READY SCHOOLS TOOLKIT PART 1

FOR SCHOOL-BASED TEAMS

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN PRE-KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THIRD GRADE

First Edition

Developed by the North Carolina Ready Schools Collaboration Team

Smart START®

The North Carolina
Partnership for Children, Inc. (NCPC)

Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education | Department of Public Instruction

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dear Ready Schools Toolkit Reader:

The early years of a child's life set the foundation for all future learning. They are a critical component of the cradle to career continuum. To ensure that children have the experiences they need to succeed later in life, we must broaden the definition of "school readiness." In North Carolina, "school readiness" is defined as both: 1) children's developmental stage when they enter school; and 2) the capacity of schools to educate all children, whatever each child's situation may be.

Building a cradle to career continuum is hard work. It is more than the individual capacities of children, families, schools, preschools, and communities. It is the collective supports and efforts of all these entities. It begins with community collaboration and ends with the adoption of the Ready Schools philosophy:

"That all schools and communities will provide an inviting atmosphere which values and respects all children and their families. It will be a community where children can succeed. The community is committed to supporting schools in their quest to provide high quality educational experiences which focus on all domains to children. The community and schools seek partnerships to address the needs of children, ensuring future success in school, work, and life in the 21st century."

This Ready Schools Toolkit is based on research, best practice, and core values for creating a community-wide Ready Schools Initiative. It is intended to assist communities, school districts, schools, and individuals in strengthening the foundation of learning for children PreK to third grade. While there is no single "best" starting place, this guide outlines components of the overall process and examples implemented at the community level.

Your interest and contribution to the adoption of Ready Schools in your community or school can help ensure that every child in North Carolina succeeds in third grade and beyond.

Sincerely,

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INTRODUCTION

Why Ready Schools?

In the past two decades, research has shown that learning begins early, that brains are impacted most in the earliest years, and that early learning experiences are critical for the long-term success of children both educationally and economically. Research on the effectiveness of high-quality preschool experiences also reinforces the need for quality early learning experiences to provide a good start to formal learning.

However, we also know that even high-quality one-time interventions like Pre-Kindergarten (PreK), while helpful, cannot alone eliminate the achievement gap or maximize learning for our most vulnerable students. While benefits do not disappear, they begin to fade by third or fourth grade without sustained enhancements and quality instruction through the primary grades. Multiple interventions across these years yield the best results for successful achievement and the likelihood that children will exit third grade with grade level skills.

Defining a PreK-3 or "Ready Schools" Approach

In the last ten years, a new approach to educating young children has taken shape and gained momentum among researchers, policymakers, and educators. We have moved from thinking about "school readiness" as both children's condition at kindergarten entry and schools' capacity to meet each of their unique needs. In turn, the "school readiness" framework has been stretched to encompass a span of learning across the PreK through third grade continuum — consistent with our knowledge of young children's generally predictable, sequenced development from birth through age eight (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

The "PreK-3" or "Ready Schools" approach includes the intentional and rigorous alignment of standards, curriculum, and assessment across grades. Effective PreK-3 efforts are grounded in teacher and leader professional development that promotes coordination and alignment and supports knowledge of "children's developmental capacities and having appropriate expectations for both cognitive and social outcomes, which are consistent with what is learned in the classroom" (Bogard and Takanishi, 2005).

> We, as a nation, are doing a very good job of squandering human potential and making life harder for all Americans as a result. This has to stop. If our government, at the local, state, and federal level, does not start investing in education systems that reach children before kindergarten, and if it does not get serious about providing children with high-quality instruction throughout the earliest years of their schooling, it is wasting taxpayer dollars, ignoring decades of research, and disregarding the extraordinary potential of millions of children who otherwise have very little chance of succeeding in school.
>
> – Guernsey & Mead, 2010

> A ready school provides an inviting atmosphere, values and respects all children and their families, and is a place where all children succeed. It is committed to high quality in all domains of learning and teaching and has deep connections with parents and the community. It prepares children for success in work and life in the 21st century.
>
> – North Carolina State Board of Education, 2007

What is a Ready School?

Moving from a more traditional framework to a Ready Schools framework is an evolutionary, intentional process of shifting the way that teachers and administrators think and act. The Ohio Department of Education (2008) Ready Schools Task Force developed the following template to help schools reflect on their beliefs and practices.

Traditional Thinking Teachers and administrators focus on content and teaching and believe:	Ready School Thinking Ready schools put children first, focus on learning, and believe:
Many children are at a disadvantage academically when they start school; therefore we can only do a certain amount in a regular classroom.	All children start school with the ability to learn. We must assess and find ways to narrow and close any gaps.
Some families need to do a better job of helping their children get ready for kindergarten.	All children are ready for kindergarten. Some may need extra attention. We need to work together with families to ease transition.
We treat all children the same.	We help children who are different adjust to the norm and overcome their limitations. By teaching all children to embrace their own uniqueness and respect their differences, we are helping them prepare for a diverse world.
Student diversity means lower performance.	Student diversity is challenging, but rewarding for all learners.
Screening procedures provide data to determine a child's readiness for kindergarten.	Screening procedures provide data that informs instructional practices, the need for additional assessment, and the need for supportive services.
Communication with families is limited to the start of school.	Communication starts early in the preschool years and is ongoing, providing multiple opportunities for children and families to visit the school.
The learning environment supports the "typical" students.	The school environment is prepared to support the learning and development of all children.

Becoming a Ready School is not just "another thing to do". Done well, a Ready School is able to make changes in school practices and structure that are impeding success. Ready Schools engage teachers, administrators, parents, and community members to strengthen existing efforts and reach shared goals.

About the North Carolina Ready Schools Initiative

The Ready Schools Initiative, led by the North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction – Office of Early Learning, has set an ambitious long-term goal of building a statewide infrastructure that fully realizes the vision of school readiness established by the North Carolina Ready for School Goal Team in 2000: 1) all children enter school "ready;" and 2) schools are "ready" for all children.

The Ready Schools Initiative launched in 2006 with a W. K. Kellogg Foundation Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) grant to NCPC. The grant leveraged considerable interest in and support for building a statewide Ready Schools effort. Ready Schools has achieved many significant accomplishments since 2006, including: 1) the establishment of a statewide Ready School Taskforce with broad-based representation from more than 50 groups representing public school, early care and education, business, and community organizations; 2) the implementation of six regional forums with nearly 800 participants from 100 of the 115 school systems across the state; and 3) the State Board of Education's adoption of a definition of a "ready" school and identification of "pathways" that would lead to ready elementary schools. They identified nine pathways that were subsequently reduced to eight: 1) Leaders and Leadership; 2) Family, School, and Community Partnerships; 3) Transitions; 4) Respecting Diversity; 5) Engaging Environments; 6) Effective Curricula, Instruction, and Child Assessment; 7) Teacher Supports and Adult Learning Communities; and 8) Assessing Progress and Assuring Quality.

In November 2008, NCPC received a second grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to develop, vet, and evaluate a Ready Schools Toolkit based on pathways identified by the State Board of Education, and to support the development of local Ready Schools' efforts in communities and schools across the state. As a result, an estimated 18,535 children (PreK through 3rd grade) in 53 elementary schools and 20 school districts received Ready Schools technical assistance and implementation grants. These children benefited from communities and school districts working together to improve educational outcomes for all children age 3 to 8. NCPC and the Office of Early Learning continue to work together to strengthen and evolve the North Carolina Ready Schools Initiative.

The Ready Schools process is a continual process of assessment, action, reflection, and revision of practices and policies to best meet the needs of children and families across the PreK through 3rd grade continuum and beyond. Done well, the Ready Schools Initiative influences and engages all the people involved in a young child's life – families, teachers, doctors, caregivers, social workers, and many others – in Ready Schools' efforts. Our goal is clear: to ensure every child is supported, learning, and progressing across the PreK–3 continuum.

GETTING STARTED

Where to Begin

To be successful in launching a local Ready Schools Initiative, it takes a team approach that includes both schools and the larger community. It takes careful planning, leadership, and an ongoing commitment to building and sustaining partnerships to develop both a School-Based Team and a Community Team that support the overall school district initiative. To meet your goals, you must take a broad-based and multi-layered approach that involves diverse representation from across your school(s) and community.

Do you develop an individual School-Based Team first or a Community Team? Do you get central office staff involved first or a principal? Do you first develop a community- wide plan or an individual school plan? There is no right answer — it depends on what best fits your community and environment. The most successful Ready School efforts take both approaches.

If you start with the development of a School-Based Team, make sure you quickly integrate participants from the community into your planning process. Involve families, early education providers, civic organizations, and community leaders in your planning and implementation process. If you start at the community/school district level, be sure to include principals and teachers from schools with a strong interest in implementing a Ready Schools approach.

When a Ready Schools effort starts at the school level, it may be less likely to be sustained if there is no district-wide and community commitment to building a strong research-based educational foundation for young children ages 3-8. The Community/District Team is essential to the ultimate success of high quality PreK-3 education. However, it is equally important that Community/District Teams be informed by the Ready Schools efforts at the school level. Community/District Team work is grounded in the real issues and needs of schools and early care and education providers.

Most important is that you get started! Begin where you have your strongest advocates and build from there to create a shared vision for your local Ready Schools Initiative.

Ready School Teams — Roles and Responsibilities

The Community/District Team is typically comprised of representatives from the school district, individual schools, the local Smart Start partnership, early childhood providers, parents, community agencies, business leaders, and other stakeholders. The Community/District Team is responsible for providing resources and supports to schools, addressing transition issues between the early childhood community and schools/district, promoting collaboration across the community to serve PreK-3rd grade children and families, and advocating for Ready Schools across schools and community.

The School-Based Team typically includes the school principal and/or assistant principal, PreK-3rd grade teachers, parents, early childhood providers, and other community stakeholders. The School-Based Team conducts a Ready Schools Assessment using the High/Scope assessment instrument, analyzes data, and develops an action plan based on areas for strengthening and priorities.

> Increasing the number of children who are ready for school and succeeding at third grade is not the sole responsibility of any single agency or professional group; rather it is a shared community concern. Effective strategies require multiple actions at the individual, family, and community levels.
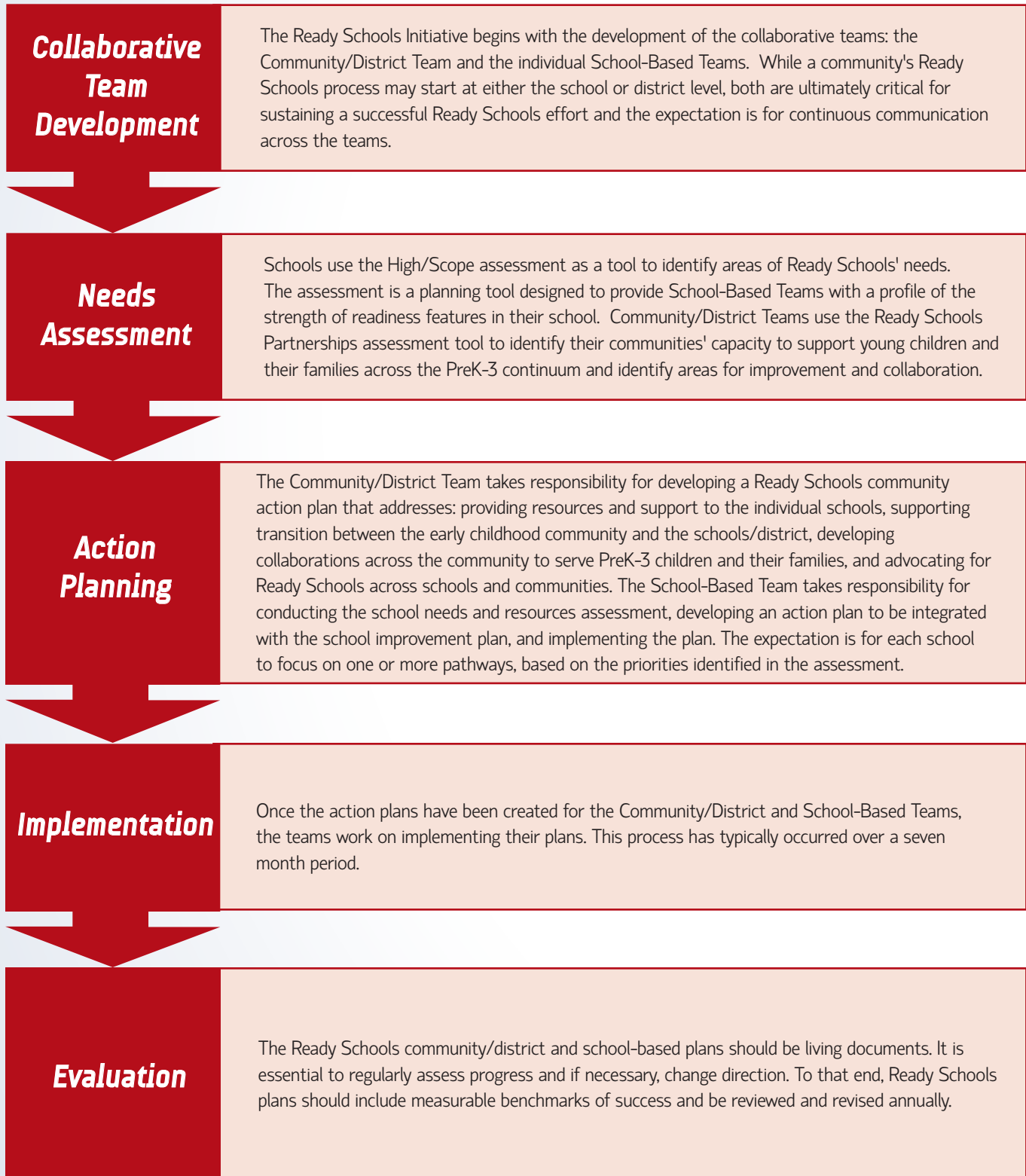>
> – Schorr & Marchand, 2007

Ready Schools Implementation Process At-A-Glance

Collaborative Team Development

The Ready Schools Initiative begins with the development of the collaborative teams: the Community/District Team and the individual School-Based Teams. While a community's Ready Schools process may start at either the school or district level, both are ultimately critical for sustaining a successful Ready Schools effort and the expectation is for continuous communication across the teams.

Needs Assessment

Schools use the High/Scope assessment as a tool to identify areas of Ready Schools' needs. The assessment is a planning tool designed to provide School-Based Teams with a profile of the strength of readiness features in their school. Community/District Teams use the Ready Schools Partnerships assessment tool to identify their communities' capacity to support young children and their families across the PreK-3 continuum and identify areas for improvement and collaboration.

Action Planning

The Community/District Team takes responsibility for developing a Ready Schools community action plan that addresses: providing resources and support to the individual schools, supporting transition between the early childhood community and the schools/district, developing collaborations across the community to serve PreK-3 children and their families, and advocating for Ready Schools across schools and communities. The School-Based Team takes responsibility for conducting the school needs and resources assessment, developing an action plan to be integrated with the school improvement plan, and implementing the plan. The expectation is for each school to focus on one or more pathways, based on the priorities identified in the assessment.

Implementation

Once the action plans have been created for the Community/District and School-Based Teams, the teams work on implementing their plans. This process has typically occurred over a seven month period.

Evaluation

The Ready Schools community/district and school-based plans should be living documents. It is essential to regularly assess progress and if necessary, change direction. To that end, Ready Schools plans should include measurable benchmarks of success and be reviewed and revised annually.

Community/District Team Process

The saying *"it takes a village to raise a child"* is an essential philosophy of the Ready Schools movement.

Effective Community/District Teams:

> Create a community/district-wide vision for Ready Schools that assures the success of all children in all schools.

> Target changes that need to occur in every school such as a district-wide transition plan, kindergarten orientation program, and PreK-3 curriculum approaches.

> Create a district-wide professional development program for school leaders that emphasizes Ready Schools concepts.

> Conduct community forums to get broader community input into and involvement in a district-wide Ready Schools approach.

