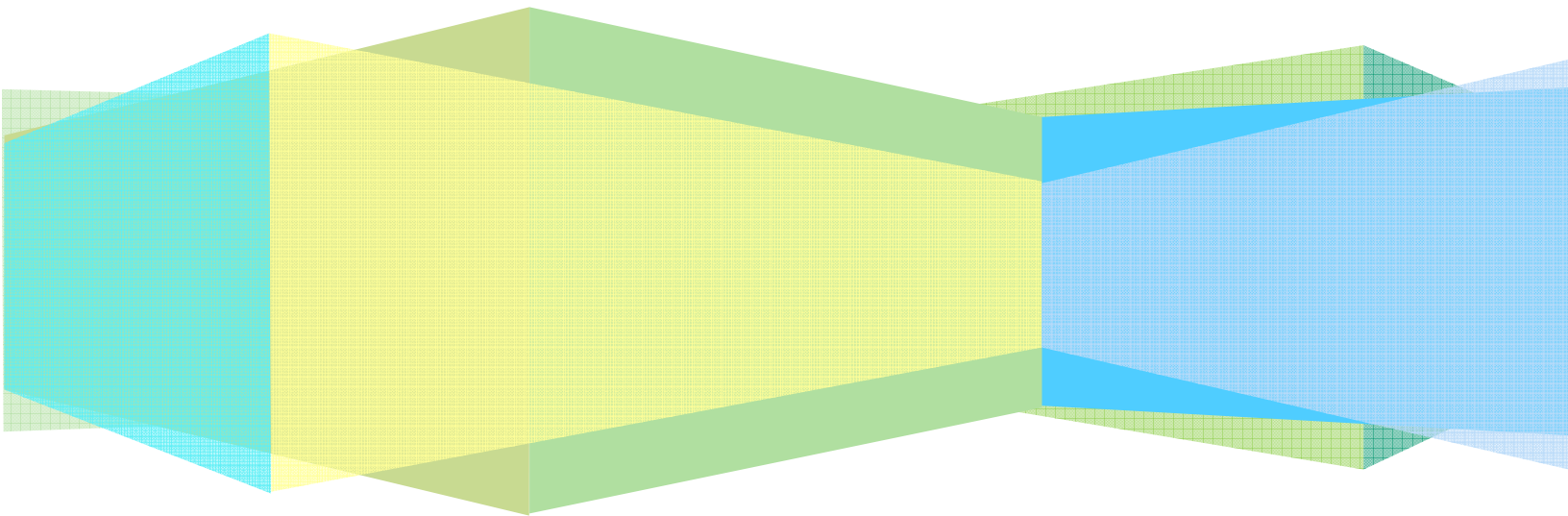


Ready Schools Toolkit

A Guide to a Successful Ready Schools Initiative



Down East Partnership for Children

Highlighting the Ready Schools work of Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools & Edgecombe County Public Schools in North Carolina

May 2011

Table of Contents

Introduction

What is a Ready School?	2
The Ready Schools Pathways	2

Starting the Process

Building the Team	5
The Ready Schools Process	6
Community-School Teams	6
The Ready District – Community-District Team	7
Overview of the Toolkit	

Ready School Pathways

Leaders and Leadership	10
Transitions	12
Teacher Supports	14
Engaging Environments	16
Effective Curricula	18
Family, School, and Community Partnerships	20
Respecting Diversity	22
Assessing Progress	

Appendix

Sample Ready School Toolkit	25
Blank Community Assessment Documents	32

What is a Ready School?

A Ready School works to meet the unique needs of all children and families they serve. It provides an inviting atmosphere, values and respects all children and their families, and is a place where children succeed. It is committed to high quality in all domains of learning and teaching and has deep connections with parents and its community. It prepares children for success in work and life in the 21st century.

The Ready Schools Pathways

Leaders and Leadership- School leaders believe all children can learn, teachers and staff can develop professionally, and all schools can meet or exceed state performance standards.¹

Transitions- School staff and parent groups work with families, children, and preschool teachers and caregivers before kindergarten and with families and children during kindergarten and across grades to smooth the transition from home to school.²

Teacher Supports- School organizes classrooms, schedules, teams, and staff activities to maximize the support for all adults to work effectively with children during the school day.²

Engaging Environments- The environment is warm and inviting, and actively engages children in a variety of learning activities.²

Effective Curricula- The school diligently employs educational methods/materials shown to be effective in helping children achieve objectives required for grade-level proficiency.²

Family, School, and Community Partnerships- The school takes specific steps to enhance parents' capacities to foster their children's readiness and to support children's learning in and outside of school.²

Respecting Diversity- The school helps all children succeed by interacting with children/families in ways that are compatible with individual needs and family backgrounds or life experiences.²

Assessing Progress- School staff engages in ongoing improvement based on information that rigorously and systematically assesses classroom experiences, school practices that influence them, and children's progress toward curricular goals.²

¹ North Carolina Ready Schools definitions, www.ncreadyschools.org

² High/Scope Ready School Assessment: The Dimensions of Measurement. www.readyschoolassessment.org

History about the Ready Schools Initiative

The concept of Ready Schools has been around for nearly 20 years, but has built momentum over the past 5 years. In 2006, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) Initiative elected to advance the ready school agenda through their Pathways to Ready Schools. Down East Partnership for Children was among the local demonstration sites, along with Region A Partnership for Children and sites from seven other states.

North Carolina brought together a Ready Schools Taskforce that utilized these pathways at the foundation for its definition and set of pathways. The North Carolina Board of Education adopted the definition and pathways in November 2007. The pathways were modified to align with the High/Scope Ready School Assessment, a widely used self-assessment tool that measures a school's capacity for using Ready Schools' best practices.

For more information on Ready Schools, contact the Down East Partnership for Children or visit us at www.depc.org.

Building the Team

The education of young children is often seen as the responsibility of the entire community, including families, schools, early care providers, businesses, faith-based organizations, and others. For a Ready School to be seen as a part of the community, it must effectively engage the community in the school at all levels from providing financial resources to being a partner in school-decision making.

“Ready Schools helps teachers and impacts students' learning. We are able to help young children to become better prepared to succeed in today's global society.”

-Ready Schools Principal

The community must value education – and specifically – value the role of early education in the long-term academic outcomes and goals for our children. Many educational initiatives and programs come and go depending on the administration at the time. However, Ready Schools is not a program, it is a process, and a way of thinking that ensures schools are ready to meet the needs of all children, regardless of background or experiences. An engaged community, committed to creating Ready Schools, can withstand changes in leadership or specific educational programs.

The first step in creating a Ready Schools Initiative is to increase awareness about Ready Schools, including its role in early care and education for children birth to age eight. It is critical for those involved in your Ready Schools Initiative to note that the Ready Schools philosophy is about increasing the capacity of schools to meet the needs of all children during this critical phase in their development. By age 8, children develop the academic and social skills that form the foundation for later learning—problem-solving, self-confidence, relationship building, curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. Also by age 8, children are no longer learning to read but reading to learn. It is during this period, that children get the greatest benefit from high quality educational opportunities. Without such opportunities, they may never have that foundation for later learning and may never reach their full potential.

