely related to the concept or skills addressed with the assessments.
- Create student folders designed to meet the needs of each individual student. The materials within the folder should require the students to work independently while the teacher is working with small groups.
- Create a procedure that states when a light is lit or a particular sign is up (e.g., stop sign), students in the class will know that the teacher is working with an individual student or small group and should not be interrupted. Students should have experience operating in this fashion during daily instruction.
- Allow volunteers (e.g., older students, parents, community members, instructional aide. etc.) to work with the small groups of students not involved in the diagnostic assessment.
- Have teachers from teacher teams administer the diagnostic activity(s) while the other teachers work with the remaining students.
- Substitutes can also be used to supervise the students while you administer the diagnostic activity(s).





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