> Build bridges to greater understanding and cooperation between families, early education, and K-3 teachers.

> Generate increased resources as well as greater integration and use of community assets into schools.

> Serve as an advocate at the local, state, and national level for the resources and support necessary for Ready Schools.

Who should be on a Ready Schools Community/District Team?

The composition of this team will vary by community. It should be customized to fit each community's needs, resources, and realities. Participants might include:

☐ School personnel, including administrative and support staff and teachers working in an elementary school;

☐ Central office staff, including superintendents, school board members, curriculum specialists, and support services staff;

☐ Early education professionals, including teachers and program directors;

☐ Early childhood service providers and advocates;

☐ Families with children ages 3-8;

☐ Social service providers;

☐ Medical professionals;

☐ Community, business, and faith leaders; and

☐ Higher education representatives.

Note that school system personnel are at the top of the list of members for the Community/District Team. School leaders at all levels are critical for the success of Community/District and School-Based Teams. Evaluation results from the NC Ready Schools Initiative showed that principals' participation on both the Community/District and School-Based Teams were instrumental to the overall success of the Ready Schools efforts in communities.

Steps to Success for a Ready Schools Community/District Team

1. Create a vision for what you want Ready Schools to look like in your schools and community. This vision should be comprehensive for what the district, schools, and communities need to do both independently and in partnership to support Ready Schools' efforts.

2. Use the Ready Schools Partnerships assessment tool to examine your community's resources, interest, capacity, and barriers to achieving your Ready Schools vision.

3. Determine the role of the Community/District Team in advocating for and guiding Ready Schools' efforts. Building leadership, public engagement, and political will is essential. Leadership for this initiative should be shared by the community (e.g., local Smart Start partnership) and the schools.

4. Conduct forums to get broad input into how the community can best support the initiative. Hear what families, teachers, school administrators, early care professionals, and community members have to say. Have them talk with each other to build greater understanding about challenges as well as the potential resources and assets that may be available.

5. Integrate input from the community forums and School-Based and Community/District Team members.

6. Conduct an inventory of community and school assets, resources, and needs.

7. Use the data and input gathered to develop a Community/District Action Plan that includes strategies for integration of Ready Schools concepts across the community and schools. Consider inluding information such as:
    » Community-wide school transition plan;
    » Kindergarten orientation process that links with early education and supports both children and families;
    » District-wide professional development program that is for families, early educators, and PreK-3 teachers and staff; and
    » Alignment of the curriculum in the district's elementary schools across early education and PreK through 3rd grade.

8. Integrate existing and new community resources into this Community/District Action Plan.

9. Use a variety of tools to measure the progress in individual schools. Use the data from these tools to update your Community/District Action Plan. Tools are described in the Using Data in the Ready Schools Assessment Process later in this Getting Started chapter.

10. Develop the infrastructure and communication plans necessary to ensure regular communication between the Community/District Team, the individual School-Based Teams, and the broader community. Consider taking a few minutes at each meeting to highlight a program or agency or issue that impacts children (ages 3-8), schools, or families.

The Community/District Team should serve as an ongoing resource to individual schools and district-wide efforts. Ongoing communication and regular updates to the action plan are essential for continued progress.

Community Forums — A Critical Step to Ready Schools Success

In addition to building greater understanding and awareness about Ready Schools within the community, forums garner critical information that may be useful to community planning. Use community forums to identify:

> **Leadership** — Who is interested, excited, able, and willing to lead the process?

> **Sparks** — Where is the energy that can be maximized to create greater synergy in the community?

> **Common Purpose/Commitment** — To what will people dedicate their energies and time?

> **What Works Already** — This is the foundation on which to build and the substance that can be shared from one community to the next. It's what gets people excited. It also helps people feel they can tackle the next question.

> **Frequent and Persistent Sources of Frustration** — What comes up repeatedly that can suggest priorities for future change? People are motivated to work on solutions to things they perceive as problems or roadblocks to progress.

> **What Tools Are Available** — such as assessment tools; information sharing tools; tools for families; and resource guides.

> **What People Dream About** — Where do people want to go? It's important for people to have the opportunity to be creative in the process and not just listen or fill out paperwork.

> **Families First** — No matter how wonderful children's early care and education program or school setting is, families will always be children's first and most influential teachers. What do families care about and need to be successful?

Answers to such questions provide important feedback to schools and communities not only in the beginning, but also as change occurs and new priorities are set.

How often should community forums be held? While there is no magic number, it is helpful to hold these on an annual basis as a barometer to measure community buy-in and to get input into next steps.

Ready Schools in Action: Community Forums in Region A Lead Change Process

The Region A Partnership for Children, together with the local school system, facilitated a series of community forums discussing services for children from preschool through the early grades. The Region A Partnership serves Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties as well as the Cherokee Indian Reservation.

Participants engaged in conversations about the nature of preschool and elementary school, how to support effective transitions, what families dream about for their children, where schools are strongest in their response to families, and how to set priorities for the future.

The energy from the community forums sparked the greatest interest in working on transition and family support. School representatives made a commitment to working with community members to develop materials to share with families about early literacy, curriculum, and child development.

Over the course of a year, some very practical changes occurred; including a new kindergarten orientation process, the development of transition materials for PreK through 3rd graders, resource materials for families focusing on curriculum and transition, changes to the environments of schools, and enriched professional development plans.

School-Based Team Process

When an elementary school launches its Ready Schools Initiative, some important questions to explore are:

› What is our vision for ensuring the success of all children?

› How well do we meet the needs of all children, regardless of their socio-economic status, family background, or preschool experience?

› What do we believe about young children and how they learn? Does our instruction reflect those beliefs?

› How many children are retained in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade and what do we know about the results of retention both through research and our own experiences?

› What practices support how young students best learn?

› How do teachers use school curriculum to link to children's culture/background?

› How do we work together to support each other in order to further student learning? Who should be involved in the school improvement process?

› How does research guide our practices for developing language, reading, mathematics, science, and social/emotional skills?

Who should be on a Ready Schools School-based team?

Like the Community/District Team, the School-Based Team should include a cross-section of members from the school and the community and should mirror the demographics of the student population. The School-Based Team might include:

☐ Principal and/or other school administrators;
☐ PreK teacher, if school includes PreK classrooms;
☐ Kindergarten teacher;
☐ Other primary grade teachers in grades 1-3;
☐ Parents;
☐ School counselor, social worker, or other support personnel;
☐ Community members (preferably a member of the Community/District Team if possible);
☐ Area child care providers and PreK teachers (may include those providing after school care);
☐ Business, community, and faith leaders; and
☐ Health care providers.

Think in terms of community assets, resources, and needs as you develop your team. Different groups and staffing levels need to be represented so the team "belongs" to everyone. You may also want to take an existing school committee — such as the School Improvement Team — and broaden it by integrating it with the School-Based Team. In this way, people may not see it as something "new" or more work, and it will become part of the school's overall planning. If you are using an existing team, make sure you incorporate multiple perspectives by including members of different races and cultures, families, and community members. Regardless of who is on your team, success depends on open dialogue, trust, commitment, and a willingness to be honest about the school's strengths and areas needing improvement.

Steps to Success for a School-Based Team

1. **Assess the Situation.** The School-Based Team is responsible for conducting the school self-assessment. This initial assessment process is essential to understanding where you are and where you need to go as a community or school in reaching your goals. The data gathered from the assessment should inform all future planning. NC Ready Schools Initiative has used the High/Scope Ready School Assessment (RSA). It is an easy tool to use, but it is important that you take your time with the assessment. Teams must stop to critically analyze whether their school is meeting particular standards or not. Because the High/Scope RSA is not able to cover each essential aspect of change, the Pathway Sections of this Toolkit offer additional questions that teams may want to consider as they move more deeply into school improvement.

   The dialogue which occurs as a result of the assessment process is extremely important. If the assessment team is diverse in multiple ways, the responses to the assessment questions and the data collected will inspire conversations that you may not have anticipated. Team members' perceptions may differ based on their individual experiences. This assessment process is an important opportunity for dialogue among diverse team members that would not otherwise happen.

2. **Develop an Action Plan.** The plan should be based on the eight pathways to Ready Schools. Use the results of the assessment process to determine the specific areas on which to focus the greatest attention. Again, involve a broad array of perspectives and participants. The resulting action plan should become part of the regular School Improvement Plan. In selecting the pathway(s) to focus on, prioritize areas where you can build on school strengths, as well as those that will make the largest impact. Focus on two to three areas at a time in order to assure sufficient attention and resources for change and to be transparent to the community.

3. **Build Momentum.** As described in the first chapter, the key to Ready Schools success is to move from "traditional thinking" to "Ready Schools thinking." For this to happen, teachers, parents, caregivers, community members, and others need to be aware of the concepts of Ready Schools and the potential for positive change as a result. Get them excited about the possibilities and let them think creatively about the role(s) they can play in making it happen. Keep open lines of communication so everyone feels part of the process. At staff meetings, school events, etc., regularly share the research on Ready Schools issues, assessment results, and get input into the action plan. Involve the whole school and community in the Ready Schools process!

4. **Implement Activities and Practices.** Implementation of the action plan requires participation by everyone in the school as well as community participants, including early childhood program personnel, families, and other community organizations. It is important to delineate responsibilities and determine timelines, as well as assure everyone feels some responsibility for the success of the effort. Utilize businesses, faith-based organizations, and other community organizations to help provide the support needed to implement your plan. Resources available for funding may include Donors Choose, local community foundations, civic groups, and retired educators.

5. **Monitor, Evaluate, and Revise.** The Ready Schools plan should be a living document. It is essential to regularly assess progress and if necessary, change direction. Just like the school practice of teaching, reviewing, and assessing progress of students, the same approach applies to the Ready Schools process. Schools should revisit their High/Scope Ready School Assessments at least annually.

Using Data in the Ready Schools Assessment Process

Documenting evidence of Ready Schools pathway indicators on the High/Scope Tool makes progress visible and helps identify areas for improvement. The assessment team may want to use a large file or "drop box" to organize all of the indicators by High/Scope Dimensions and add documentation regarding specific indicators as it is collected. You may find that there is no evidence for some indicators, and this is not unusual. Allow adequate time to collect the evidence. It may be necessary to provide parent and community representatives with additional background information and support to be actively involved. Be cognizant of their background as you assign them to work on specific areas of self-assessment.

The following types of data might be useful to the School-Based Team as they gather information to complete a full assessment of needs and strengths and to develop action plans:

- **High/Scope Ready Schools Assessment.** This tool serves as a planning tool for School-Based Teams to use to evaluate their "Readiness Rate." One unique feature of the tool is the online profiler. Schools are able to input their scores from the assessment and analyze their growth potential or track changes over the years.

- **Partnership Self-Assessment Survey.** This tool was created by the National Program Office of Free to Grow, Mailman School of Public Health, for Head Start to help determine a community's collaboration capacity.

- **Kindergarten Family Transition Survey.** This survey was developed for families to evaluate their perceptions and kindergarten transition experiences.

- **School Professional Staff as a Learning Community** (Hord, 1996). This questionnaire provides school staff the opportunity to give their perceptions about their school's functioning as a learning community. This data can be used by the Community/District Team to inform what needs to occur on a district-wide level.

- **Comprehensive Needs Assessment**. This tool was developed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and assesses schools on multiple dimensions.

Observation, assessment, and documentation are foundational skills to successful teaching and to making meaningful and lasting improvement to any process or system. Enjoy the process of shared inquiry and discovery and be open to what you learn, reaffirm, and create together.

Pathways At-A-Glance

Each of the eight Ready Schools Pathways provides a framework for thinking about the topic, resources for reflection, and highlights best practices.

1. **Leaders and Leadership**

   The principal advocates for and leads the Ready School. School leaders believe that all children can learn and provide support and strategies for teachers and staff to acquire the requisite skills within the context of a learning community. Additionally, leaders of Ready Schools understand early childhood education and support teachers in the implementation of best practices for young children. The school garners support from the superintendent, central office, and school board.

2. **Family, School, and Community Partnerships**

   Schools and communities actively work together to address academic, social, and cultural needs of their students and families. The school implements practices and policies that encourage a variety of opportunities for community and family participation in all aspects of school life. The school enhances families' capacities to foster their children's readiness and to support children's learning and development in and outside of schools. The school functions as a community and partners with the outside community to provide opportunities and services to children and families.

3. **Transitions**

   Effective transition plans are school and community initiated to address the needs of the school, family, child, and community. There is ongoing communication and collaboration among elementary schools, early care and education (ECE), and families to ensure smooth transitions from the Infant-Toddler Program (Part C) to preschool, from preschool and home to school, and across grade levels within and between schools. The school participates in a variety of transition experiences for children entering PreK or kindergarten and across grade levels (PreK-3).

4. **Respecting Diversity**

   The school seeks to help children from all circumstances and backgrounds succeed; it interacts with children and their families in ways that are compatible with individual needs and family backgrounds. The school uses culturally appropriate curricula and instructional materials to enhance learning. Children with disabilities and from diverse backgrounds and circumstances are represented in curriculum, class materials, and activities. All of these children participate in a wide range of learning activities appropriate for their individual needs as full members of the school community.

5. **Engaging Environments**

   The school projects an open, child focused, welcoming atmosphere characterized by friendliness, respect, high teacher and staff morale, and the use of appropriate practices that support social/emotional development. The building and grounds are safe, inviting, and developmentally appropriate. The school's learning environments actively engage children in a variety of learning activities.

6. **Effective Curricula, Instruction, and Child Assessment**

   The school diligently employs educational methods and materials shown to be effective in helping a diverse population of children achieve appropriate academic growth to reach essential standards. Children with disabilities and other special needs are accommodated and included in the regular instructional programs to the maximum extent possible. Standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned from preschool through elementary grades and beyond; within a classroom, within a grade level, and across grade levels. Research and data help to drive instructional practice, and teachers plan within and across grade levels to ensure alignment and multi-level intervention strategies.

7. **Teacher Supports and Adult Learning Communities**

   The school supports the learning of adults as essential to children's well-being and achievement. Goals for adult learning communities include high-quality sustained professional development of school personnel as well as intentional parent and family participation in the planning and evaluation of children's learning. Adult learning communities work within and across grade levels, between homes and the school, and between the school and other educational entities and learning opportunities in the community. School leadership ensures that Ready Schools are purposefully organized in terms of space, time, tools, and resources to maximize support for all adults to work effectively together with children.

8. **Assessing Progress and Assuring Quality**

   The school systematically uses both formal and informal assessments to plan and tailor instruction to address individual student needs, to improve classroom practices and instruction, and to improve outcomes for all children. The school develops a data driven written improvement plan that includes strategies for maintaining its mission and goals over time and monitors progress toward them.

PATHWAY ONE: LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP

Principal leadership is critical to a successful Pre K-3 initiative. The general skills and knowledge of principals should enhance the development of a seamless continuum of learning from early childhood through grade 3 or higher. To do this, principals must:

> Have a strong understanding of PreK-3;

> Develop, support, and sustain a strong vision based on the principles and research that support PreK– 3rd grade education;

> Promote appropriate learning environments and quality teaching practices for PreK-3 based on an understanding of child development;

> Foster the creation of a school community focused on educating young children;

> Lead school efforts to engage families in their children's learning and transitions through school;

> Encourage family involvement and community participation in children's learning;

> Establish and sustain supportive connections between the superintendent, central office, and school board;

> Understand the change process, including the structure and process of teams working on Ready Schools/PreK-3; and

> Develop a team that shares similar philosophies and approaches.

I n the absence of serious and sustained leadership, efforts to bring about change will not take hold...Reform can be a lonely undertaking, and the feeling that one is engaged in a solitary uphill fight can be discouraging, even devastating.

Progress is more likely to occur within schools, or across networks of schools, and scaling up is more likely to become a reality, if the players feel that they belong to something important and if they secure the emotional rewards that come from engagement with a cause.