A successful strategy to build awareness of Ready Schools and engage the community is through community forums. Forums allow various stakeholders to learn information, as well as discuss strategies they know are or are not working in their community. These forums may be targeted at a specific Ready Schools topic or pathway, such as transition, or on Ready Schools as a whole.

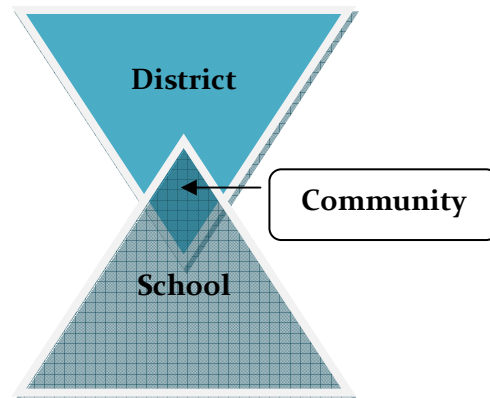
A second stage of the community engagement process is to identify leaders (from the forums or through other connections) that support the Ready Schools vision and engage them in community-based strategies that support Ready Schools. Many community leaders want to support education, but need additional information and training on how to be involved.

A strategy to engage school personnel in the Ready Schools process is by providing resources, both human and financial, to implement innovative ideas at the classroom, grade, or school level. These ideas can stimulate teachers and administrators to think outside of their traditional strategies for school improvement, as well as to foster relationships between the schools and outside organizations.

A final strategy to include in efforts to build your team is to provide networking opportunities for celebrating successes and sharing lessons learned. It can be equally important to share strategies that worked as well as those that were not successful, so that the team can continually learn.

A Ready Schools Initiative may be successfully built from any level – from an individual school that wants to look at themselves through a new lens – a community agency that wants to partner with its local elementary schools – or from a school system that wants to improve the practices within its district.

There is a role for each of these partners to play in a successful initiative, but all must have buy-in to helping build welcoming and engaging environments that support the needs of all children and families. Regardless of where you begin your Ready Schools Initiative, it is essential to engage the community effectively in the process. The community not only brings a new perspective to the work, but also can be a key player in bringing the early care community, school community, and other community resources together to create a system that can support the healthy growth and development of children and their families.



The Ready Schools Process

The Ready Schools process includes:

- Assessment with a community-school team
- Development and implementation of a Ready Schools workplan
- Coaching and technical assistance on best practices
- Evaluation of the Ready Schools workplan

To participate in the Ready Schools process, interested schools bring together a school-community team. It is important that a school allow adequate time to build this

team and/or use community-based agencies to help identify appropriate partners. This team is instrumental in the school's efforts to assess their practices using a tool such as the nationally validated High/Scope Ready Schools Assessment (RSA). The RSA was developed based on research and best practices for effectively meeting the needs of all young children. The RSA, which aligns with the North Carolina definition of Ready Schools endorsed by DPI in 2007, measures a school's practices in eight dimensions of Ready Schools' practices:

- Leaders and Leadership
- Transitions
- Teacher Supports
- Engaging Environments
- Effective Curricula
- Family, School, and Community Partnerships
- Respecting Diversity
- Assessing Progress

The school-community team then develops a Ready Schools workplan and identifies resources needed to implement the plan. These plans have shown to be most effective when the community-school team identifies a maximum of two to three areas from the assessment results to work on at a time and pick those areas strategically based on where you may see the largest or most long-term impact.

Schools should identify a resource, such as their local Ready Schools coordinator or other identified contact, where they can receive training, technical assistance, and coaching throughout the assessment process and implementation of the workplan. The Ready Schools coordinator provides information on research-based and best practices for addressing school needs. The coordinator can also share effective strategies and lessons learned from other Ready Schools participants. The coordinator should promote cross-school and cross-district networking and sharing. There are several books related to the pathways, which may serve as good resources for guided book studies (see resources section or the *Ready Schools Toolkit: Pathways to Success for Young Children Pre-Kindergarten through Third Grade*).

“The opportunity to participate in the Ready Schools Assessment process was very beneficial. It was an eye opening experience for our staff and leadership team...With this straightforward appraisal system; we did determine that there are very specific areas in which we can definitely improve.”

Ready Schools Principal

Community-School Teams

The first step for a school engaging in the Ready Schools Initiative is to form their community-school team. This team will be responsible for completing the school-level self-assessment measuring their capacity to meet the needs of all children. The team should minimally include:

- Principal/School administrator
- Grade level representation that mirrors the school (i.e. PK – 5 teachers)
- Early Care Provider(s)
- Families*
- Business
- Faith-Based Organization

Civic organizations, higher education institutions, and other community-based leaders are also good to include on the team. A shared vision and trust are key to facilitating open dialogue and ultimately, the success of this team.

*Families on the team typically require pre-existing knowledge of school practices to be able to engage in the assessment process. However, solicit input through other methods, such as parent surveys or focus groups with families that represent the student population, including hard-to-reach families.

The Ready District – Community-District Team

The work of the community-district team mirrors that of the school-community team, but must also incorporate strategies for scaling best practices and sustaining the initiative through the development of human and financial resources.

The role of the community-district team is to provide oversight of the Ready Schools Initiative, including input on the development of school-level and community-level strategies.

The team should minimally include:

- Ready Schools coordinator
- Lead central office contact with knowledge and influence on PK-3
- School board member(s)
- School principal(s) or other staff with PK-3 influence
- Faith-based organization(s)
- Business(es) & business organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce
- Early care providers (child care centers, family home providers, private preschools, Head Start, school-age programs)
- Families
- Child care resource and referral agency
- Civic organization(s)
- Higher education institution(s)
- Grassroots leaders

Overview of the Toolkit

This Ready Schools toolkit is designed to provide a foundation for creating a Ready Schools Initiative, including the process centered on building community engagement from key stakeholders in your community.

For each of the eight pathways or dimensions, the toolkit highlights successful strategies that have been implemented in Ready Schools Initiatives, including those in Nash and Edgecombe counties through the Down East Partnership for Children's Ready Schools' efforts.

The toolkit will guide your community-district team through a series of discussion questions about what a Ready District looks like, including what policies and practices a community or district should have in place to support and sustain the Ready Schools. Each series of questions will guide your community-district team in thinking about how it can support a successful Ready Schools Initiative, what evidence there is to support your current practices, and identify next steps for your team.

Resources

- Down East Partnership for Children; www.depc.org
- NC Ready Schools Initiative; <http://www.ncreadyschools.org/>
- High/Scope Ready School Assessment; <http://www.readyschoolassessment.org/>
- FirstSchool; <http://firstschool.us/>

Leaders & Leadership

Leadership at all levels of the school and district must reflect in its vision a belief and climate for promoting the success of *all* children. Within the district, it is important that the superintendent and other administration value the role of early childhood (preschool to grade 2) in meeting its vision for all children to be successful.