– Gardner, 2000

Key Understandings

Quality Early Education Impacts School Success

Despite decades of educational reform, we are still facing persistent achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students and between poor and non-poor students. In the past two decades, research has shown that learning begins early, that brains are impacted most in the earliest years, and that early learning experiences are critical for the long-term success of children.

Quality early learning experiences provide a good start to formal learning. However, while benefits do not disappear, they may begin to "fade" by third or fourth grade without sustained enhancements and quality instruction through the primary grades (Shore, 2009).

Principal Leadership is Key

Building a Ready School and a PreK-3 continuum of learning is a process, not a final destination. As with all school improvement efforts, this requires a leader with a vision for the future; a realistic assessment of the present conditions; the capacity to develop and implement goals and plans in collaboration with others; an understanding of how to measure progress; and the ability to reflect upon and refine the pathway.

Principals must support teacher leaders through quality professional development, professional learning communities, reflective learning, and ongoing assessment of child progress to be successful in leading PreK-3 change efforts. In addition, being an effective Ready Schools leader requires facilitating conversations with many stakeholders, maintaining engagement over time, and helping others navigate the change and transition necessary for Ready Schools transformation.

It is important to note that change and transition are not identical. Change is the "thing" that is going to be different. Transition is the internal psychological process that people go through to come to terms with the new situation. "Change management" (the plan for innovation) helps people understand the destination and how to get there. "Transition management" is designed to convince people to leave home in the first place (Bridges, 2003).

Rethinking Approaches to PreK-3 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments is Essential

- Effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment are appropriate for young children's developmental stages, responsive to individual interests and needs, and sensitive to children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

- Aligning standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment both horizontally and vertically creates a learning continuum that supports instructional practices based on individual needs and children's developmental stages. This provides an atmosphere where ALL young children can develop and learn at their own pace.

- The continuing achievement gap requires in-depth analysis of instructional practices and environments for poor and minority children.

- Using appropriate formative assessment to refine instruction and provide individualized support helps ensure that young children make continuous academic progress and develop in all domains.

Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

Self-reflection and honest critique are not easy. The High/Scope Ready Schools Assessment "Dimension on Leaders and Leadership" provides a framework for principals to self-assess their skills and abilities to become a Ready School leader.

Ready Schools leaders need to engage their team in the Ready Schools process by helping them examine school policies and practices, address difficult issues in working with families, develop responsive professional development, and ask hard questions about what works, what does not, who it works for, and who is left out. This requires a leader with a mindset that schools must take the responsibility of meeting the needs of every child who walks in the door. Additionally, Ready Schools leaders need to become skillful in using evidence and data as a source for dialogue and professional development.

Dialogue is a vital factor of any genuine effort to look deeply into school practices and policies. Real change will be sustained by a regular and honest exchange of ideas amongst a collaborative team. A leader may wish to reflect on the following questions to engage schools, families, and communities in the Ready Schools Assessment Process.

> What is the school's or district's mission statement?

> What is the school philosophy of effective teaching and learning?

> Do our practices reflect what we say we believe?

> What are the district, state, and federal rules and mandates that support or constrain what we do?

> What conditions do schools control?

> Where do we place our instructional focus? Do we prioritize time for planning and the use of data to inform practice?

Ready Schools in Action: Leaders Setting the Vision

Sample Mission Statements:

Iredell/Statesville Schools will rigorously challenge all students to achieve their academic potential and to lead productive and rewarding lives. We will achieve this mission with the support of parents, staff, and the community.

Wake County Public Schools: Educate each student to be a responsible and productive citizen who can effectively manage future challenges.

Superintendent's Mission: To create and maintain systems with sufficient resources for establishing a collaborative, inclusive, and trusting environment for all stakeholders and for providing high quality learning experiences for each student to ensure success in the 21st century.

Taking Action

Reframing: A Different Way of Thinking

To begin to get people to think differently, a leader should pose the question: "How is a Ready School different from any other elementary school?" A team leader might discuss the following questions with the School-Based Team to help everyone better understand why it is important to approach change systematically, rather than through isolated efforts:

➤ How do beliefs, professional expertise, and research impact what happens in our school on a daily basis?

➤ What policies support how students learn best?

➤ How effectively do we link our work to parents and the community?

➤ How do we all work together as learning communities to support each other and further student learning?

➤ What does the research say about best instructional practices for developing language, reading, mathematics, science, and social/emotional skills?

What Can Principals Do?

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2005) identifies several ways that principals can build early childhood learning communities:

1. *Embrace early childhood learning.* Effective principals embrace high-quality early childhood programs, principles, and practices as the foundation for education throughout the school community.

2. *Engage families and communities.* Effective principals work with families and community organizations to support children at home, in the community, and in pre-K (including below age 4) programs, as well as kindergarten and other primary grades.

3. *Promote appropriate learning environments for young children.* Effective principals promote environments that are developmentally, age, and content appropriate for children's learning. They understand the balance of child-initiated learning and teacher-led instruction.

PATHWAY TWO: FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Family, school, and community partnerships are the foundation upon which local Ready Schools Initiatives are built. They work together in the following ways:

- The families, school, and community partner to address academic, social, and cultural needs of students.

- The school district works with families to determine practices and policies that encourage a variety of opportunities for community and family participation in all aspects of school life.

- The families, school, and community partner to foster children's school readiness and to support children's learning and development in and outside of schools.

- The families, school, and community partner to provide opportunities and services that support child-specific learning.

Key Understandings

Effective family, school, and community partnerships involve mutual trust, open two-way communication, and the belief that all children can succeed in school. In order for this partnership to be successful, all parties must be engaged.

To better understand the Family, School, and Community Partnerships Pathway, consider the following:

- All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them.

- All families have the capacity to support their children's learning.

- Families, community, and school staff should actively partner to address academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs of students and families.

- Schools often decide independently what constitutes family involvement. Some families feel alienated from schools. It is important to learn from families their beliefs about the role of schools and teachers in their children's lives, as well as how they think they could benefit from engagement with the school and classroom.

- Community, religious, and cultural organizations can provide schools with valuable information to help them communicate, plan, and respond to the needs and preferences of children and families.

- Community-initiated activities provide opportunities for family and school interactions.

Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

Schools and communities may wish to reflect on the following questions as they engage in the Ready Schools Assessment Process. These questions, along with suggested tools, may help further the collaborative work of schools, families, and communities:

➤ Do the school's polices and educational practices encourage positive relationships with families and the community?

➤ What does the research say about best practices for encouraging family and community involvement? Are we implementing those best practices?

➤ Does the school provide multiple opportunities for families with varied availability, backgrounds, talents, and abilities to be involved in the school?

➤ Does our staff have sufficient training in family-centered practices so that they are comfortable engaging with families for the sake of developing strong family school partnerships?

➤ Does our staff understand the strong links between family engagement and positive learning outcomes for children?

➤ Do we remember to look at family and community involvement in schools at higher grade levels as well as elementary school?

Remember that dialogue is a vital part of any genuine effort to look deeply into school practices and policies. Real change will be sustained by a regular and honest exchange of ideas within a collaborative team.

Taking Action

The following guiding questions and activities can help schools and districts begin or further their work in family, school, and community partnerships.

1. What are the characteristics of effective family/community involvement?

Relationships with families begin long before children arrive at school. Effective family involvement means more than holding annual parent teacher conferences or back-to-school nights. Effective family involvement is established through the development of personal relationships, open communication, and mutual respect. These must begin as early as possible and long before a child arrives at school.

2. How do we build these early relationships?

Explore the possibility of the "community school model" (Coalition for Community Schools). A community school is a public school acting as a hub. It collaborates with many partners to provide supports and opportunities for children, youth, families, and community members before, after, and during school hours, seven days a week. Community story time, mentoring, English or foreign language classes, family reading programs, and family support services may be some of the activities provided.

Ready Schools in Action:

Nash County Elementary School Establishes Family Resource Center

With support from the Down East Partnership for Children and funding from the school, Title I, and private grants, a family resource center was established at Winstead Avenue Elementary School. The school's decision to create a family resource center was based on the findings from the High/Scope Assessment.

The center is a quiet, informal, friendly room where family members, teachers, and students can meet in conference or in special study. In addition to a closet fully stocked with children's clothing, shoes, toys, and other items for emergency needs, there are computers, books, ESL materials, learning games, and education brochures.

Funding for transportation has also been a part of the program to enable families to participate in school programs and conferences.

Picture of a Ready School

If you were to look into an open and welcoming school you would see that:

☑ All staff greet children, visitors, and each other in a friendly way.

☑ Front office staff acknowledges visitors as they walk in the door.

☑ The principal is visible and available.

☑ Teachers greet children and families as they arrive and leave each day.

☑ The school has a bulletin board with pictures of all the staff and other children and families.

☑ There is artwork throughout the school which reflects the diversity of the school community.

Strategies for Building Partnerships

Partnering with the Community:

▶ Contact your local child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R) or Smart Start partnership about how to build relationships with the child care community. This can be an effective method for reaching out to children and their families long before they get to school. Talk directly with child care providers about the curriculum they are using and invite them to bring children to the school for special visits.

▶ Create a community resource guide communicating specific information about the community/school and the resources and services available. Information pertaining to the school system, kindergarten entry, human services, civic organizations, health tips, and opportunities for volunteerism could all be addressed.

▶ Hold a community informational fair. Community agencies can work together to focus on a particular topic (health, kindergarten transition, early childhood, career day, etc.) and provide seminars, pamphlets, and demonstrations.

▶ Offer community-friendly events (such as story time at the library, art fairs, free days at museums, etc.) that support children and families within the community.

▶ Actively involve community organizations on the School-Based Team.

▶ Host special community nights at local schools. These can be fundraisers for school activities and involve families and their children in the school at an earlier age.

▶ Collaborate with programs already serving families of young children. Examples of these programs are Parents as Teachers, Welcome Baby, Early Head Start, and other parent education and home visitation programs. Engage these programs in connecting families with young children to special opportunities at the schools.

▶ Participate with other organizations in community events in order to help families understand the role of the school in the life of the community.

Partnering with Families:.

Make School a Resource for Families

▸ Open the school playgrounds to neighborhood families and organize regular activities to encourage use and build relationships.

▸ Offer family education and other community enrichment courses including not only GED, English, and family literacy courses but also courses in leadership development, budgeting, exercising, and cooking, among others.

▸ Provide resources targeting the developmental needs of children by age/grade level along with corresponding strategies that families could adopt at home to support their children.

▸ Create family-run support groups that provide opportunities for families to support each other and interact with one another. Sometimes families prefer this type of group because of its nonthreatening approach.

▸ Develop an interactive web-based information site for new parents. This website would provide a source of information for parents of young children and promote it wherever you find families with young children (the doctor's office, the grocery store, the library, the neighborhood park, the hair salon and barber shop, public health departments, laundromats, and the shopping mall).

Create a Welcoming Environment

▸ Build relationships with families prior to kindergarten by offering a variety of transition activities for children, including visits to kindergarten classrooms, home visits, and workshops for families.

▸ Focus on family strengths and availability. Effective family involvement does not have to occur during the regular school day.

▸ Take into consideration the varying cultural, literacy, and language backgrounds of all of their families and community members. This includes ensuring that school-home communications are available in other languages and that staff diversity reflects that of the student population.

▸ Understand that the past experiences that parents had with schools, either from their own childhood or their younger children, will influence how they feel about interacting with the school today.

Foster Open Communication

› Determine multiple ways to find out what families need and want.

› Make sure that your first communication with a family is positive.

› Ask families how they would like to be contacted. Possible responses may include paper, automated telephone alerts, dialogue journals, phone, website, etc.

› Be clear about the best ways and times for families to contact teachers and other staff at the school.

› In cases of divorce or non-custodial care situations, determine if communication should be sent to the primary and/or secondary caregiver.

› Be available during non-traditional work hours to meet or communicate with working families.

› Have regularly scheduled family meetings and conferences.

› Take into account family needs. Do they need translation services, transportation, or child care? Are there opportunities for involvement at different times of the day? Can the family do anything from home, after work, or on weekends? If the family cannot come to the school for a conference, can it be scheduled in the community or as a home visit or phone call? Who is typically coming to events? Who is not? Why?

Build Shared Ownership in the School Community

› Offer families resources on how to be effectively involved with their children at school and at home. These may include trainings on the curriculum, expectations, and ideas for activities to reinforce classroom instruction.

› Incorporate family talents. What talents do the families in your community possess? Can they be a tutor or mentor? Teach a foreign language or other skill?

› Increase volunteerism. Recruit school volunteers through families and a variety of community service organizations. Create a wish list of tasks for which volunteers are needed.

Encourage and Support Family Engagement

➤ Increase professional development for early childhood educators and all school staff on any of the items that are identified on the Ready Schools Assessment in answer to the questions related to engaging with families and the community.

➤ Create policies that incorporate family and community outreach and respect and sensitivity for cultural and economic diversity.

➤ Provide administrative support and encourage home visiting as a strategy for developing partnerships between families and classroom teachers. Include training for teachers on effective home visiting so that teachers are comfortable with the purpose, and competent in building positive relationships.

➤ Provide training in family-centered partnerships that includes staff, community, and family participants to model effective relationship building.

Do we take a family-centered approach in our school?
(Adapted from the National Principles of Family Support Practice)

☐ School and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.

☐ School enhances families' capacity to support the growth and development of their children.

☐ Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.

☐ A school affirms and strengthens families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhances their ability to function in a multi-cultural society.

☐ School programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.

☐ School programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.

☐ School staff works with families to mobilize formal and informal resources and to support family development.

☐ School programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.

☐ Principles of family support are modeled in all school activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

PATHWAY THREE: TRANSITIONS

A transition can be defined as a life change or moving from one environment or experience to another. Most children experience multiple transitions during their early years, typically including home to formal care arrangement, PreK to kindergarten, home to kindergarten, grade to grade, and school to school. Children experience transitions into and out of services.

Ideally, all Ready Schools' efforts include accountability for the education of young children from birth to age 8, and most certainly between ages 3–8. Thus, Ready Schools is an approach to school reform that focuses on smoothing the transitions among the settings and services for young children and their families (Ritchie, Clifford, Malloy, Cobb, & Crawford, 2009) by aligning environments, curriculum, programs, and practices across settings.

When thinking about transitions, keep these things in mind:

➤ Transitions are more than one-time or short-term activity-focused events.

➤ Early care and education programs and schools must share responsibility for planning and implementing effective transitions.

➤ Effective transitions help children succeed in school, while poor transitions can have negative short- and long-term effects on later learning (Howard, 2009).

> The most important strategy for addressing school readiness is to prepare the school to be responsive to the wide range of experiences, backgrounds, and needs of the children who are starting school.
>
> – Katz, 1991

Key Understandings

Transition and Alignment: Defining Terms

"Transition" is defined as something(s) that children experience; "alignment" refers to the activities that adults carry out to create smooth transition experiences for children (Kagan, 2009). Alignment across all educational programs and practices should result in a continuum of learning and increased consistency of children's experiences through integrated educational curriculum, programs, and practices across home, childcare, preschool, and school. The implementation of transitional supports should begin well before and continue well after the transitional event to ensure that children and families can make necessary adjustments.

Dimensions of Transition and Transition Efforts

Transition work needs to create links between and across early education (preschool) and early elementary grades, as well as define the characteristics of an elementary school that has the capacity to sustain and increase children's learning in the early grades. Some PreK–3 work focuses on structural and policy components of schooling. Critical features include a focus on instructional and human resources that better ensure coordination, alignment, and quality across the grades (e.g.,

appropriate school environments, curriculum and instruction alignment, increased collaboration and shared leadership, and family and community partnerships).

Because effective transitions are so important, many state and national education programs and support services are mandated to provide transition services to the families and children they serve. For example, Title I, IDEA (legislation for children with disabilities), More at Four (North Carolina's PreK program), and Head Start all require transition planning. These mandated transition activities are especially important as children transition to kindergarten. Before engaging in the planning process, check Federal, State, and Local guidelines.