Specifically, this pathway looks at the commitment of the principal to meet the unique needs of all children and creating a professional climate that is conducive to the success of all children and all staff.

A school and principal's support of the Ready Schools philosophy can be demonstrated through their school improvement plan. Does the plan incorporate Ready Schools' strategies, including strategies to meet the needs of the K-2 students and families, not just the testing grades (third grade and up)?

The pathway looks at the training and experience of the principal in early childhood development. Principals can join early childhood organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, attend conferences on child development, and access resources on best practices for instruction of young children. It is also critical that principals spend time in developmentally appropriate preschool, kindergarten, and first grade classrooms that promote experiences and environments based on knowledge of how children learn and develop.

Resources

- National Association for the Education of Young Children; www.naeyc.org
- Power of K; http://prim.ncwiseowl.org/the_power_of_k/

READY SCHOOLS IN ACTION

Fostering Collaboration -

At Benvenue Elementary, the principal promotes collaboration among his teachers and across grades. Teachers are encouraged to take an active part in planning and create innovative solutions. Close attention is given to scheduling to ensure at least 45 minutes of common planning time for teachers each day. Every six weeks, substitutes are hired to allow for half day of collaborative planning across all grade levels, including academic coaches, specials, and administrators. Vertical alignment of curriculum is essential for student success.

Coffee with the Principal -

At Middlesex Elementary, the principal initiated "Coffee with the Principal" to address Leaders & Leadership along with Family, School, & Community Partnerships. Once monthly, (with both morning and evening opportunities) parents and community members are invited to participate. The morning and evening schedules make it possible for parents to attend no matter their work schedules. These dialogue sessions allow opportunities for sharing of ideas and information within a small, non-threatening environment. A translator was available for non-English speaking parents.

Leaders & Leadership

Ready Districts promote a vision and practices that support the success of all children, including the role that pre-kindergarten through 2nd (PK-2) grade plays in overall student achievement. The community and district can encourage participation in the Ready Schools Initiative and that leadership selections reflect the support and adoption of the Ready Schools pathways.

- **Does the district-level vision and mission reflect success for all children?**
- **Do the superintendent, school board, and other central office staff understand early childhood development and its impact on effective learning strategies?**
- **Do district-level leadership policies and practices reflect the importance of PK-2 in student achievement?**
- **Are Ready Schools' strategies for PK-2 included in the school improvement plan?**

Transitions

In North Carolina, children are eligible to start kindergarten if they are five by August 31. Schools should have strategies in place to ensure all children, regardless of their prior experiences, can transition smoothly into the kindergarten setting and have a successful start to their school career.

A variety of strategies should be offered to work with families, early care providers, and children that build smooth transitions for children to help them adjust to changing expectations and routines as they start kindergarten, throughout the school year, and between grades. While strategies may build children's exposure to what kindergarten will look like, they should not be used to catch children up on basic skills contained in the kindergarten curriculum.

Strategies may include welcome materials sent to families, home visits by kindergarten teachers to share information, and family workshops at the school. Children should have opportunities to meet their child's teacher before school starts through an open house or other opportunities where they may actually spend time in the kindergarten classroom and visit other areas of the school, such as the cafeteria and the media center.

By facilitating early registration and determination of class rosters for all grades, schools may facilitate activities where children get an opportunity to spend time as a group and schools can get a "sneak peek" at the classroom dynamics.

Effective transition practices include building relationships with families and early care providers (childcare centers, family home providers, Head Start, private and faith-based preschools, and public pre-kindergarten programs). These relationships allow schools to work with early care programs and families regarding registration, sharing of information on children's strengths and needs through tools such as Ages and Stages Questionnaires to identify additional support services, and for alignment of preschool and kindergarten curricula.

Resources

- SERVE Center: *Terrific Transitions*
<http://www.serve.org/uploads/publications/Terrific%20Transitions.pdf>
- Partnerships for Inclusion: *Smooth Moves to Kindergarten*
http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~pfi/pages/products.cfm?product_id=55
- Ready. Set. Go! <http://www.readysetk.org/>

READY SCHOOLS IN ACTION

Transition Does Not Have to Happen Monday through Friday - Baskerville Elementary realized that families might not always be able to attend events during the week. A series of Saturday workshops for kindergarten families and students was implemented prior to start of the school year and throughout the year.

Connecting with Early Care Providers The Winstead Avenue principal and kindergarten teacher visited an early care program that feeds into their school. While at the center they met perspective parents, shared information about registration and kindergarten life. They also read with the children, shared information about kindergarten, and answered many questions.

Early Care Pen Pal Program - Elementary schools were matched with childcare centers or family home providers from their feeder area. Classrooms exchanged letters, cards, and pictures. The communication will culminate at the end of the year when the children from the early care programs will be invited to visit the kindergarten classrooms with whom they have been writing.

Using Technology - Not all families can attend the traditional activities to share information about transition. Bailey Elementary created a video to be used with parents that could not attend events or registered after the beginning of the school year. Additionally, schools could create an online open house or tour of the school for their website.

Sharing Information - Think & Grow Childcare Center develops packets to share with the feeder school staff. Included in the packet is the child's physical information.

Reducing Risk for Retention - Red Oak Elementary offered an "Extra Set of Hands" during the first semester of kindergarten. Teachers identified students needing additional support early in the school year and the licensed teacher, which was employed, enabled classrooms to work in smaller groups offering support to identified students.

Transitions

A Ready District will develop an infrastructure that facilitates planning and implementation of a variety of collaborative transition practices that provide multiple and varied opportunities for children and families. The community and district should also work together to establish systems that create connections and foster alignment among early care programs and elementary schools.

- **Does your district have a community-wide transition committee and/or plan?**
- **Do district policies and practices promote communication between early care environments and schools?**
- **Does the district implement any community-wide transition practices (i.e. staggered entry, early registration, etc.)?**
- **Do district policies reflect best practices related to entry and promotion of children?**

Teacher Supports

This pathway looks at the commitment of resources to support teachers and administrators' abilities to educate children effectively. This includes both infrastructure decisions, such as class size, and peer mentoring, as well as professional development on a variety of teaching strategies for supporting student achievement. This professional development should provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Teachers and administrators should understand how a child's racial, cultural, socio-economic status or special needs affect the types of interventions s/he may need to be successful.

Teacher supports also include connections with outside organizations from feeder preschools to professional organizations and higher education institutions. One way to facilitate connections with feeder preschools is to conduct joint professional development for teachers and early care providers.

Resources

- North Carolina Teacher Academy;
<http://www.teacheracademy.org/cms/index.php>

READY SCHOOLS IN ACTION

Commitment to Vertical Planning - Benvenue Elementary hires substitutes to allow for half day of collaborative planning every six weeks across all grade levels, including academic coaches, specials, and administrators.

Professional Development to Connect the Dots - Red Oak Elementary conducts professional development to allow teachers opportunities to maximize their effectiveness in work with materials purchased to support identified areas of reading skill needs for grade K-2 students. Teachers aligned manipulative materials with learning targets identified in the 3-D Assessment used in North Carolina K-2 classrooms. Additionally teachers developed literacy units around children's picture books to allow children opportunities to make open-ended learning choices in response to their reading

Professional Development for All - To ensure that all staff had access to the same information and promote discussions among teachers, Princeville Montessori turned their professional development into a staff retreat. Over the course of two days, teachers, staff, and administrators, engaged in discussions about Ruby Payne's Framework of Poverty, under the facilitation of NC Teacher Academy Instructor. Staff members shared in conversations about implementation of learned strategies throughout the year at staff meetings.

Power of K Collaboration with NAEYC - To encourage connections between early care settings and kindergarden classrooms, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction tied the Power of K training opportunities with the annual NCAEYC conference.

Get an Edge Up - To promote alignment between early care, school age (K-12 settings) and higher education, the education settings in Edgecombe County promotes "Get an Edge Up" on billboards, flyers, and signage throughout the county to emphasize the importance of

Teacher Supports

A Ready School district should commit appropriate resources to support their teachers and administrators' abilities to educate children effectively, ranging from their professional development to resource allocations.

- **Do schedules established for schools and individual classrooms reflect an understanding of child development principles?**
- **Does the district provide joint professional development for early care providers, teachers, and administrators on topics related to early childhood development?**
- **Are district resources allocated to support reduced student-teacher ratios in K-2 classrooms?**
- **Does the district facilitate opportunities for cross-school networking, sharing and learning?**
- **Does the district offer professional development and monitoring on the use of best practices in K-2 classrooms tailored to the school's individual needs?**
- **Does the district provide support for memberships and training from outside professional organizations?**
- **Does the district collaborate with any higher education institutions within the district?**

Engaging Environments

This pathway examines children’s environments to ensure they are warm, inviting, and actively engage children in learning. This includes meeting the basic health and safety needs, such as the school grounds being in good repair and classrooms having ample space. When completing classroom assignments, administrators should recognize the need for large physical spaces to create appropriate learning environments, particularly for kindergarten children.

Engaging environments should also ensure children have access to adequate materials, including books and manipulatives to support art, building, and other hands-on learning opportunities. The classroom climate should be positive, respectful and balance children’s opportunities to work individually, in small groups, and in whole group settings. Children’s materials should be culturally diverse and reflect the student population.

Children should be actively engaged in the learning process and have the ability to make open-ended content and process choices. Children’s learning should focus on transforming ideas versus completing paper-pencil tasks. Use of technology can also be a tool to expand the types of activities in which children can engage.

There are opportunities to extend these learning opportunities into the home environment by sharing ideas for hands-on learning opportunities outside of school.

Resources

- *Classroom Spaces That Work: Strategies for Teachers* by Marlynn Clayton, Mary Beth Forton, and Linsey Doolittle
- *K Today: Teaching and Learning in the Kindergarten Year* by Dominic F. Gullo
- Power of K; http://prim.ncwiseowl.org/the_power_of_k/

READY SCHOOLS IN ACTION

Literacy/Listening Centers – Middlesex Elementary developed centers within each K-2 classrooms. Center materials included beanbag chairs, CD players, CDs and books.

Bilingual Learning Centers - At Cedar Grove Elementary, the school established English as a Second Language Learning Centers. These centers include materials in print format, game format, and computer software that support ESL learners and offers enrichment activities to enable English-speaking students to learn Spanish. Staff received professional development on the use of the materials to implement these centers effectively.

Power of Kindergarten - Kindergarten classrooms of today have to balance what we know to be effective in teaching our youngest children with the demands of testing and accountability. To increase utilization of best practices in kindergarten classrooms, the Department of Public Instruction identified 33 Power of K teachers throughout North Carolina, including a teacher at Red Oak Elementary and one at Stocks Elementary. These teachers received intensive professional development and training on how to increase the utilization of age- and developmentally-appropriate strategies for teaching kindergarteners. The teachers then shared their learned strategies with other teachers in their districts.

“Movers and Shakers” Professional Development- Middlesex Elementary participated in a professional development led by a NC Teacher Academy teacher. Teachers had the opportunity to learn new ways to reinforce basic skills within their classrooms. Teachers made interactive games to be used, which allow children to manipulate materials to reinforce skills rather than complete worksheets.

Engaging Environments

A Ready School district should value and promote classroom environments that emphasize children as active participants in the learning process and nurture children's development in all areas.

- **Does the district value and allocate adequate resources to support the safety and health of environments?**
- **Does the district secure materials and resources to provide print-rich classrooms with adequate manipulatives?**
- **Does the district provide support for the implementation of positive behavior supports and classrooms free of threat?**
- **Does the district offer professional development on nurturing children's social and emotional development?**
- **Do district policies and practices emphasize and support children being active participants in the learning process?**

Effective Curricula

This pathway looks at the use of effective educational methods to develop children’s proficiency in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, character education and specials (music, art, physical education).

Each area should have clearly identified learning standards or goals that align with the Standard Course of Study of the state. The curricula used by the school should be used as a resource to meet these standards, but may be supplemented with other resources and activities to develop children’s proficiency in all areas, including healthy nutrition and physical activity habits.

Staff should be informed and trained about all curricula areas. Opportunities should be available for planning and collaboration across all areas and grades. Procedures should be in place to monitor fidelity for ensuring adherence to the learning standards.

READY SCHOOLS IN ACTION

A Well-Rounded Education –

All teaching staff at GW Bulluck Elementary participated in monthly professional development opportunities to identify effective teaching/learning strategies for science, social studies, physical education, and the arts standard courses of study. All staff was included to improve strategies to integrate the content areas not emphasized by end-of-grade testing within the daily instructional schedule.

Curriculum Board – Several schools display all learning goals for the specific marking period for each grade level in a centrally located area of the school. By posting the learning goals for reading and mathematics, all staff members are able to integrate and support learning, no matter their teaching assignment. Families use the board to understand concepts being taught in the classrooms.

Power of Science & Social Studies - At Williford Elementary, the school established science and social studies centers for their K-2 classrooms. The school also purchased “Classroom Weeklies” to support instruction in these areas. Parent sessions were held to offer information to parents of strategies they could implement at home to support science and social studies.

Effective Curricula

A Ready School district should ensure children have access to curricula and other effective teaching strategies that help children build their skills and abilities in all areas of child development, including social-emotional and health.

- **Does the district ensure staff are informed and well trained in learning standards across all areas?**
- **Does the district promote vertical alignment of grade level learning targets?**
- **Does the district allow opportunities for staff and others to evaluate and select the most effective curriculum to achieve learning targets?**
- **Does the district have in place processes to monitor the fidelity of learning standards and materials?**

Family, School and Community Partnerships

This pathway examines the practices of a school to engage families and community effectively in supporting children's education at home, at school, and in the community. Schools should engage families in multiple and varied opportunities, including school decision-making. Events should be designed in a way that provides interactive learning opportunities.