Goals of Effective Transition Planning

The goal of transition planning is to build a seamless continuum of learning and experiences for children across ages, settings, programs, and grades. Specifically, transition planning positions:

➤ Parents to be able to understand and to practice increased ways of supporting their child's development and education; and

➤ Teachers and all school staff to recognize and accept each child's accomplishments so that instruction can begin and continue based on the child's level of development.

Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

Schools and communities may wish to reflect upon the following questions as they engage in the Ready Schools Assessment Process:

➤ What transition strategies are currently implemented for children birth to age 8?

➤ Are families asked what transition practices work for them?

➤ Who is typically involved in developing transition plans? Have families, school representatives, child care community, previous service providers, community resources, etc. been considered?

➤ Does the district have a community-wide transition plan or process? If no,

» How does that hinder optimal transition?

» How do schools move forward in a comprehensive manner?

➤ What specific practices are in place to smooth the transition for children into preschool, into kindergarten, from grade to grade, and into and out of special settings?

➤ For children who have had an educational experience outside of their current setting, what steps are in place to 1) build upon and honor the child's previous learning, and 2) benefit from the knowledge of the previous caregiver or teacher?

Taking Action

School Level Factors that Facilitate Transitions (Ritchie et al, 2009)

➤ Physical and cognitive environments need to change along a seamless continuum to meet the developmental and learning needs of children as they grow. For example, the time children spend in whole group settings in one grade should not dramatically shift as they enter the next grade. Other examples of shifts in experiences could include outside time, rest time, centers, choice, and independent work. Children, who are accustomed to a variety of experiences one year, may experience difficult transitions if they are faced with limited experiences in the next year.

➤ Social environments should attend to children's need for skills to negotiate pro-social relationships across and between their learning environments. For example, children who have had support in developing self-regulation and peer interaction skills one year should continue to encounter appropriate support for their emerging social skills in the following year.

➤ Environments need to support the social/emotional needs of the children. These environments should support children's strong sense of themselves no matter where they are. For example, there should be a common set of rules and expectations for children across school environments (cafeteria, specials, classrooms, and bus).

➤ School attitudes towards families and family involvement need to be receptive of family input on existing traditions, policies, and procedures as it concerns transitions.

➤ The goal of coordinating children's transitions is to make the experiences of children, family members, and educators positive and productive. When the gulf between experiences is too great for children, family members, and educators to navigate successfully, a Ready School recognizes the challenge and makes adaptations as needed.

Of the many factors that contribute to an effective, coherent PreK–3rd experience, some may include: time allocation, support services, collaborative structures, grouping, curriculum alignment, and family engagement.

Time:

How many times have we heard or said, "We don't have time!"? School professionals often don't have enough time for planning, meeting with colleagues, working with individual students, and engaging with families. In order to optimize relationship building, communication, and coordination, the allocation of time must value meaningful participation opportunities at all levels.

For students this may involve teachers re-designing the classroom to provide more time and opportunities for peer involvement. For educators this might mean expanding the time allocated for horizontal and vertical planning. At the administrative level this might mean increasing the time needed for collaborative program development that requires representation from all members of the school community. For families and teachers this might mean prioritizing opportunities to discuss a child's progress and needs, and developing meaningful partnerships that promote increased roles for parents in shared decision making.

Support Services:

We have known for many years that children do not reach their academic potential if they are hungry, abused, neglected, or homeless. This fact highlights the need for providing a supportive service system within schools, between schools, and between schools and human service agencies to address the needs of children and their families. Student support services also can assist students as they transition from one service setting or program to another when special needs are identified.

Student support services can be provided by a number of individuals including counselors, psychologists, social workers, therapists (e.g., speech, occupational, and physical), health care professionals, special educators, remedial educators, classroom teachers, and itinerant teachers.

Support service providers should have the knowledge, skills, and cultural competence to work with preschool and school-age children within a culturally sensitive environment, including the perspectives and values of family members, and supporting teachers in helping children make transitions.

Collaborative Structures:

In order to develop and sustain collaborative work, it is essential to commit to re-examining school structures with the aim of prioritizing time for communication and the development and maintenance of relationships and partnerships between teachers and children, family members, and other professional staff. Examples of collaborative structures that support communication and generate multiple perspectives include vertical and horizontal teams, professional learning communities, mental health teams, study groups, child study teams, and team teaching. A collaborative process enables the people working together to co-construct ideas and strategies using the best available scientific research as well as the wisdom and values of the varied partners.

Grouping:

The terms ungraded, non-graded, continuous progress, and mixed- or multi-age grouping are often used interchangeably. Regardless of the term, these terms generally refer to grouping children so that the age span of the class is greater than one year. Such classes:

▸ Employ a teaching philosophy and curriculum practices that maximize the benefits of interaction and cooperation among children of various ages;

▸ Provide for more than one year of contact between a group of children and their teacher;

▸ Allow children with different experiences and stages of development to turn to each other for help with all aspects of classroom activity, including mastery and application of basic literacy and numeracy skills.

When and how children develop varies by individual and thus early childhood programs and schools need to focus more on developmental processes than on test scores and age when making decisions about grouping.

Curriculum Alignment:

It is essential that schools focus on aligning children's experiences to support a developmental sequence of growth and learning. This means working both within and across grade levels. The more cohesive the alignment of children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional experiences along a developmental continuum, the greater the school's capacity for achieving successful transitions for children and families. Professional Learning Communities are structures schools have successfully used to examine curricula and instructional approaches.

Family Engagement:

Families want to support their children's success in school, but they do not always know how to go about offering that support. Often, their own school experience carries over subtly into their children's interactions at school and influences the ways in which they think they can or cannot help their children succeed.

Recognizing that family members need a variety of gentle and specific suggestions for how they could provide support for positive outcomes for their children is a trademark of a Ready School. Asking family members for their ideas, with the intent of using them, helps establish feelings of mutual trust and appreciation. Plus, it shares responsibility for action, relieving the school of the burden of taking all the initiative.

This strengths-based approach ensures that the best a family member has to offer is what will be accepted and utilized by the school. It begins to pave the way to committed and ongoing involvement and support of family members in the education of their children.

Transitioning Children with Special Needs

Children with disabilities, children with limited English Proficiency and other special needs may transition to school starting at age 3. Districts and schools should have clear and thoughtful policies and practices that not only meet regulatory requirements but also meet the changing needs of children and their families. As children with special needs move through the school experience, their placement in grades and other settings should be carefully thought through. Ensuring that all the appropriate people are at the Individual Education Program meetings (including the receiving teacher) is an important aspect of transitioning children.

Creating a Community-Wide or School-Based Transition Plan

Both the Community/District-Wide and Schools-Based transition plans play an important role in ensuring effective transition practices for children, families, and educators. Things to consider:

Transition Planning Process: (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)

1. Invite all the relevant stakeholders:

› Teachers and administrators from both public schools and early care settings,

› Family members, and

› Representatives from other community agencies and programs (e.g. child care programs, Head Start, Even Start, More at Four, Smart Start, Parent-Teacher Association, and parenting programs).

2. Make sure that the transition team is representative of the community with special attention to race, age, geographic location, and socio-economic considerations.

3. Identify a team coordinator who will:

› Arrange and facilitate meetings;

› Establish a timeline when activities will occur;

› Organize activities throughout the year; and

› Explore possible funding streams for strategy implementation and opportunities for collaboration.

4. Implement transition practices.

5. Evaluate – Monitor – Revise.

Start Early and Provide Multiple Approaches

One key to creating positive and effective transitions for children and families is starting early and implementing a variety of strategies varying in duration and intensity. Selected examples include:

- Developing a district-wide registration plan (common days) to identify incoming kindergarten children earlier and make class lists sooner (sharing the information with teachers and families).

- Sneak-a-peek days (providing opportunities for student to experience the next grade level).

- Engaging families with infants and toddlers, inviting them during the years preceding school enrollment to participate in school functions and family strengthening programs.

- Developing portfolios or a common form to share information about children entering kindergarten from PreK programs and homes.

- Providing staggered entry at PreK and K so that children have time to adjust to the new classrooms and teachers get to know their children better.

- Conducting home visits (including beyond the PreK year) as a way to better understand both the children and their families and introduce them to their new teachers in a non-threatening environment.

Effective transition plans should reflect the multiple settings and connections that could be affected during a transition period. These include teachers, neighborhoods, peers, and families (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 2002). Examples of transition strategies targeting the different relationships include:

- **Child-Teacher relationship:** Provide opportunities for the child to interact with their new teacher prior to school entry.

- **Family-School relationship:** Provide parent orientation before the start of the school year and follow-up with additional involvement opportunities (offer at various or unconventional times to allow for all families to participate, e.g., weekends). Consider parent surveys as a way to determine which transition strategies families find most helpful and to identify any needs families may have during the transition period.

- **Peer relationship (child–child):** Provide opportunities for future classmates to interact with each other prior to school entry.

- **Child-Community relationship:** Create a team of community stakeholders who coordinate services to best meet the needs of all children entering school and transitioning through school.

Transition Activities Beyond Kindergarten

Careful attention to transitions across all grade levels is equally important as the PreK to K transition. There should be evidence of ongoing planning, communication, and alignment for learning and development across grade levels. Vertical teams may be one way to ensure that this kind of planning occurs. Following children across grades is a key part of ensuring their success, and any school or community transition plan should include this component. Professional Learning Communities can be important in planning the transition process across grades, ensuring a smooth instructional continuum for individuals and groups of students, selecting of appropriate teachers, etc. They can also look at teachers' strengths as classes are created.

Recommendations for Kindergarten Orientation

The ultimate goal of "kindergarten orientation" should be to serve as a tool to familiarize parents and children with the school setting and to help alleviate parent or child fears about the first few days of kindergarten. Ideally, any orientation to the kindergarten program should begin at minimum the year before kindergarten entry and focus on developmental readiness, including elements addressing academic, social, and emotional domains.

Kindergarten orientation activities can be successful when they are designed based on needs identified by parents and the children that are entering kindergarten. Kindergarten orientation programs should serve to:

➤ Provide opportunities for parent orientation to the school and for parents to ask questions and gather information (ex: forms to be filled out, carpool/bus procedures, school policies, etc.);

➤ Provide opportunities for children to enjoy positive school experiences (e.g., riding the school bus, playing in the kindergarten classroom and the outdoor settings, having lunch in the cafeteria, learning about the daily routine at school, and talking about appropriate social behaviors for school, etc.); and

➤ Provide an opportunity for the kindergarten teacher to better get to know and communicate with the parents and children.

Practices to be Used Carefully and with Reflection

The following strategies and activities are sometimes implemented within communities as part of their transition plans. In some cases, they are used as "gatekeepers" for kindergarten entry. It is important that schools, school districts, and communities remember that children's development varies widely at age five. Thus, we should not expect all children to reach a common "standard" of readiness. *"Children from various cultures and with various experiences will express their competencies differently and should be expected to show different patterns of development. The same is true for children with disabilities"* (Ready for Schools Goal Team, 2000). It is the hope that communities and schools who are interested in employing these strategies demonstrate a willingness to use them appropriately.

Kindergarten Camps:

A practice occasionally used before children enter kindergarten is called "kindergarten camp." If used to introduce children to school routines and to experience the activities and interactions they can expect, this orientation practice may be appropriate. If it is used to try to drill academic skills (letters, math concepts, etc.) for children who are not deemed "ready," then it is not an appropriate practice. Kindergarten teachers should be "ready" for all children. While it may be helpful for children to have PreK experiences, trying to distill these experiences over a short time period is not an effective practice.

Developmental Screenings:

Developmental screening, typically for PreK or kindergarten, is a brief, relatively inexpensive, standardized procedure designed to quickly evaluate a large number of children. In general, screening is not an end in itself. Ready Schools encourages schools to evaluate their use of screenings, and provides the following guidelines (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2005 & NAEYC, 2003):

➤ Screening tools must meet technical standards for test construction and be culturally and linguistically relevant.

➤ Only staff with appropriate training should conduct screening.

➤ Families should contribute information about their child including any screening information completed by the child's physician and/or health department personnel.

➤ Children and families should be as familiar as possible with personnel completing screening in order to obtain a true picture of the child's abilities.

➤ Use screening instruments only for their intended purpose. If potential concerns are identified, consult with the family or parent/guardian to determine appropriate next steps.

➤ Common screening instruments should be adopted to ensure consistency within counties and school districts. These common screening instruments should correlate and coordinate when possible with the tools utilized within the early childhood community (PreK or early childhood setting).

Questionable Transition Practices

Academic Red-Shirting

The eligibility age for kindergarten is legislated and the school system should not deny access or recommend delayed school entry. "All children are ready for school when they reach the age of eligibility! Ready Schools believe that children entering kindergarten come with a variety of skills and abilities. Because of children's individual differences, Ready Schools respond to this uniqueness by initially assessing each child's experiential base and individualizing curriculum and teaching practices" rather than expecting all children to meet a common standard of readiness at kindergarten entry (Ready for Schools Goals Team, 2000). The term academic red-shirting refers to the practice of delaying the entry of age-eligible children into kindergarten to allow additional time for physical, cognitive, or socio-emotional growth. This practice is most often used for children whose birthday is close to the kindergarten age-eligibility cut-off date. The research on red-shirting has been inconclusive and has failed to provide substantial evidence of its short and long-term effects.

Transitional Grades

Like grade retention, use of transitional grades (grades inserted between the "official" grade: e.g., transitional K, transitional First) has not been shown to be more effective than promoting children and using targeted intervention. While some children need more time to learn than others, this need could be addressed by 1) finding time within the regular school year to provide additional opportunities for learning, and 2) changing our expectations that every child needs to be at the same point on the learning continuum at the same time. Some children make leaps in their learning earlier, some later, and others may learn at a steady pace.

PATHWAY FOUR: RESPECTING DIVERSITY

Regular celebration, reflection, and responsiveness to the experiences and backgrounds of children, families, and communities ensure that children have the best and most enriching learning experiences. When schools are ready for children and families from diverse backgrounds with diverse experiences, schools will be successful for all.

Key Understandings

The notion of diversity is complex. It includes: race/ethnicity, culture, language, socioeconomic status, cognitive and physical ability, and disparities in early education experiences to name a few. To better understand the Respecting Diversity Pathway, consider the following:

› When schools and teachers are respectful of and responsive to children's cultural backgrounds and learning styles, then schools and teachers are in the best position to help them achieve at the highest level.

› The population of each school and classroom needs to be assessed to ensure that all children, including those who are culturally, linguistically, academically, mentally, physically, and economically diverse feel welcome and supported.

› The desired results of inclusive experiences for diverse children and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning that encourage children to reach their full potential.

› Celebration of, reflection of, and responsiveness to the experiences and cultures of children, families, and communities at multiple levels through multiple methods ensure that children have the best and most enriching learning experiences.

[Schools] are responsible for creating a welcoming environment that respects diversity, supports children's ties to their families and community, and promotes both second language acquisition and preservation of children's home languages and cultural identities. Linguistic and cultural diversity is an asset, not a deficit, for young children.

– National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009

Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

Schools and communities may wish to reflect on the following questions as they engage in the Ready Schools Assessment Process. These questions, along with suggested tools, may help further the collaborative work of schools, families, and communities delving deeper into this pathway:

▸ Are the assessments you use comprehensive enough to assess all children's skills, strengths, and weaknesses?

▸ Does the curriculum integrate the knowledge and traditions of different aspects of diversity throughout the entire curriculum (i.e., are students with disabilities included in the general curriculum)? Does the curriculum immerse children in other cultures and ways of life that are not stereotypical?

▸ Are the "leaders" of the school and staff culturally competent, and conscious, of diversity issues, and do they understand the experiences of the diverse group they communicate with and serve?

▸ Do instructional practices reflect the diverse learning styles of children?

▸ Do instructional practices reflect an understanding of how culture may influence children's learning and engagement?

▸ Are teachers and school staff reflective of the community (i.e., are there procedures in place to achieve the goal of a culturally and linguistically competent workforce that include recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion)?

▸ Do instructional materials recognize diverse cultures and experiences within cultures?

Diversity Resources

Promoting Cultural and Linguistic Competency: Self-Assessment Checklist for Personnel Providing Services and Supports in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Settings. This seven-page self-assessment document is for teachers and others providing services in early intervention and early childhood settings. It asks about the usage frequency and quantity of culturally-relevant materials and resources, varied communication styles, and certain values and attitudes. It provides concrete examples of the kinds of practices that foster such an environment.

Equity in Special Education Placement: A School Self- Assessment Guide for Culturally Responsive Practice. This is a comprehensive measure for administrators and is similar to the High/Scope Ready School Assessment with a particular focus on equity and culturally responsive practices.

Cultural and Linguistic Competence Policy Assessment. Although this assessment is focused on health disparities, the questions are also applicable to education disparities. These questions ask about an organization's (i.e., school's) cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills, as well as the organization's ability to sustain a diverse workforce that is culturally competent.

DEC Recommended Practice: Parent Checklist. This checklist is designed for parents to help evaluate programs for their children with special needs.

Creating an Anti-bias Learning Environment. This is a checklist that can be done by a variety of individuals, including teachers, staff, and families on whether the learning environment has diverse images and provides varied experiences through policies and curriculum.

Taking Action

The following guiding questions and activities can help schools and districts begin or further their work in respecting diversity and being more culturally competent.

- How can schools become more understanding and accepting of differences?

- Know who your students and families are by conducting a cultural inventory and examination.

- What are the culture/ethnicity/language of your students, families, and staff?

- Who participates and who does not in all aspects of your schools' leadership?

- What cultural images are represented throughout the school and does it match your children, families, and community?

- Are there outreach and events that occur in the community?

Create a Welcoming Atmosphere for All Families and Children

Create an atmosphere that is representative of the community and students. Take time to learn more about the diversity within your community and/or school, and determine ways to incorporate the diversity into the everyday school experiences of the children. Try some of these strategies (Ohio Department of Education, 2008):

- Learn about the language, daily rituals, and customs that students practice at home and incorporate them into school routines.

- Ask families to share their cultural heritage in a variety of ways, both within the classroom and across the school.

- Facilitate interactions and promote friendships between children with and without disabilities.

- Provide equipment that supports children with physical disabilities.

- Facilitate friendship between children from different backgrounds (this may also create a friendship between the families).

- Be mindful of and adjust to children whose home environment may be different from the school environment (e.g., children who are not used to routines at home may need help adjusting to routines at school; children who are not allowed to touch things at home may not be familiar with the use of touch as a way to learn).

Ready Schools in Action: Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools: Supporting English Language Learners

Carrboro Elementary, which has been implementing a dual language program from K–5 for several years, decided to begin a PreK dual language classroom in 2008. The implementation of this program has focused on the following aspects:

- Language distribution: How will the languages be used in the classroom? How much time will be devoted to each language? How will high status be accorded to both languages? How will the languages be used in the routines and activities during the day?

- Curriculum: What are the goals and objectives of the program? How do teachers integrate the Creative Curriculum into the dual language program? How do teachers use sheltered English and Spanish strategies in their instruction? What kinds of materials are necessary to implement the Creative Curriculum in a dual language program?

- Assessment: How do teachers integrate the Creative Curriculum assessment into the dual language program? Do other assessments need to be included to address specific areas of language development? How can teachers take language samples and use them to understand where children are in their language development?

- Language use throughout the day: How to use sheltered English and Spanish teaching strategies, and what materials are appropriate? How to assess children in both English and Spanish.

- Communicate verbally and in writing with families and community members in their native language.

  » Translate written communication into native languages.

  » Print materials in easy to read, picture and symbol formats.

  » Train bilingual mentors to work effectively with families.

- Begin relationships with families prior to when the children start school.

- Conduct needs assessments to determine what families expect from the school community.

- Create a family and staff committee that meets regularly to enhance parent-school community relationships.

Strategies for Creating Learning Environments that Meet the Needs of All Learners

Professional Development:

Ongoing professional development is critical to providing information and ongoing support to educators who are working to increase their cultural competence. Professional development topics that will support increased attention to diverse populations include:

- Learning to choose and use assessments to develop Individualized Education Plans (IEP).

- Determining how alternative assessments help account for children's language acquisition, dialect, etc. and reduce the potential for bias.

- Becoming familiar with research-based strategies for working with diverse learners (academic, gender, socio-economic, non-English language learners, ability level).

- Focusing on what children communicate rather than how they communicate.

- Understanding the second language acquisition process.

- Re-examining classroom practice based on brain research about boys and girls.

- Adapting instruction for English Language Learners by:

  » Paying attention to pacing and articulation when speaking and use other methods to convey meaning such as intonation and gestures.

  » Using pictures and objects to support understanding.

  » Utilizing peers as models.

- Understanding and acknowledging the impact of race, prejudice, and discrimination on the school experiences of children:

  » Addressing the role of socio-cultural history and the impact on children's learning and home environment (e.g., low expectations).

  » Questioning stereotypic images or perceptions of particular children's ability and learning level (e.g., black boys are aggressive, non-English speaking children cannot communicate with English-speaking children, physically challenged children are unable to be active).

- Choosing appropriate program design for second language learners, (i.e., dual immersion, transitional bilingual, content-based).

- Developing a broad repertoire of approaches to give learners multiple ways to acquire skills and knowledge.

- Developing multiple means for learners to express information and knowledge.

- Providing opportunities and structures for teachers and school staff to safely discuss their values and beliefs.

  » Beliefs and concepts of mental health or emotional well-being, particularly for infants and young children, vary significantly from culture to culture, and approaches to disciplining children are influenced by culture.

  » Different cultures have different expectations of their children for acquiring toileting, dressing, reading, writing, feeding, and other skills.

  » The definition of 'family' differs by culture (e.g., extended family members, fictive kin, god-parents).

  » Male-female roles in families may vary significantly among different cultures (e.g. who makes major decisions for the family, play and social interactions expected of male and female children).

  » Children may not have exposure to the same learning opportunities because of economics (e.g., knowing what a pencil is, how to hold a book, sense of learned helplessness, etc.).

Collaboration:

Find opportunities not only among adults but between children to collaborate. For example:

- Regularly collaborate with families in planning how to meet the needs of children at home and school.

- Provide opportunities for peer assisted learning to occur within the classroom.

- Meet regularly with teachers, staff, parents, and community leaders to come to shared understandings specific to particular groups of children (e.g., English language learners, black children, special needs children, poor children, etc.).

PATHWAY FIVE: ENGAGING ENVIRONMENTS

Engaging environments go beyond what the school building looks like and include: the classroom learning environment, school climate, interactions, and developmentally appropriate practices. Schools that engage children and families:

> Project an open, child-focused, and welcoming atmosphere characterized by friendliness, respect, and high staff morale;

> Use appropriate practices that support the whole child—physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively;

> Are safe, inviting, and developmentally appropriate; and

> Actively engage children in learning.

The environment...conveys the message that this is a place where adults have thought about the quality and instructive power of space. The layout of the physical space is welcoming and fosters encounters, communication, and relationships. The arrangement of structures, objects, and activities encourages choices, problem solving, and discoveries in the process of learning.

– Gandini, 2001

Key Understandings

In the seminal work, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Lella Gandini (1998) gives the reader a guided tour of a preschool in Reggio Emilia, Italy, pointing out the important relationship between the children's facility and the larger community; the ways that space reflects culture; and how that environment responds and evolves over time. She explains that the Italian designers created space to:

> Promote active exploration and relationships among children and adults;

> Meet the developmental needs of each age group;

> Document the life that occurs within that space; and

> Provoke discovery and learning.

In Italy, Gandini (1998) believes that their value for schools everywhere lies in the way *"each school's particular configuration of the garden, walls, tall windows, and handsome furniture declares: this is a place where adults have thought about the quality of the environment."*

Thoughtful consideration of the school environment should attend to the following ideas:

➤ All children and their families should feel welcome and respected. Children should know upon arrival that they belong in the school environment — all indoor and outdoor spaces are accessible to children: the classroom, hallways, auditorium, and cafeteria, as well as the grounds, including the entrance, the parking lot, the bus area, the gardens, the surrounding trees and plants, and a defined playground.

➤ Indoor and outdoor environments should be designed to engage and support children in active, meaningful play that promotes development across all domains - physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. This is true for all children, not just four and five year olds.

➤ Learning occurs most effectively in the context of supportive, positive relationships. School environments foster those relationships by providing opportunities for children to interact with peers and adults in a variety of rich and stimulating indoor and outdoor environments.

➤ Adults and children deserve environments that promote comprehensive school health and wellness.

Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

Schools and communities may wish to reflect on the following questions and assessment tools as they engage in the Ready Schools Assessment Process (FirstSchool Design Collaborative, 2009):

➤ What barriers to relationship building are apparent in our design?

➤ Do we use our outside spaces to promote academic learning, physical development, and contact with nature?

➤ What values and beliefs do we convey, and how is that reflected in our environment?

➤ Do we promote family and community involvement?

➤ Do we welcome and honor ALL staff, children, and families?

Environment Assessment Tools

The following tools may be helpful in assessing your school's indoor and outdoor environments:

Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC): This rating scale is designed to measure the use of developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten through third grade classrooms, in terms of physical environment, social context, and instructional context. It is suitable for program improvement as well as for research and evaluation.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS): is an observational tool for assessing teacher-child interactions in PreK through third grade classrooms. Three important domains of interaction are examined: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. The system can be used for professional development, planning, evaluation, and research.

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (revised) (ECERS-R) and School-age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS): These rating scales are designed to assess the quality of learning environments for children, including the interactions between staff and children, staff, parents, and other adults, and among the children; the many materials and activities in the environment; and features such as space and schedule. They are suitable for program improvement efforts as well as research and evaluation. Training materials are available. The ECERS-R is designed to be used in classrooms for children ages 2 ½ through kindergarten. The SACERS is designed for before- and after-school care programs.

Physical Environment: A Guide to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standard and Related Accreditation Criteria: This resource is a self-study guide for programs seeking accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, focusing on NAEYC's "Physical Environment" program standard. It can be useful to anyone trying to assess the physical elements of their program. It is one of nine booklets addressing the Standards and Criteria specific to NAEYC Accreditation of early childhood education programs.

Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale (POEMS): This measure was designed to help teachers/caregivers and administrators learn more about creating higher quality environments for children's outdoor play and learning. It is a tool to assess the quality of outdoor environments for children three to five years old and a self-study resource for planning new construction or for improving existing space. It can be used as a research instrument to study the implications of outdoor environmental quality on children's development and learning. POEMS contains 56 items grouped in 5 domains: physical environment, interactions, play and learning settings, program, and teacher/caregiver role. In addition to a user guide, scale, and scoring protocol, a technical assistance manual for program improvement and planning is also available.

Smart Start Effective Practice in Activity Design: Outdoor Learning Environments: This publication offers guidelines for Outdoor Learning Environments Design Plans, including considerations for selecting materials, meeting ADA requirements, protecting health and safety, and evaluating the initiative.

Taking Action

The following topics and activities can help schools and districts begin or further their work in Engaging Environments.

- › Well-constructed environments promote the learning and well-being of the children and adults who spend their days there (Gandini, 1998). *"Both child-guided and teacher-guided experiences are vital to children's development and learning."* Successful learning environments support play and relationships, and promote health and wellness.

- › Developmentally appropriate programs provide substantial periods of time when children may select activities from a variety of enriching and stimulating choices that teachers have prepared in various centers in the room.

- › Planned, teacher-guided, interactive small-group, and large-group experiences are an important part of each school day (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

- › Learning environments convey respect for different cultures and abilities.

- › Nature is important to children's development — intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically. Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and intellectual development. Therefore changes in our modern-built environments should be made to optimize children's positive contact with nature (Kellert, 2005).

- › Play is a controversial subject and as schools determine their philosophy and practice about play, it is important to consider the evidence and data. The NC Position Statement on Kindergartens of the 21st Century (2007) shares these thoughts on play:

  » *"The NC Department of Public Instruction believes that play is at the core of a kindergartner's learning and development and that it is an essential element of a child's education in the 21st Century...Through an interactive, play-based curriculum, children develop cognitive skills as they explore, imagine, imitate, construct, discuss, plan, manipulate, problem-solve, dramatize, create, and experiment."*

Environments that Support Relationships

Research has consistently demonstrated an association between positive teacher-child relationships and children's social, emotional, and intellectual competence. Well-planned environments make it easy for children to be constructively engaged with each other and with materials so that teachers can observe and interact with individuals or small groups to promote deeper explorations and learning. When children are constructively engaged, there are fewer discipline problems and thus a calmer, more pleasant emotional environment for everyone. Well-planned environments provide spaces for children to be active as well as to pause and reflect, and for family members to observe as well as participate in school life.

For example: as children get older, they continue to benefit from the creativity and self-regulation that is promoted through play. The social studies and science curricula provide an excellent foundation for the integration of play into daily classroom life. Rather than the kitchen area that is prevalent in PreK classrooms, dramatic play areas can become community facilities such as the post office, hospital, or parks and recreation office; science labs for the investigation of sea life, anatomy, or magnetism; or community action areas for work on the environment, elections, or the need for a new stop sign.

> **T**he development of positive relationships among and between education professionals, families, and children is foundational to all work with young children.
>
> – FirstSchool Design Collaborative, 2009

Environments that Support Health and Wellness

Children, teachers, and families are impacted daily by obesity, diabetes, lack of exercise and fresh air, poor nutrition, and exposure to environmental chemicals. Additionally, members of the school community are directly or indirectly affected by difficulties that include depression, substance abuse, and hyperactivity.

In order to give priority to the health and wellness of all members of the school community, environments should not only be designed and managed to prevent illness and injury, but also to *"promote and build healthy children, staff, and families"* (FirstSchool Design Collaborative, 2009).

School communities have an opportunity to dramatically improve children's connection to the natural world. *Last Child in the Woods* (2008) brings together a new and growing body of research indicating that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development and for the physical and emotional health of children and adults. In this influential work about the divide between children and the outdoors, Richard Louv directly links the lack of nature in the lives of children to rises in obesity, attention disorders, and depression.

Links between Curriculum, Instruction, and Environment

Thinking about curriculum and instruction is synonymous with thinking about engaging environments. Some of the ideas presented in this section can also be found in the Curriculum and Instruction Pathway.

> Every child is different. Learning is not a lockstep, linear progression; the environment must be responsive to the unique needs and learning styles of diverse children.

» Do lessons include a variety of modalities — visual, audio, kinesthetic?

» Does curriculum planning insure that children understand content before moving on?

> Children are persistent, curious, and creative; they want and need to make sense of their world. The environment must promote multiple ways for children to gain knowledge.

» Are children supported as they learn to be good observers — given equipment such as microscopes, magnifying glasses, binoculars, clip boards? Are they given access to animals, plants, rocks, water, and trees? Are they given instruction on how to document their findings through notes and sketches?

» Are children given the opportunity to hypothesize, ask questions, and talk about what they have learned?

> Language, traditions, and family expectations are the primary influences on children's development.

» Is cultural and linguistic diversity apparent throughout the school in books, art and materials, and music?

» Are there multiple opportunities for families to share their knowledge and experiences that go beyond cooking a traditional dish or attending a single event devoted to their heritage?

» Are some staff able to communicate with children and family members who speak a language other than English?

➤ Learning is most meaningful when integrated across all domains of development and learning – physical, emotional-social, and cognitive. Each is important and closely interrelated. Children's development and learning influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains. Part of integrating development and learning includes the development of environments that incorporate rather than compartmentalize learning.

  » Are math vocabulary words such as horizontal, vertical, and parallel in the blocks area so that children can develop descriptive language for their buildings?

  » Are books on touch and smell in the science area accompanied by opportunities for children to develop and identify their senses?

  » When there is interpersonal conflict, do teachers take the time to help children talk about the feelings involved and strategies for resolution?

➤ Children learn through active engagement.

  » Are classrooms arranged for optimum movement and interaction?