The environment should be welcoming and reflect an open-door policy embraced by all school staff. Communication between home and school should reflect that openness and promote two-way communication. Barriers should be removed to ensure families have the opportunity to participate, including the use of family-friendly language in communication and for sharing curriculum information, as well as the regular availability of parent-teacher conferences. If transportation is an issue, home visits are a strategy to share information and build relationships with families. Another option is to provide taxi vouchers to families or host events in the community.

Community partnerships should be built with businesses, early care providers, faith-based organizations, higher education, civic organizations, and other community resources. These partners should be an active voice in school decision-making and promoting the value of education in the community.

The community can support the development of children and families by actively participating in school-sponsored events or by extending the services available to children and families of the school. The community can provide resource for student supports, such as medical care, nutrition, and social services, and for family supports, including parent education and GED courses. School-based family resource centers are an effective way to meet families' needs and become a hub for the community.

Resources

- North Carolina Parent Information and Resource Center- "*Family Friendly*" Walkthrough Checklist; <http://www.ecac-parentcenter.org/education/pirc.htm>
- *Parents & Teachers Working Together* by Carol Davis and Alice Yang
- *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family/School Partnerships* by Anne T. Henderson, Vivian Johnson, Karen L. Mapp, and Don Davies

READY SCHOOLS IN ACTION

Community canvassing to Identify New Students – Baskerville Elementary School struggles each year in having kindergarten students registered prior to the opening of school. Volunteers including school staff, community leaders, and district level staff joined to canvass the community to locate potential students. The result-enough students were identified to allot two additional teaching positions to the school prior to the start date.

Family Webinar – Winstead Avenue identified a need to reach "hard-to reach" parents who did not or could not due to schedules attend parent workshops. The second grade developed a webinar, promoted it, and presented the information. Approximately 80 parents participated from home.

Saturday Mornings at School - Baskerville Elementary School combined extended learning opportunities for kindergarten students and support of families. Saturday morning sessions were held at the school for parents and children. Games were made, learning strategies were modeled, and relationships were strengthened between school and families.

Family, School, and Community Partnerships

A Ready School district should promote policies and practices that effectively engage families and the communities at the district and individual school levels, including decision-making.

- **Does the district value authentic family and community involvement in school decision-making?**
- **Does the district promote an open door policy for family involvement?**
- **Does the district monitor family and community involvement data and practices?**
- **Do district policies promote effective, regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences?**
- **Does the district offer professional development on effectively engaging families and communities?**
- **Does the district have policies and practices to encourage authentic community involvement in education, including volunteer policies?**

Respecting Diversity

Ready Schools should be skilled in engaging families and teaching children with respect to all backgrounds and experiences. This includes approaches based on children's ethnicity, income, family structure, language, special needs, and their strengths, life experiences, and talents.

The classroom environment should have culturally diverse materials that mirror the student population. Children should be able to find images of children that look like them, as well as materials to support children with special needs and English as Second Language (ESL) learners.

Teachers should receive diversity training, including on ways to work in partnership with families and community to meet the needs of children of these various backgrounds. These strategies may range from communication (translating materials into other languages) to professional learning communities that incorporate exceptional children's teachers with regular classroom teachers.

Resources

- *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* by Carol Ann Tomlinson
- North Carolina Teacher Academy, www.teacheracademy.org

READY SCHOOLS IN ACTION

Building Children's Experiences – Many children may come to school with limited life experiences. At Baskerville Elementary, a community team adopted the school and coordinated opportunities for children to have community members read to them, have a pep rally with a semi-pro football team, and take a tour of the city.

English Language Learners Professional Development- Bailey Elementary participated in training to learn effective strategies to teach non-English speaking children within the regular classroom. A NC Teacher Academy trainer led the professional development.

Framework of Poverty - To ensure that all staff had access to the same information and promote discussions among teachers, Princeville Montessori turned their professional development into a staff retreat. Over the course of two days, staff engaged in discussions about Ruby Payne's Framework of Poverty, under the facilitation of NC Teacher Academy Instructor.

Diverse Materials – Red Oak Elementary inventoried classrooms and found that their print materials did not offer positive, authentic images of the school population. Materials were purchased and placed in the media center for check out to classrooms. Puzzles, books, charts, etc. showing Hispanic/Latino, African-American, Asian and Indian children became part of the K-2 classroom environments.

Exceptional Children in the Regular Classroom - Stocks Elementary conducted professional development to identify strategies to teach exceptional and struggling students within the regular classroom. The book *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Children* was the primary resource.

ESL Support - With a large Hispanic/Latino population, Spring Hope Elementary wanted to ensure that families had access to support outside of school hours. The school provides a cell phone to the ESL teacher to allow access to ESL families outside of school hours for assistance with any questions or concerns that may arise.

Respecting Diversity

A Ready School district should have policies that respect and value children and families of all backgrounds and provide support, including professional development to staff, on how to effectively engage all families and teach diverse children.

- **Does the district provide professional development and monitor implementation of strategies related to diversity, English language learners, and exceptional children?**
- **Are there district-level ESL staff?**
- **Does the district implement strategies to encourage the employment of a diverse staff?**
- **Are the district's website and other communications accessible by families of all backgrounds and reflective of the population?**
- **Does the district ensure staff is knowledgeable about anti-discrimination and harassment policies?**
- **Does the district regularly share or discuss its disaggregated student achievement data with the community?**

Assessing Progress

This pathway looks at practices regarding the assessment of classroom experiences, school practices, and children’s progress toward meeting learning standards.

Ready Schools should have systematic and standardized mechanisms for assessing children’s progress in PK-2. Schools should use multiple and varied types of assessments, including authentic assessments and student portfolios. Assessments should be aligned with clearly defined learning goals, and encompass children’s thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills. Classroom climates should also be systematically measured by methods other than walkthroughs.

It is also critical that schools utilize the assessment information to individualize instruction, communicate this information with families and the community, and monitor progress on goals through the school improvement process. When sharing this information with families and the community, schools should help all parties understand the data and foster a constructive discussion between the school and community.

Resources

- High/Scope Ready School Assessment; <http://www.readyschoolassessment.org/>
- North Carolina Parent Information and Resource Center- “Family Friendly” Walkthrough Checklist; <http://www.ecac-parentcenter.org/education/pirc.htm>
- Early Learning is For Everyone Asset Development Worksheet; www.ncreadyschools.org/documents/3ELFEAssessmentTool.doc
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS); <http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/>
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS); <http://curry.virginia.edu/research/labs/class>

READY SCHOOLS IN ACTION

Ready²: The Power to Connect Communities & Schools – Families and communities often want to be more involved in area schools and schools often want to connect more directly with families and the community, but need additional information and support. At Baskerville Elementary and Princeville Montessori, a team of family, school, and community representatives met to discuss the school and its needs. Honest and open discussions of the school data on end-of-grade tests and family involvement occurred. Sharing data with families and community in friendly language, engaged these leaders in a process to identify and implement new strategies to improve children’s experiences and family involvement.