  » Are there a variety of learning areas/centers for active exploration that address content areas (literacy, math, writing, science/discovery, social studies, and creative arts) that attend to children's developmental needs including fine and gross motor development, language development, and higher order thinking?

  » Are children able to be independent and self-reliant? Are materials readily accessible and organized? Are routines clear and well established? Are children given consistent opportunities to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings?

Snapshot of a Ready School Environment

If you were to look into a school that honors all of its members, you would encounter:

☑ Staff who are diverse by race, culture, ethnicity, language, and ability;

☑ Books, pictures, posters, and materials that reflect the language, race, culture, and background of the school staff and families;

☑ Hallways and classroom pathways wide enough for wheelchair access;

☑ Railings on stairways and in restrooms;

☑ Written communication in the languages of the school families;

☑ Teachers and staff who can speak the languages of the school families;

☑ Foods that are familiar to all children, and;

☑ School and classroom activities and events that are representative of the population of the school.

PATHWAY SIX: EFFECTIVE CURRICULA, INSTRUCTION, AND CHILD ASSESSMENT

Effective curricula, instruction, and child assessment foster motivation and enthusiasm for learning, support development in all domains, and build academic knowledge and skills.

Priorities include:

➤ Projecting an open, child-focused, and welcoming atmosphere characterized by friendliness, respect, and high staff morale.

➤ The school diligently employing educational methods and materials shown to be effective in helping a diverse population of children achieve appropriate academic growth to reach essential standards.

➤ Accomodating and including children with disabilities and other special needs to the maximum extent possible in the regular instructional programs.

➤ Aligning standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment within a classroom, within a grade level, and across grade levels from preschool through the elementary grades and beyond.

➤ Using research and data to help drive instructional practice, and teachers planning within and across grade levels to ensure alignment and multi-level intervention strategies.

> ntentionality is "directed, designed interactions between children and teachers in which teachers purposefully challenge, scaffold and extend children's skills."
>
> – Pianta, 2003

Key Understandings

Teachers must be prepared to understand both academic standards and child development to design effective learning experiences for young children.

Curriculum, Assessment, and Alignment

➤ Effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment are appropriate for young children's development and responsive to individual interests and needs and sensitive to children's cultural and linguistic contexts. Developmental needs and learning styles in the primary grades lend themselves to an integrated approach to curriculum.

➤ Aligning standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment horizontally and vertically creates a learning continuum within which ALL young children can develop and learn at their own pace.

➤ The continuing achievement gap requires in-depth analysis of instructional practices and environments for poor and minority children.

➤ Linking assessment directly to curriculum and instruction generates meaningful data needed to inform instructional practice. Using appropriate formative assessment to refine instruction and provide individualized support helps ensure that young children make continuous academic progress and develop in all domains.

Learning and Development

> Intentional teachers make thoughtful choices about classroom environment, curriculum, and student interactions. 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 developmental needs and learning styles in the primary grades, kindergarten through 3rd grade, lend themselves to an integrated approach to curriculum rather than that of a stand-alone, content-specific nature.

> Children's learning cannot be left to chance. Effective teachers use a variety of approaches, strategies, contexts, and materials to support children's interests and abilities in each learning domain. Young children's learning is determined most significantly by what teachers do and how they interact with each child. A good curriculum is important, but teacher decisions and interactions are paramount.

> Children develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers.

> Inclusion is valued and practiced as it supports the right of all children, regardless of their diverse abilities, to participate actively in natural settings within their school environment. Inclusion of children with disabilities and other special needs in the regular instructional program, combined with specialized instruction and support to reach each child's individual goals, helps to ensure optimal development and learning for ALL young children.

Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

As schools continue to explore this pathway, Ready Schools invites school teams and communities to reflect upon the following questions:

- ❯ Do policies and educational practices support the learning of all students?

- ❯ Are we implementing research and evidence-based best practices?

- ❯ Do curricula and instructional practices support the whole child or do they primarily address reading, writing, and math?

- ❯ Do teachers incorporate a balance of learning environments and teaching approaches each day?

- ❯ What does children's work tell us about their response to instruction?

- ❯ How do children's mistakes provide information about instruction?

- ❯ What alternative strategies can be used to increase learning?

- ❯ Do all teachers know the academic standards for the grade they teach, as well as the standards for the previous and succeeding grades?

  - » Do they understand how the standards build upon one another from one grade level to the next?

  - » Is there alignment between early learning standards and school-age standards?

Taking Action

To ensure that young students are provided optimal and appropriate learning experiences staff members first must understand the principles of child development and learning. Staff members also must:

- be clear about academic expectations;

- know effective instructional strategies; and

- understand the value of sound and appropriate assessment practices for young children.

Understanding and Implementing Child Development Principles

Children grow and develop through predictable stages, but at individual rates. Every child is different. Learning is not a lockstep, linear progression; effective schools and classrooms must respond to the unique needs and learning styles of diverse children. Teachers should employ various child development methods to respond to each child's social-emotional and cognitive needs.

All children can learn and, in appropriate settings, want to learn. Children are persistent, curious, and creative; they want and need to make sense of their world. Experience, knowledge, curiosity, and a sense of wonder are foundations for learning.

Development and learning are rooted in culture and supported by family. Language, traditions, and family expectations are the primary influences on children's development. Cultural and linguistic diversity should be embraced as meaningful opportunities to expand children's learning. Learning is enriched and strengthened by stable, nurturing relationships within the family and community.

Action Steps:

- Form vertical teams of PreK-3rd grade teachers focused on typical and atypical child development in the primary years. Read and discuss the implications of recent research. Invite a local expert from a college or university to summarize recent research about young children's development from ages 3 through 8 to help guide your discussions.

- Allocate funds to purchase memberships for teachers in professional organizations focused on the education of young children, such as National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), and the Division of Early Childhood (DEC).

- Plan and teach intentionally with specific goals in mind for children's development and learning in all domains. Provide a variety of learning areas/centers for active exploration that address all developmental areas (cognitive, language, physical, social-emotional). Look for ways to incorporate materials and activities that bring children's culture, language, community, and family into the classroom in meaningful ways.

Effective Child Assessment

Early childhood assessments should give children numerous opportunities to show what they have learned and how they can apply their knowledge. These assessments should be integrated into daily routines and become progressively more challenging. Assessments benefit children by showing teachers what children have mastered and where further instruction is needed, enabling all children to make continuous progress. Children are more likely to perform at their best when engaged in interesting and meaningful classroom projects and experiences of their choosing.

Action Steps:

› Observe and document children's performance during daily assignments and play. If they demonstrate understanding of a concept consistently, it is not necessary to re-assess it formally. Use the results of formative assessment to differentiate instruction. Identify and strengthen students' weak areas, create lessons to engage students who are uninterested, and develop new challenges for students who are exceeding standards.

› Collaborate in grade-level groups to make a list of appropriate formative assessment strategies such as rubrics, record-keeping forms, portfolio criteria, etc., for assessment related to essential standards. Work in teams to develop observable criteria for learning. ("What does it look like when students have learned it?") Work in teams to develop methods for communicating ongoing progress to families, based on the results of formative assessments. Staff members at the same grade level use common assessments of student learning and development and align assessments vertically. Assessment results are shared across grade levels.

› Assess and record the progress of children with disabilities toward Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals and objectives using authentic assessment methods including observation during everyday activities. Methods and materials used to assess children with disabilities accommodate their developmental and disability-specific characteristics.

› Engage in action research to identify and test strategies and tools for assessing children's learning and development.

› Develop a list of websites where teachers can locate information and resources for assessing young children.

Assessments for Young Children

Assessments for young children are:

☑ Artifacts of children's understanding;

☑ Ongoing, strategic, purposeful, and embedded;

☑ Aligned to academic standards; and

☑ Used to inform practice.

Assessments are not:

✗ Pen-and-pencil tests;

✗ Infrequent events;

✗ Out of context;

✗ Used to judge children's abilities; or

✗ Administered by an adult the child does not know.

Authentic assessments for young children include:

☑ Observations,

☑ Ongoing documentation of children's work,

☑ Work samples,

☑ Running and narrative records, and

☑ Interviews with children and their families.

Effective Curriculum and Instruction

Children learn and grow in an integrated manner. Learning is most meaningful when integrated across all domains. All domains of development and learning – physical, social/emotional, and cognitive–are equally important and are closely interrelated. Children's development and learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains. The first step toward integration is deep knowledge of the state's learning standards. This knowledge enables teachers to integrate curriculum in natural ways that are meaningful for children.

Children learn quickly when material is presented in meaningful ways at appropriate times. Children learn best when actively involved in activities in which they have a role in initiating. Teachers should incorporate an appropriate balance of teacher-directed and child-directed learning activities, including play, into curriculum and instruction. They must intentionally incorporate standards-based learning objectives into rich, inquiry-based activities that are meaningful, interesting, and motivating to young children.

The early childhood curriculum is the planned management of time, materials, experiences, and activities to guide children's learning and development. It is an organized framework that delineates:

› The content children are to learn;

› The processes through which they achieve the identified curricular goals;

› What teachers do to help children achieve these goals; and

› The context in which teaching and learning occur.

Action Steps:

› Work in grade-level teams to develop, implement, and evaluate integrative units of study that are aligned with essential standards across content areas. Use technology such as a Wiki or a Blog to explore effective teaching strategies and share successful lesson plans that integrate curriculum across multiple content areas and developmental domains.

› Integrate topics based on children's interests, ideas, and discoveries into the everyday experiences of the classroom. Develop and implement schedules with large chunks of time for exploration and inquiry-based learning that enable children to become deeply engaed. Take advantage of teachable moments to weave important learning objectives into child-centered experiences, based on a deep knowledge of essential standards. Provide opportunities for children to participate in project-based learning experiences.

› Foster children's active engagement through conversation and dialogue about their experiences. Young children are concrete, active learners who construct knowledge based on direct sensory experiences as well as previous knowledge. Discovery learning, activities involving concrete objects or manipulatives, and multi-sensory experiences enhance learning in young children by helping them understand the world and how things work. For children, play is serious work and is an important vehicle to promote language, cognition, social competence, and self-regulation.

> Identify the learning styles and preferences of each student and design instruction to meet individual needs. Offer multi-sensory experiences and use a wide array of effective instructional strategies.

> Engage in intentional teaching. The term "intentional teaching" refers to teachers acting with specific goals in mind for children's development and learning.

> Provide ample opportunity for play. Play is a primary vehicle for young children's development and learning, especially in the earliest grades. Effective teachers provide many opportunities for age-appropriate play in its various forms, including active physical play, object play, pretend or dramatic play, and games with rules.

> Provide professional development focused on the value of play and how it provides a vehicle for children to explore and elaborate on their understandings of the world.

> Use developmental, cultural, linguistic, and age appropriate strategies for relationship-building and integration of curricula.

> Engage families in discussions about how learning goals are met through play, inquiry-based activities, and daily classroom routines.

> Arrange classrooms for optimum movement and interaction for students. Take learning activities outdoors, and bring the natural environment into the classroom. Align learning center experiences to the essential standards in the state's standard course of study. Use technology appropriately to expand learning opportunities for students of all ages, including applications that promote creativity and open-ended thinking.

> Create a varied and balanced program where every child can be successful. Both teacher-directed and child-directed experiences are found in intentional and effective classrooms (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2009).

Content and Learning Experiences are Aligned Horizontally and Vertically

Children learn best when there is an alignment between standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment in early childhood education settings and the elementary school, within a classroom, within a grade level, and across grade levels.

Curriculum should be mapped across grade levels, by utilizing child development principles and standards to align curriculum and instruction both vertically and horizontally. Curriculum should be integrated and aligned in ways that are meaningful to students. Staff members collaborate with child care, community preschools, Head Start, and other programs serving children who will later attend the school to align curriculum and instruction vertically across programs using early childhood standards and the state's K-3 standard course of study.

Action Steps:

‣ Develop vertically aligned curriculum maps based on *Foundations* (or your state's early learning standards and your state's standard course of study).

‣ Meet regularly as vertical teams and use the Department of Public Instruction's essential standards as they are implemented to map curriculum from preschool through 3rd grade and beyond.

‣ Use curriculum maps to identify curricular gaps or redundancies (Ohio, 2008).

‣ *"Determine key areas for vertical alignment of standards-based lessons from preschool through grade three"* (Ohio, 2008).

Fidelity of Curriculum Implementation/Training

Teachers must understand both academic standards and child development to design effective learning experiences for young children. Embedded, sustained professional development should be infused within and beyond the school year to ensure staff receives the training and materials necessary to understand child development, the standard course of study, system-mandated curricula, and evidence-based best practices for instruction.

Authentic professional learning communities (PLC) should be developed and woven into the tapestry of each Ready School. It is critical that staff members be provided time to collectively examine their practices and beliefs. This structure provides a context of collegiality, which supports teachers and administrators in improving their practice via increased reflective/collaborative time. This time should be utilized to learn new curriculum and instructional strategies and differentiated methods for interacting meaningfully with each child.

PLCs create opportunities for professional staff to look deeply into the teaching and learning processes in order to become more effective in their work with students.

Action Steps:

› Become familiar with the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy and the state's essential standards as they are implemented.

› Work in grade-level teams to assess the fidelity of current curriculum methods and materials to learning standards and the state board of education's recommended practices.

› Use mentor teachers to ensure that teachers who are new to the school understand and know how to implement the DPI-mandated methods and materials currently in use at the school.

› Work in teams to explore how standards-driven lessons differ from topic-driven lessons, and how topics of interest to children and teachers can be woven into standards-driven lessons.

› Develop a curriculum fidelity checklist and use it as a tool for observation and self-assessment of lessons and units.

Student-Teacher Interactions

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 develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers. Nurturing relationships are vital to fostering self-esteem and a strong sense of self-efficacy, capacity in resolving interpersonal conflicts cooperatively, and the sociability to connect with others and form friendships. Further, by providing positive models and the security and confidence to try new experiences and attempt new skills, such relationships support children's learning and the acquisition of numerous capabilities.

Sensitive, responsive teacher interactions with children during instruction build the kind of positive relationships that contribute to children's sense of safety and security in the classroom. Positive teacher-child interactions during instruction are essential to optimal learning and development.

Ready Schools in Action:

Davidson County Schools Integrate Social Studies, Literacy, and Transition Activities

PreK-3rd grade teachers voluntarily met over summer vacation to explore the integration of social studies into their literacy block during the first four weeks of school. During this time teachers thought about the kinds of things children may worry about as they enter school (finding the bathroom, bus, or cafeteria, making friends, older students, new rules) and designed experiences to alleviate those worries, some of which included:

- A "Welcome to South Lexington" campaign was created to address the needs and concerns of children and families new to the school, as well as new to grade levels.

- Students developed maps and brochures for visitors and new students.

- Older students became buddies and mentors to younger students.

- During family orientation everyone had a chance to meet the important members of the school staff and positive relationships were established.

When teachers affirm their efforts, give constructive feedback, and avoid negative interactions that shame them, students develop a sense of competence and confidence. Teachers actively encourage and facilitate positive interactions and friendships between ALL children, including those with disabilities and their typically-developing peers.

Action Steps:

- Implement professional development strategies focused specifically on the quality of teacher-child interactions during instruction, such as peer observations or walk-through teams to document teacher-child interactions.

- Create school and classroom environments that facilitate and promote positive interactions with children and among adults. Consistently implement a developmentally appropriate, school-wide program to encourage positive student behavior. Staff will respond rather than react to student behavior and be empowered to create environments supporting pro-social behaviors. Social, emotional, and academic growth in a strong and safe school community will be emphasized.

- Develop self-monitoring tools to support high quality teacher-child interactions. Use case studies and scenarios to analyze challenging situations and interactions with students. Videotape teacher interactions with children during play, inquiry-based learning activities, and large group lessons and use these videotapes as tools for reflection.