Color-Coded Chart System – K-2 teachers in North Carolina assess each child 3-4 times yearly to monitor academic achievement. In a central location, usually where grade level meetings occur, student information is displayed according to proficiency-- below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level. Teaching staff, administration, and instructional leaders jointly develop strategies to accelerate learning.

High/Scope Ready School Assessment Sixteen elementary schools in Nash and Edgecombe Counties have brought together a community-school team to complete the High/Scope Assessment. The process has allowed schools to have the “difficult” conversations relative to how ready and prepared they are to meet the needs of all children and parents who enter their hallways.

Taking a Closer Look at Family Involvement – Stocks Elementary collected data on events offered to families and then disaggregated it to find out which parents were coming and which ones were not. This allows them to learn if their strategies are effectively reaching their hard-to-reach families.

Assessing Progress

A Ready School district should create an infrastructure that supports and encourages the utilization of a variety of assessments to measure progress on goals, including PK-2 student achievement, family and community involvement, and the environment of classrooms and the school.

- **Does the district utilize K-2 assessment data to inform instruction?**
- **Does the district promote multiple methods of assessment for school performance?**
- **Is there a district-wide evaluation plan for the measurement of non-curricular goals?**
- **Does the district provide training on how to utilize assessment data to differentiate instructional strategies?**
- **Does the district regularly communicate its data, outcomes, and strategic plan to the community?**

About the Down East Partnership for Children

The Down East Partnership for Children (DEPC) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1993 by citizens concerned about education and economic development of Nash and Edgecombe counties. DEPC's model of services focuses on prevention versus intervention targeting young children ages 0-8. It leverages investments from local, state, and national partners to launch every child as a healthy, lifelong learner by the end of the third grade.

DEPC has had a positive and longstanding relationship with both local school systems (Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools and Edgecombe County Public Schools). In 2004, DEPC launched its Ready Schools Initiative to deepen and build on this collaborative relationship and to support our schools to launch every child as a healthy, lifelong learner by the end of the 3rd grade. Closely tied with the Ready Communities Initiative, DEPC has worked with 16 elementary schools (as of May 2011) to build their community-school teams, assess their current practices, and help implement innovative and effective strategies to build their capacity to meet the needs of all children.

For more information about DEPC, visit www.depc.org or call (252) 985-4300.

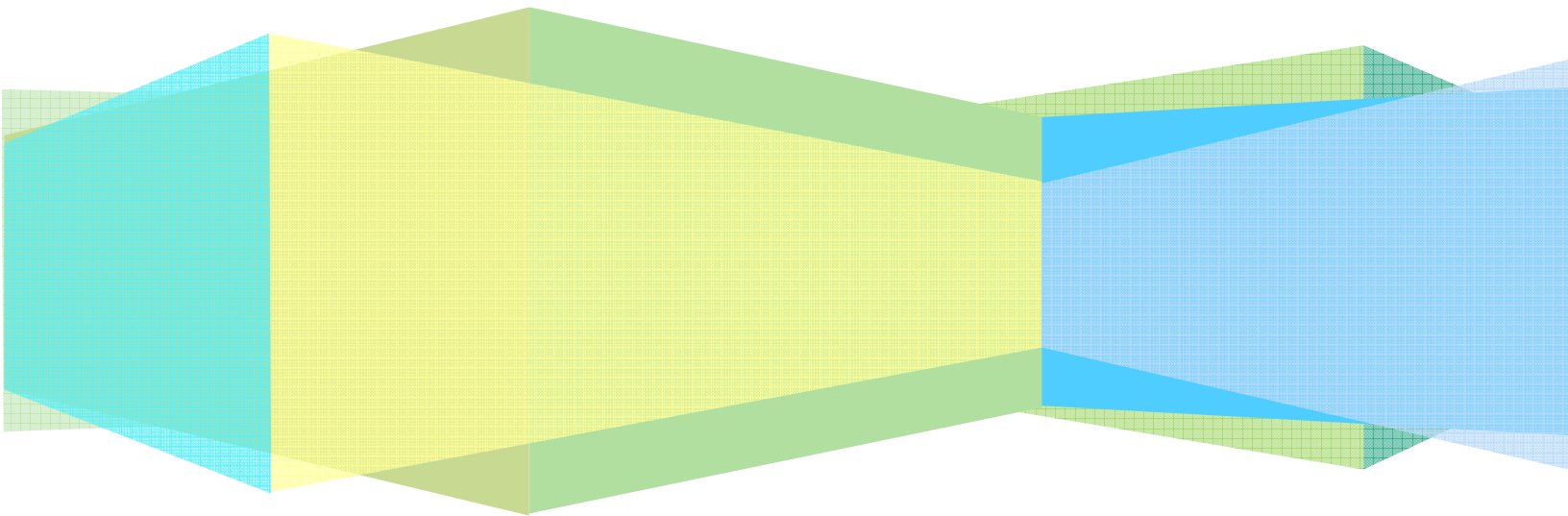
Thank You

Thank you to everyone who played a role in the development of this toolkit and the Ready Schools Initiative. Special thanks to all of the teachers, principals, school staff, families, businesses, faith-based organizations, civic groups, early care providers, and the staff from the Down East Partnership for Children, Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools, Edgecombe County Public Schools, Region A Partnership for Children, North Carolina Partnership for Children, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Department of Public Instruction, and other leaders that have contributed their time, talent, and treasure to the Ready Schools Initiative in North Carolina.

This toolkit is the result of the hard work and dedication of our community to move forward together.

Appendix

Sample Documents for a Ready Schools Workplan



Ready School Workplan

Community-School Team Signature Sheet

Describe below how your Community-School Team was involved in developing the 2011-2012 Ready School Workplan. (Attach additional sheet if needed.)

Signatures/Contact Information of Community-School Team

(Copy additional sheets as needed)

	Name	Position / Organization	Contact Information (address, phone number)
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			

Current Statistical Data

Demographic Data for 2010-11 school year (give actual numbers, not percents)

	Total	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	ED	LEP	Migrant
K									
1									
2									
3									

ED - Economically disadvantaged

LEP - Limited English Proficient

Retention (Give actual numbers, not percents)

2009-10 School Year

	Total	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	ED	LEP	Migrant
K									
1									
2									
3									

2010-11 School Year

	Total	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	ED	LEP	Migrant
K									
1									
2									
3									

Adequate Yearly Progress 2009-10 School Year

of Targets _____

List targets and circle those not met

**Down East Partnership for Children
Ready Schools Innovations Award
2009-10 Ready School Workplan**

School:

Identified Need:

Goal:

STRATEGY(IES)	TIMELINE	RESOURCES	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	MONITORING & EVALUATION	
				EVIDENCE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT	IMPACT

Date Completed:

Contact Person:

Phone:

Email:

Fax:

Down East Partnership for Children

Ready Schools Innovations Award

2010-11 Sample Ready School Workplan

Identified Need: Family, School, and Community Partnerships

**Goal: Enhance families' capacities to foster and support their children's learning in and outside of school
 Increase families' participation in developing and influencing school decision making and policies
 Increase participation in school activities by families typically not participating**

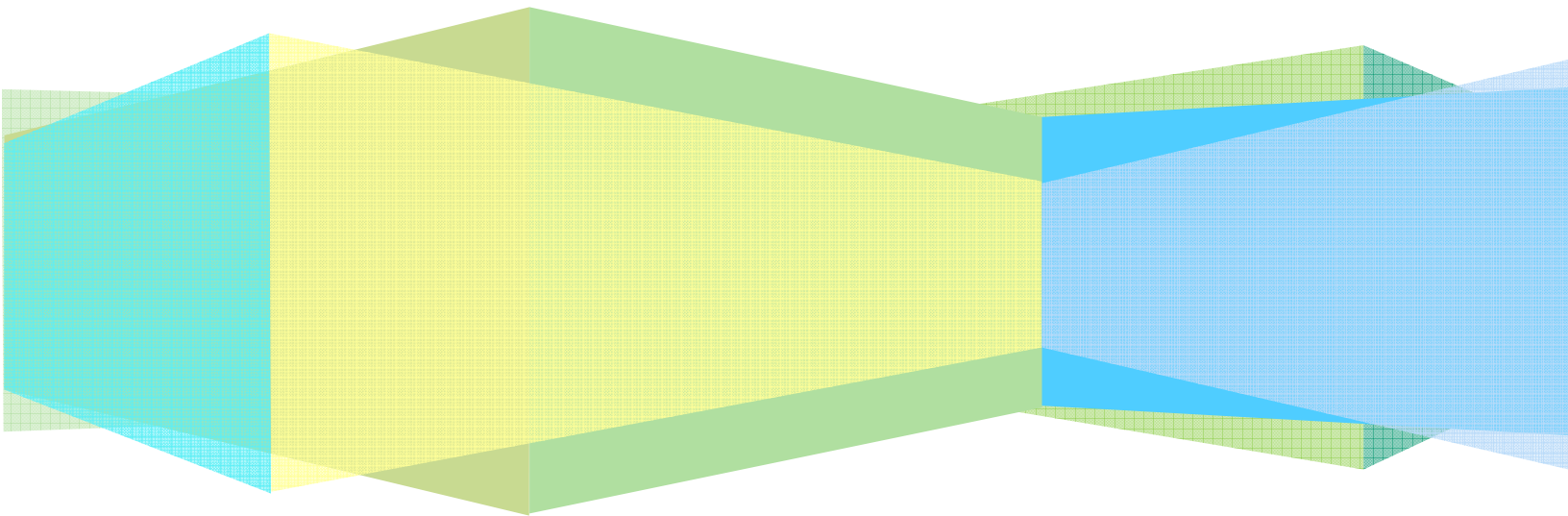
STRATEGY(IES)	TIMELINE	RESOURCES	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	MONITORING & EVALUATION	
				EVIDENCE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT	IMPACT
Develop committee of teachers to plan family engagement work to occur throughout the year (2 nd , 1 st , 2 nd , and 3 rd grade teachers) Strategies to include parents who typically do not participate in school will be identified	July 2010 and throughout year	Employ teachers during summer to develop materials Stipends 8 teachers for 2 days @ \$125 per day (total \$2000)	Principal K teacher	Work products Timeline (specific dates)	Strategies & activities will be preplanned to ensure occurrence of each activity and will lessen stress during the year Parents not typically participating in school activities will participate
Develop Family Engagement Committee (parents, business, teachers, assistants) Strategies to include parents who typically do not participate in school will be identified	Committee established by end of 1 st 9 weeks & continued throughout year	Supplies & materials \$100 Refreshments \$150	Principal School Improvement Team	Family Engagement roster Minutes from meetings	Families & community members will participate in and have significant influence on school policies and decision making Relationships between school, families, & community will be strengthened

Conduct parent orientation sessions prior to school opening (K will hold 2 sessions, 1 @ Creative Kids & 1 @ school grades 1-3 will hold one session at school) Purpose: parent/teacher question/answer session	Creative Kids Session August, 2010 School Session August, 2010	Refreshments @ Creative Kids \$75 Light dinner for School Session \$400 Childcare \$50 Postage for mailing \$100	Principal K-3 teachers	Sign in rosters Pictures Agendas Parent Survey	Families will gain knowledge of the school & expectations School staff will gain knowledge of children & families Relationships will be built & strengthened
Family Fun Night – parents & children	August – Prior to school opening	Light Supper \$400 Game Rentals \$400	Principal Teacher Committee planning family engagement activities	Parent rosters Pictures	Families will gain knowledge of the school & expectations School staff will gain knowledge of children & families Relationships will be built & strengthened
Home Visits – Kindergarten (for families not participating in orientation sessions)	August - First 5 days of school in the afternoons of staggered K entry	Travel for teachers \$200 Parent Incentives \$100	Principal Kindergarten teachers	Documentation of home visits Parent survey	Families will gain knowledge of the school & expectations School staff will gain knowledge of children & families Relationships will be built & strengthened
Conduct Parent Conferences/report card pick up	October 3:00 pm -7:00 pm January, 2011	Childcare \$75 X 2 sessions = \$150; Dinner for teachers \$300 X 2 sessions \$600; Parent Incentives \$100	Principal Teachers	Schedule of Conferences Parent survey	Strengths & areas of needed support will be shared between families and school

<p>Develop & conduct series of parent workshops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literacy Math Parent Choice (determined by survey) 	<p>Literacy September Math – October Parent Choice -February</p>	<p>Childcare \$40 X3 events = \$120 Dinner \$500 X3 - \$1500 Parent Incentives \$100</p>	<p>Principal Teacher Committee planning family engagement activities Other staff in school as designated</p>	<p>Parent rosters Parent Evaluations Pictures</p>	<p>Families will gain knowledge of the school & expectations School staff will gain knowledge of children & families Families will develop strategies to support student learning at home</p>
<p>Conduct 3 Kindergarten transition sessions</p>	<p>Session 1 – held during district K Registration Session 2 - February/March Session 3- May</p>	<p>No funding needed for initial K registration Dinner \$200 X2 = \$400 Books for children \$200 Materials & Supplies \$100</p>	<p>Principal Kindergarten teachers</p>	<p>Parent rosters Parent Evaluations Parent Survey Pictures</p>	<p>Families will gain knowledge of the school & expectations School staff will gain knowledge of children & families Relationships will be built & strengthened</p>
<p>Build relationship with Hispanic Families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cinco de Mayo event Cell phone for ESL teacher 	<p>May, 2010 Throughout year</p>	<p>Food \$300 Phone \$530</p>	<p>Principal ESL teacher</p>	<p>Parent rosters Parent evaluations Phone use documentation Parent survey</p>	<p>Hispanic families will feel valued as a part of the total school family Communication between home & school will be timely</p>
<p>Develop connection between school/parents/businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent/business breakfast Calendars for home refrigerators listing parent events Signage for business windows & family yards 	<p>Breakfast – March Made prior to school year begins Printed and distributed in 1st 9 weeks of school</p>	<p>No funding needed for breakfast Refrigerator Calendars - \$200 Bumper Stickers/ Window signs for Businesses/Magnets/ Yard Signs - \$1725</p>	<p>Principal Teacher Committee planning family engagement activities Family Engagement Committee</p>	<p>Business rosters Documentation of business support to school</p>	<p>School/Community partnerships will be strengthened Business leaders will be identified to support the school and will know specifics of the support needed</p>