Inclusion

Inclusion of children with disabilities in classrooms with their typically developing peers is valued because all children benefit. In a high-quality inclusive classroom, children with disabilities learn from peer models, and children without disabilities develop appreciation for the strengths of diverse classmates. The mission statement of every school mandates learning for "all children." Inclusion is a philosophy of ensuring that all children, including those with special needs, have access to curriculum that is appropriate for them in settings with their grade-level peers. Ensuring that all children have access to the general curriculum is a first step towards reaching all children. Inclusion is more than being included for lunch, recess, or enhancement classes.

Classroom teachers who include children with disabilities in their classrooms receive the necessary resources and support to provide appropriate instruction for ALL children in the classroom. Staff members should value accommodations and adaptations that will allow inclusion and the integration of children of varying abilities. They must know how to apply various practices such as tiered interventions and be willing to share responsibility for meeting the needs of all children in the least restrictive environment. Staff in an effective inclusive classroom provide the intensive, specialized instruction needed to help children develop in an optimum manner and progress toward their IEP goals.

Action Steps:

> Invite an expert on special needs to provide ongoing training and support on inclusion. Develop a "toolkit" on ways to differentiate instruction to meet the needs for all children.

> Develop a school-wide action plan (steps) for increasing the level of inclusion. Provide environments that incorporate a wide variety of materials and adaptations to allow all children to access and use the materials. Promote high, yet achievable expectations for all students.

> Develop an inclusion support team to monitor the effectiveness of the program. Invite Exceptional Children program staff to grade level team meetings.

PATHWAY SEVEN: TEACHER SUPPORTS AND ADULT LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Ready Schools are designed to support the ongoing learning and development of school teachers, staff, and administrators. Ready Schools leaders:

› Ensure that space, time, tools, and resources are purposely designed to support all school personnel's capacity to work effectively with children.

› Promote and foster professional learning communities and high-quality sustained professional development. They value and support opportunities for educators to:

  » Work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. In order to promote and insure seamless social and academic experiences for children, professional learning communities work within and across grade levels, between homes and the school, and between the school and the community.

  » Partner with family and community members to align school, family, and community knowledge and to design goals to meet the needs of all children.

Key Understandings

The school and district leadership support adult learning when (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001):

› There is a shared vision of teachers as leaders and learners.

› Family and community members are regularly part of a process of collective inquiry and problem solving.

› The school culture supports adult learning communities that are designed to meet a variety of needs and are comprised of those who can best meet the identified goals.

› Teacher support is a top priority, as evidenced by time allocation and both financial and human resources.

› Educators spend time in the classrooms of others and offer concrete and constructive help and support.

› Educators are encouraged to participate in professional organizations.

› There are multiple and ongoing opportunities to participate in meaningful professional development.

Creating Collaborative Learning Communities

It is important that adult learning communities in schools include family and community members to ensure:

› Meaningful and intentional engagement opportunities for family and community members;

› Shared decision making on behalf of children; and

› Community conversations that address the following questions (Ritchie, et al., 2009):

   » In what ways is education a shared responsibility between schools and families?

   » What does it mean for families to be involved in their children's education?

   » How do schools and families work together to create a positive school experience that honors all students and their families?

   » How can families and communities support school personnel to provide an enriching and learning opportunity for all children?

Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

Schools and communities may wish to reflect on the following questions as they engage in the Ready Schools Assessment Process. These questions, along with the suggested tools, may help further the collaborative work of schools, families, and communities:

› What collaborative structures are in place to ensure regular communication? (Professional Learning Communities, School Improvement Plan Teams, vertical teams, Ready Schools teams, etc.)

› Does the time allotted for collaboration match the priority and value placed on communication?

› Who participates in decision-making processes in our school?

› Does our current professional development program meet our real needs?

Professional Development Assessment Tools

A planning checklist based on the North Carolina Professional Development Standards provides educators with a framework for developing individual professional development plans.

The McREL Professional Learning Community Checklist provides the opportunity for school staff to rate the school's professional learning community on four characteristics: Shared Sense of Purpose, Collaborative Activity and De-privatized Practice, Supportive Staff and Cooperation, and Shared Decision Making.

Dialogue is a vital factor in any genuine effort to evaluate school practices and policies. Real change will be sustained by a regular and honest exchange of ideas within a collaborative team.

Taking Action

The following information, guiding questions, and activities can help schools, districts, and communities to begin or further their work supporting adult learning communities.

Teacher-focused Professional Development

Teacher-focused professional development should support one or more of the following objectives (Ritchie, et al., 2009):

▸ To enhance or strengthen teacher/child (student) relationships: research concludes that when a child has a positive relationship with the teacher, the child is more likely to be successful in the classroom and have positive peer relationships.

▸ To improve relationships between school and home: research indicates that schools that view education as a partnership requiring a collaborative effort produce strong connections between home and school.

▸ To define and reinforce high academic expectations for all children: research shows that high expectations paired with positive emotional classroom and school climate are essential for students' success.

- To use research to guide practice.

- To use data to guide and monitor progress and change.

- To focus on intentional and balanced curriculum and instruction.

- To focus on instructional practices that have been most successful in helping all students achieve at high levels.

- To help teachers value and utilize multiple knowledge sources, including formative assessments, family input, and culturally responsive practices.

Types of Teacher Supports

In order to be meaningful, professional development opportunities should 1) be long-term and reinforced by mentoring or coaching; 2) prioritize time for teams of teachers to work together to plan lessons, review student work, and use data to inform curriculum practices.

Job-embedded Professional Development:

Job-embedded professional development opportunities occur during the course of the work day. Many of these opportunities may lead to college credit or licensure (continuing education credits or teacher induction programs). These opportunities may be offered in a variety of settings: within the school, district, county, or through the higher education system.

Action Research:

Children benefit from educators who know how to determine important questions and look for systematic ways to gather evidence that helps them make decisions about effective ways to meet the needs of the students in their classrooms. Key features include:

- Action research is practical and grounded in the day-to-day work of the teacher/researcher.

- The teacher/researcher is not removed from what is being studied, but rather is a part of it.

- The research is modest, manageable, and directly related to daily adult and student work.

- By using careful research procedures, teachers/researchers can resolve their own teaching challenges. They learn how to ask focused questions, define terms, collect relevant evidence, analyze data, and obtain meaningful results. The findings become immediately applicable to individual situations, even if the data suggest more exploratory research needs to be done or several possible options for action.

Ready Schools in Action: Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools: Teachers Engage in Collaborative Learning

Chapel Hill-Carrboro school district invited Dr. Sharon Ritchie to present her research data focusing on teacher behaviors towards boys (PreK-3rd grade) of color. After the presentation, the kindergarten teachers designed their own action research projects specifically targeting boys of color.

Study Groups:

Study groups work well for small groups of people who share an interest in a topic or issue. The group meets on a regular schedule and looks into the topic using books, articles, or research to add to their understanding.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):

DuFours (2002) defines a PLC as a "collaboration of teachers, administrators, parents, and students who work together to seek best practices, test them in the classroom, and continuously improve processes, and focuses on results." Their three "big ideas" include a focus on learning, collaboration, and results.

Mentoring:

Teacher mentoring programs are designed to pair more experienced teachers with novice teachers with the aim of reducing teacher turnover and increasing teacher effectiveness. Key features include:

> Mentoring should not be tied to supervision and evaluation. When it is, mentee teachers may be less likely to ask important questions or take risks.

> Ideally the mentor and mentee work at same grade level.

> Mentors should be selected because of their belief in supportive relationships, not because they believe that they can "fix" someone.

> Mentors themselves should receive quality training and support.

> Mentors should be paid, given release time, or be rewarded through status and recognition for their participation.

> Mentoring programs should receive administrative support, including adequate funding and allotted times for mentors and mentees to meet on a regular basis.

> This mentoring relationship should be publically acknowledged as an important aspect in the school.

Coaching:

Coaches provide one-on-one support, feedback, or assistance. Research has identified several benefits for those who are coached, including improved implementation of teaching strategies, increased sense of belonging, and a contribution to a positive school climate. There are three models of coaching (MLRN, n.d.):

1. Mirror coaching: The teacher requests that the coach observe a particular event in the classroom. The coach only observes that event and provides written feedback. Once the coach has submitted the feedback the coaching relationship is over.

2. Collaborative coaching: As with mirror coaching, the coach only observes the requested event but the feedback is discussed in person.

3. Expert coaching: The coach is considered a "master teacher." The coach's observations are not limited to teacher requests. The coach directs and guides the discussions during the post-conference.

PATHWAY EIGHT: ASSESSING PROGRESS AND ASSURING QUALITY

Ready Schools incorporate ongoing assessment and monitoring of quality as key components in their reform efforts. The school systematically uses both formal and informal assessments to plan and tailor instruction to address individual student needs, to improve classroom practices and instruction, and to improve outcomes for all children. The school develops a data-driven written improvement plan that includes strategies for maintaining its mission and goals over time and monitors progress toward them. Ensure that space, time, tools, and resources are purposely designed to support all school personnel's capacity to work effectively with children.

The journey begins with assessment literacy, which means understanding sound assessment principles, such as:

> Understanding different types of assessments, their purposes, and users;

> Choosing appropriate assessment methods for designated learning goals and age groups;

> Examining assessments for cultural and language relevance; and

> Using assessment to engage and motivate students.

🔑 Key Understandings

Assessing progress on school improvement efforts begins with high-quality goals for achievement and student outcomes in all domains of learning and development. Using a broad base of data or information to inform progress on those goals is essential. Some general principles frame this work:

➤ Schools and districts should align high-quality and comprehensive standards, curriculum, and assessments on a continuum from PreK through 3rd grade or beyond.

➤ All formal assessments should be valid and reliable, and meet high testing standards.

➤ Use assessments for the purpose for which they were intended. No one assessment can meet all educational purposes.

➤ More than one source of data/information should be used in making decisions about individual children.

➤ Data on assessments of children should not be reported without data on the programs that serve them.

➤ Schools and districts should work toward comprehensive data systems to inform their progress on high quality goals for all students. Data systems should include formative, benchmarking, and summative assessments.

  » Development of local benchmarking data for students' progress should be consistent across the school and the district.

  » Reports should highlight attributes of classroom quality, instructional practices, and teacher-child interactions that are most highly correlated with promoting children's learning and development.

Research shows that appropriately used assessments have great influence on teaching and learning. Information gleaned from them can motivate students and improve instruction when they are multi-faceted; involve immediate feedback; provide for self-reflection; show when students are successful; and indicate how improvements can be made.

Therefore, reliance on End-of-Grade or other summative tests, designed primarily for accountability purposes, cannot be the primary source for assessing ongoing progress during the school year.

Assessment and monitoring quality is integrally intertwined with the school improvement process that includes "Plan, Do, Study (or Check), Act." This model is the basis for the North Carolina School Improvement Guide.

Knowing where you are as a system is equally as important as knowing where students are in the education progress. We should hold high standards for students as well as high standards for our teachers, schools, and systems. Assessment in its broadest form should inform our practice and indicate how we can improve to ensure the success of students.
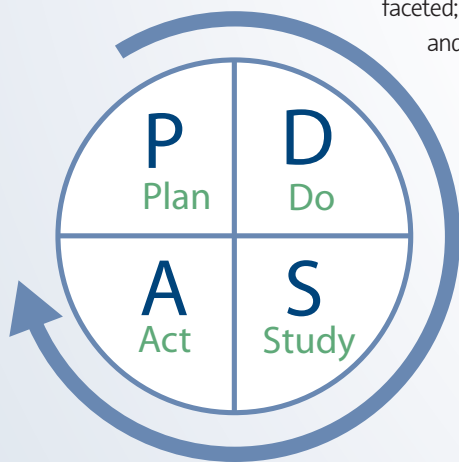
The Shewhart Cycle – The Deming Wheel
Graphic from saferpak.com/pdsa.htm

Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

In addition to the questions in the High/Scope Ready Schools Assessment, refered to in the Steps to Success for a School-Beased Team section, we encourage teams to explore additional questions to help evaluate how well your school addresses this pathway, including:

▸ Are we using an appropriate combination of formative (classroom and instruction embedded), benchmarking (periodic common assessments), and summative assessments to measure both student progress and instructional strategies and programs? Where do we need to improve?

▸ Are we using a broad base of data/information to help inform our status, progress, and attainment of goals? For example: parent surveys, attendance data, retention data, special education placement trends, discipline referrals, etc.?

▸ Do professional learning community teams analyze data to promote understanding of their teaching and their student's learning?

The NC Department of Public Instruction encourages use of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for all schools as part of its comprehensive School Improvement Process. This assessment links to the areas addressed by the High/Scope tool, but provides a broader focus than just PreK to 3rd grade. Combining the use of these two instruments will provide a comprehensive review for the Ready School.

Ready Schools in Action:
Iredell-Statesville Schools
Recognized for Data Driven Continuous Improvement Approach

The Iredell-Statesville School System (ISS) was the only educational organization in the United States to receive a visit from the Baldridge National Quality Program in 2008 — a comprehensive data driven, continuous improvement approach. They were recognized as among the top six percent of all Baldridge applicants nationally, including those from health care, business, and other areas.

ISS has moved from the bottom quartile in the state to the top quartile on most measures and is among the top 10 districts on selected indicators (attendance, writing achievement, academic growth, and energy efficiency). The Continuous Improvement Approach that ISS uses to guide efforts to raise achievement and close gaps is founded on 5 key questions:

1. What do students need to learn?
2. How will they learn it?
3. How will we know if they've learned it?
4. What will we do if they don't learn it?
5. What will we do if they already know it?

Taking Action

Conducting a Data Inventory

A data inventory provides a summary of data that are available in your school. It helps you review what data you have available, how it is used and organized, and how it might be used more effectively. Both "External Assessments" (those required beyond the individual school) and "Internal Assessments" (those created by and used specifically by the individual school) are important to include. *Data Wise: A Step-by Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning* (Boudett & Moody, 2008) provides a description of how to conduct an inventory using Clark Elementary, a K-8 School, as an example. Headers for the inventory are shown here for illustrative purposes (Figure I).

Figure I - Data Inventory

Clark K-8 School Data Inventory: External Assessment						
Data Source	Content Area	Date of Collection	Students (grades) Assessed	Accessibility (by whom)	Current Data Use	More Effective Use

Sources of external data identified by the Clark School team included (these will be specific to an individual school):

- State Skill Mastery Assessment,

- Observation Survey (Reading),

- Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA),

- Stanford 9,

- English Proficiency Assessments, and

- District Math Assessment.

The internal data inventory showed the following types of data available:

- Reading Checklists (Reading),

- Running Records (Reading),

- Writing Samples (Writing), and

- Unit Assessments (Math).

A data team — a small group of people who are responsible for the technical and organizational aspects of data work — can help with the potential barrier of time. The school might choose staff that are interested in this work, have the inclination or skills for it, and are willing to "dig" into the data.

Common Assessments and Other Data

Other student level data and information is also important. The school may develop common (benchmark) assessments within or across grades for various subject areas to better monitor student progress, intervene by groups of students, and determine which teachers are handling certain objectives best. Retention rates by grade level and type of student (and maybe even teacher) are important to know. More effective instructional strategies are key to reducing retention rates. Absenteeism, discipline data, numbers, and types of parent involvement, special education referrals and placements, and other pertinent data may be identified to help further school improvement work.

Displaying data to tell a clear story is important. Templates for each student, class, and grade level may be helpful. Disaggregating data by multiple groups is important to determine needs for diverse learners. While the state requires specific student categories for disaggregated state testing data, these may or may not be sufficient to fully understand student learning.

Conducting an Instructional Inventory as Part of Assessment

An inventory of instructional initiatives will help acknowledge what is already happening before moving on to new school improvement strategies. Initiatives are programs the school has put in place to meet a variety of needs. They may target special student groups or the whole school. They may or may not be used as intended or effectively (i.e., with fidelity). That is part of the discussion that can proceed once the inventory is complete. An example from Boudett, City, and Murnane (2008) is provided for illustrative purposes, showing the data for one instructional initiative (Figure II).