Appendix

Blank Community Assessment Documents



Leaders & Leadership

Does the district-level vision and mission reflect success for all children?
Evidence: Vision statement, mission statement
Action Steps:
Do the superintendent, school board, and other central office staff understand early childhood development and its impact on effective learning strategies?
Evidence:
Action Steps:
Do district-level leadership policies and practices reflect the importance of PK-2 in student achievement?
Evidence: Early childhood experience of elementary school principals; child development training requirements for elementary and district staff
Action Steps:
Are Ready Schools' strategies for PK-2 included in the school improvement plan?
Evidence:
Action Steps:

Transitions

Does your district have a community-wide transition committee and/or plan?
Evidence: Membership roster of the committee, copy of transition plan
Action Steps:
Do district policies and practices promote communication between early care environments and schools?
Evidence: Copy of policies, agendas from meetings between early care & schools
Action Steps:
Does the district implement any community-wide transition practices (i.e. staggered entry, early registration, etc.)?
Evidence: Description of transition practices
Action Steps:
Do district policies reflect best practices related to entry and promotion of children?
Evidence: Data and policy used to make promotion decisions
Action Steps:

Teacher Supports

Do schedules established for schools and individual classrooms reflect an understanding of child development principles?
Evidence: Time of kindergartener's lunch; large blocks of time for child-directed learning, etc
Action Steps:
Does the district provide joint professional development for early care providers, teachers, and administrators on topics related to early childhood development?
Evidence:
Action Steps:
Are district resources allocated to support reduced student-teacher ratios in K-2 classrooms?
Evidence: each K-2 classroom has TA
Action Steps:
Does the district facilitate opportunities for cross-school networking, sharing and learning?
Evidence:
Action Steps:
Does the district offer professional development and monitoring on the use of best practices in K-2 classrooms tailored to the school's individual needs?
Evidence:
Action Steps:
Does the district provide support for memberships and training from outside professional organizations?
Evidence:
Action Steps:

Teacher Supports

Does the district collaborate with any higher education institutions within the district?

Evidence:

Action Steps:

Engaging Environments

Does the district value and allocate adequate resources to support the safety and health of environments?
Evidence: Resources for maintenance/custodial support; rewards or recognition for meeting safety and health standards
Action Steps:
Does the district secure materials and resources to provide print-rich classrooms with adequate manipulatives?
Evidence: Average number of books in classrooms; collaboration with community resources, such as local libraries; access to blocks, art easels, puppets, and reading pillows
Action Steps:
Does the district provide support for the implementation of positive behavior supports and classrooms free of threat?
Evidence: Professional development on implementing PBIS system, bullying
Action Steps:
Does the district offer professional development on nurturing children's social and emotional development?
Evidence: Professional development descriptions
Action Steps:
Do district policies and practices emphasize and support children being active participants in the learning process?
Evidence: The curriculum selected allows for open-ended choice and active learning centers
Action Steps:

Effective Curricula

Does the district ensure staff are informed and well trained in learning standards across all areas?
Evidence: Professional development on learning standards
Action Steps:
Does the district promote vertical alignment of grade level learning targets?
Evidence: Structure for vertical professional learning communities
Action Steps:
Does the district allow opportunities for staff and others to evaluate and select the most effective curriculum to achieve learning targets?
Evidence: Process for curriculum selection
Action Steps:
Does the district have in place processes to monitor the fidelity of learning standards and materials?
Evidence: Monitoring documents
Action Steps:

Family, School, and Community Partnerships

Does the district value authentic family and community involvement in school decision-making?
Evidence: District-level parent involvement committee; requirements for family involvement on school improvement teams; parent and community surveys
Action Steps:
Does the district promote an open door policy for family involvement?
Evidence: copy of policy; documentation of strategies for sharing policy with stakeholders; clear and simple volunteer policy
Action Steps:
Does the district monitor family and community involvement data and practices?
Evidence: Data on memberships for PTO/PTA organization; tracking of donations and volunteer hours; data on family population participating in school events
Action Steps:
Do district policies promote effective, regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences?
Evidence: Copy of policy
Action Steps:
Does the district offer professional development on effectively engaging families and communities?
Evidence: Professional development descriptions
Action Steps:

Family, School, and Community Partnerships

Does the district have policies and practices to encourage authentic community involvement in education, including volunteer policies?

Evidence: Participation in community-sponsored events; transparent and simple volunteer management process; sample community-based strategies

Action Steps:

Respecting Diversity

Does the district provide professional development and monitor implementation of strategies related to diversity, English language learners, and exceptional children?

Evidence: Professional development modules; support for activities such as community bus rides to increase understanding of various communities and cultures

Action Steps:

Are there district-level ESL staff?

Evidence:

Action Steps:

Does the district implement strategies to encourage the employment of a diverse staff?

Evidence: Statistics on staff diversity compared to population

Action Steps:

Are the district's website and other communications accessible by families of all backgrounds and reflective of the population?

Evidence: Printed and electronic communications and materials are provided in multiple languages; website linked with software such as Babel fish for live translation, reading level is appropriate to population; ConnectEd calls are translated

Action Steps:

Does the district ensure staff is knowledgeable about anti-discrimination and harassment policies?

Evidence:

Action Steps:

Respecting Diversity

Does the district regularly share or discuss its disaggregated student achievement data with the community?

Evidence: Copy of how data was shared

Action Steps:

Assessing Progress

Does the district utilize K-2 assessment data to inform instruction?
Evidence: District has a method for systematically collecting K-2 assessment data; data is analyzed to identify trends in student performance
Action Steps:
Does the district promote multiple methods of assessment for school performance?
Evidence: Goals for all areas of the school, including non-curricular goals, family involvement, community partnerships, teacher performance, and classroom environments
Action Steps:
Is there a district-wide evaluation plan for the measurement of non-curricular goals?
Evidence: Measurement method and tools identified for each goal; support in place to effectively evaluate programs (High/Scope Ready School Assessment, tracking of volunteer hours, tracking of family involvement opportunities and participation, teacher evaluations, classroom environment ratings)
Action Steps:
Does the district provide training on how to utilize assessment data to differentiate instructional strategies?
Evidence: Professional development opportunities
Action Steps:
Does the district regularly communicate its data, outcomes, and strategic plan to the community?
Evidence: Meeting agendas, newsletter, or copies of reports, etc
Action Steps:

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