Figure II - Inventory of Instructional Initiatives

Franklin High School Inventory of Instructional Initiatives					
Name of Instructional Initiative	Intended to be Implemented by	Percent of the Relevant Teachers who are Implementing 1= all (100%) 2= Most (+75%) 3=some (25-75%) 4=few (-25%)	Among Implementing Faculty, Extent of Implementation 4=Completely 3=Mostly 2=Partially 1=Just Beginning	Evidence of Implementation	Other Evidence that Would be Helpful to Collect
Collaborative coaching and classroom visits	All Teachers	3	4	Conversations with instructional coaches	Survey of teachers; classroom visits

Elementary schools may find different types of programs or initiatives based on grade level, as well as individual school needs. Some state-level elementary school initiatives in North Carolina include: Response to Intervention, Positive Behavior Support, Power of K (Kindergarten), and professional learning communities, as well as specific curriculum and instructional programs.

APPENDIX A,
<u>RESOURCES FOR GETTING STARTED</u>

Websites

BUILD Initiative: Strong Foundations for Our Youngest Children.
www.buildinitiative.org
The BUILD Initiative supports State efforts to create comprehensive early childhood systems—coordinated, effective policies that address children's health, mental health and nutrition, early care and education, family support and parenting programs, and services for children with special needs.

First Five Years Fund.
http://www.ffyf.org/
First Five Years Fund, a project of the Ounce of Prevention Fund, is committed to improving the lives of at-risk children by leveraging cost-effective investments in early learning. They work to focus nationwide attention and resources on comprehensive, quality early care and learning programs for children from birth to age five.

FirstSchool: Uniting the Best of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Special Education.
http://firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/
FirstSchool is a PreK-3rd grade initiative to promote public school efforts to become more responsive to the needs of an increasingly younger, more diverse population of children entering school.   Our framework for school improvement addresses schools' ongoing struggles to produce equitable outcomes for African American, Latino and low-income students, the increased presence of pre-kindergartens within public schools, and the challenge of sustaining high instructional quality in every early childhood and elementary classroom.

Foundation for Child Development: PreK-3rd Education.
http://fcd-us.org/our-work/prek-3rd-education
Covers the "what" and "why" of PreK-3rd education as well as challenges, financing, implementation, leadership, and teacher professional development. Includes policy briefs other key resources.

The Heckman Equation.
http://www.heckmanequation.org/
Nobel Prize winning University of Chicago Economics Professor James Heckman provides resources to help understand the great gains to be had by investing in early and equal development of human potential.

New America Foundation: Early Education Initiative.
http://earlyed.newamerica.net/
The Early Education Initiative seeks to promote a high-quality and continuous system of early care and education for all children, birth to age 8. Much of the focus is on PreK-3rd grade. This website includes articles and op-eds, a blog, policy papers, transcripts and resources, current news, a discussion forum, and a listing of early ed events.

P-3 Early Learning and the Early Grades
http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/issueEL_new.html
An in-depth issue site by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) dedicated to topics relating to the learning and development of children from birth to age 8. This rich site includes numerous research reports and readings, overviews of what states are doing, and links to other relevant websites.

Pre-K Now.
http://www.preknow.org/index.cfm
Pre-K Now is a public education and advocacy campaign that advances high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds. This website features a resource center full of information including an advocacy toolkit, research, state profiles, history and facts of Pre-K, and many other resources (many available in Spanish).

PreK-3rd Data Resource Center.
http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/PREK3RD/publications_resources.jsp
This online resource center is designed to expand the knowledge base and provide tools for the access and handling of PreK-3rd grade longitudinal data. The Publications and Resources section contains documents covering topics such as effective programs, teacher education and quality, investment, and assessment and accountability.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
http://www.naeyc.org
NAEYC is the world's largest and most influential organization for those working with and on behalf of children from birth through age 8.

Articles & Reports

A Quiet Crisis: The Urgent Need to Build Early Childhood Systems And Quality Programs for Children Birth to Age Five. A Policy Statement of the Council of Chief State School Officers. Nov. 2009.
http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2009/Policy_Statement_A_Quiet_Crisis_2009.pdf
The evidence is now indisputable: we can save money, reduce school failure, and enhance children's lifelong success and productivity by improving learning opportunities for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Building a 21st-century learning system begins with a strong foundation of early childhood programs for all children.

Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade. Lisbeth B. Schorr & Vicky Marchand, June 2007.
http://www.cssp.org/publications/documents/pathways-to-outcomes
A publication of the Pathways Mapping Initiative from the Project on Effective Interventions at Harvard University. This PDF assembles findings from research, practice, theory, and policy about what it takes to improve the lives of children and families. It provides a starting point to guide choices made by community coalitions, services providers, researchers, funders, and policymakers to achieve desired outcomes for children and their families.

Videos

Fighting Fade-Out Through PreK-3rd Reform (Seven-minute video.) New America Foundation (2009).
http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/fighting-fade-out-through-prek-3rd-reform

Growing and Learning in Preschool (Five-minute video.) National Institute for Early Education Research (2008).
http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=65

PreKindergarten – 3rd Grade: A New Beginning for American Education (Eight-minute video.) New School Foundation & Foundation for Child Development (2010).
http://www.prek-3rd.org/index.html

Preschool: America's Best Investment (Seven-minute video.) National Institute for Early Education Research (2008).
http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=112

Resources Referred To In The Toolkit, Part 1
Getting Started Section

Comprehensive Needs Assessment.
http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schooltransformation/assessments/
This tool was developed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and assesses schools on multiple dimensions.

HighScope Ready Schools Assessment (RSA).
http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=118
http://www.readyschoolassessment.org/
This questionnaire and planning tool allows School-Based Teams to evaluate their school's "Readiness Rate" and provides them with clear, comprehensive information about school strengths and challenges. This tool features an online profiler and schools are able to input their scores from the assessment and analyze their growth potential or track changes over the years.

Partnership Self-Assessment Survey.
 http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/Family%20and%20Community%20Partnerships/Crisis%20Support/Community%20Support/ToolstoStrength.htm
This tool was created by the National Program Office of Free to Grow, Mailman School of Public Health, for Head Start to help determine a community's collaboration capacity.

School Professional Staff as a Learning Community (Hord, 1996).
http://moplc.org/Documents/Professional%20Staff%20as%20Learning%20Community%20Survey.pdf
This questionnaire provides school staff the opportunity to give their perceptions about their school's functioning as a learning community. This data can also be used by the Community-District Team to inform what needs to occur on a district-wide level.

APPENDIX B, RESOURCES FOR LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP

Websites

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).
http://www.naesp.org/transforming-early-childhood-education-pre-k-grade-3
The "Transforming Early Childhood Education, PreK to Grade 3" section of the NAESP website includes a report on Building and Supporting an Aligned PreK-3 System, a policy statement on Principal Professional Development in Early Childhood Education, and information for principals on Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
www.naeyc.org
NAEYC is the world's largest and most influential organization for those working with and on behalf of children from birth through age 8. NAEYC convenes thought leaders, teachers and other practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders and sets standards of excellence for programs and teachers in early childhood education. NAEYC members include teachers, paraeducators, center directors, trainers, college educators, families of young children, and the public at large.

School Improvement in Maryland.
http://www.mdk12.org/process/index.html
This detailed website includes sections on School Improvement Planning and A Principal's Role in Improving Student Achievement. Although the overall website is focused on Maryland, most of the advice is applicable to other states as well.

The Wallace Foundation: School Leadership.
http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/Pages/default.aspx
The School Leadership section of the Wallace Foundation's Knowledge Center features research, resources, and strategies. Specific topics include principal training, district policy and practice, effective principal leadership, and principal evaluation.

Articles & Reports

Leadership in Early Childhood Education: Six Standards and Strategies for Principals. Information Briefing, Iowa School Boards Foundation. June 2008. Vol. 2, No. 3.
http://www.schoolboardresearch.org/section/topics/early_childhood
This 4-page brief focuses on six standards that characterize leadership for early childhood learning and strategies to help attain them.

PreK-3rd: How Superintendents Lead Change. Geoff Marietta, Foundation for Child Development (September 2010).
http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/prek-3rd-how-superintendents-lead-change
Leading change to create an integrated PreK-3rd education and connect early learning programs with the K-12 system is not easy. Superintendents require courage to take the first step, persistence and political skills to encourage organizational and community engagement, and a relentless focus on results to measure progress and build momentum.

PreK-3rd: Principals as Crucial Instructional Leaders. Sara Mead, Foundation for Child Development (April 2011).
http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/prek-3rd-principals-crucial-instructional-leaders
This PreK-3rd Policy to Action brief specifies what principals can do to build high-quality PreK-3rd systems, and how policymakers can address barriers to support principals.

Principals Toolkit.
http://www.cayl.org/PrincipalToolkit2009
This toolkit covers 5 promising practices that any principal can use to support developmentally appropriate learning for young children. The five content areas are: vision, practice and pedagogy, supervision, family and community, and policy perspectives. The toolkit includes an interactive DVD, a workbook, and six rubrics.

Books

Goffin, S. G., & Washington, V. **Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education**. 2007. Teachers College Press.
http://www.naeyc.org/store/node/359
The authors examine the major issues and leadership challenges that must be addressed if children are to be given more and better opportunities. They show how adaptive leadership work can unify the field, create openness to new strategies for change, generate a shared vision, and build a viable strategy for its achievement. This is a critical resource for anyone hoping to enact change in the early childhood field.

Kostelnik, M. J. & Grady, M. L. **Getting It Right from the Start: The Principals Guide to Early Childhood Education.** 2009. Corwin and the National Association of Elementary School Principals.
http://www.corwin.com/books/Book230561/toc
This practical manual shows principals what successful ECE programs look like—and how to achieve quality results in their schools and communities. The authors provide an inside view of the field, touching on key areas of operation and discussing ways to avoid common pitfalls.

Neugebauer, R. & Neugebauer, B. **The Art of Leadership: Managing Early Childhood Organizations.** 1998. Exchange Press, Inc.
http://www.amazon.com/Art-Leadership-Managing-Childhood-Organizations/dp/0942702247
This practical, hands-on real-world guide includes 93 articles written by 63 recognized experts on child care administration as well as ideas from over 200 of our nation's most successful, professional directors. This is a must-have resource for effective management of early childhood programs.

Zmuda, A. **Transforming Schools: Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement.** 2004. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
http://www.amazon.com/Transforming-Schools-Creating-Continuous-Improvement/dp/0871208458
This book focuses on two main concepts, systems thinking and a focus on continuous improvement, that can transform staff development and create lasting improvements in teaching and learning. Each chapter is grounded in a set of operating principles that provide practical guidance to school leaders. Whether your school improvement goals are clearly defined or still in development, Transforming Schools will help you tackle the many challenges of the change process.

APPENDIX C, RESOURCES FOR TRANSITIONS

Websites

National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL).
http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/
Research at the NCEDL focuses on enhancing the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children from birth through age eight. The Center has conducted extensive research on the transition from early education to Kindergarten and has resources available on the topic.

National Early Childhood Transition Center (NECTC).
http://www.hdi.uky.edu/SF/NECTC/Home.aspx
The primary objective of NECTC is to investigate and validate practices and strategies that enhance the early childhood transition process and support positive school outcomes for young children with disabilities. This website features numerous publications and research reports as well as a web-based toolkit to assist in identification of specific practices and strategies.

Promoting Smooth Transitions to Kindergarten.
http://www.recognitionandresponse.org/content/view/22/108/
Includes a transition toolkit for early childhood educators as well as research and resources. Part of the Recognition and Response website developed by the National Center for Learning Disabilities.

The SEDL National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools.
http://www.sedl.org/connections/
Links people with research-based information to connect schools, families, and communities. Includes resources, webinars, annotated bibliography database, policy briefs, and handouts.

Terrific Transitions: Supporting Children's Transition to Kindergarten.
http://www.terrifictransitions.org/TT
A collaboration between SERVE Regional Educational Laboratory and the National Head Start Association. Includes an annotated bibliography with resources for transitions across five specific topics: Transition Overview, Program Design, Cross Program/Agency Activities, Families, Policies and Supports, and Evaluating the Process.

Articles & Reports

Bohan-Baker, M. & Little, P. M. **The Transition to Kindergarten: A Review of Current Research and Promising Practices to Involve Families.** April 2002. Harvard Family Research Project.
http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/the-transition-to-kindergarten-a-review-of-current-research-and-promising-practices-to-involve-families
A review of current research on the transition to kindergarten, focusing on promising transition practices and the role that schools might play in their implementation. This brief offers a synthesis of the findings, focusing on the important role that families play in transition to kindergarten.

Kindergarten Transition Resources: For Families, Community Members, Teachers, Caregivers, and Policymakers. 2006. Minnesota Department of Education.
http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/EarlyLearning/documents/Instruction/008965.pdf
Document from the Minnesota Department of Education outlining strategies and resources for all stakeholder groups.

Making the Move to Kindergarten: A Guide for Pre-K and Kindergarten Teachers in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. A publication of Building Bridges to Kindergarten, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools/Child Care Resources Inc. Partnership for Kindergarten Transition.
http://www.childcareresourcesinc.org/about/documents/MakingMove_Teacher.pdf
A 10-page booklet providing tips and information about preparing children and families for Kindergarten designed for both Pre-K and K teachers.

Malsch, A. M., Green, B. L., & Kothari, B. H. (2011). **Understanding Parents' Perspectives on the Transition to Kindergarten: What Early Childhood Settings and Schools Can Do for At-Risk Families.** Best Practice in Mental Health, 7(1), 47-66.
http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/pbBestPractices3.pdf

Ready Schools: Supporting Pre-K Transitions Using a Community Approach. 2008. The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc.
http://www.ncreadyschools.org/documents/Ready%20Schools%20transition%20document.pdf
This NC Ready Schools document provides a list of effective preK transition strategies that can be implemented to address the needs of the child, family, school, and community.

Transition Planning for 21st Century Schools. Public Schools of North Carolina.
http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum-instruction/home/transitions.pdf
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction published this transition planning guide to support NC districts, schools, and classrooms with the development and evaluation of a comprehensive and coordinated transition plan. This document offers a framework for school transitions that occur starting at pre-k and extending to high school and beyond

Videos

Ready, Set, Go! Your Go-To Guide to Kindergarten Transition.
http://www.readysetk.org/
The Ready, Set, Go program provides support at every stage of transition and is appropriate for families, caregivers, and teachers of young children birth through age five. It was collaboratively developed by Charlotte- Mecklenburg Schools, Child Care Resources Inc., and NC Department of Public Instruction. Presented in English and Spanish, the series includes 3 DVDs, a bonus music video, and a CD-ROM of resources to customize and print.

Books

Jacobs, G. & Crowley, K. **Reaching standards and Beyond in Kindergarten: Nurturing Children's Sense of Wonder and Joy in Learning.** 2010. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
http://www.corwin.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book231883
Covering the transition to kindergarten as well as the transition to first grade, this book shows how creative play activities can help children reach standards in literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and the arts. It also offers suggestions for promoting healthy physical and social-emotional development.

Kagan, S. L. & Tarrant, K. Eds. **Transitions for Young Children: Creating Connections Across Early Childhood Systems.**
2010. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.
http://www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/kagan-70830/index.htm
This book provides a comprehensive new framework for making transitions successful for young children and brings
together the best thinking on early childhood transitions from leading researchers and practitioners around the world. It
focuses on both vertical and horizontal transitions and can be used by a wide range of professionals including principals,
school-based administrators, program directors, district supervisors, and curriculum specialists.

Pianta, R. C., Cox, M. J., & Snow, K. L. **School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability.**
2007. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.
http://www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/pianta-68905/index.htm
The follow-up to Pianta & Cox's groundbreaking The Transition to Kindergarten, this book updates readers on what's
happened in early childhood education in the past seven years; clarifies influential changes in demographics, policies, and
practices; and describes promising early education programs and policies. More than 30 highly respected experts give
readers the latest information on the most important topics surrounding early childhood education and kindergarten
transition.

APPENDIX D, RESOURCES FOR RESPECTING DIVERSITY

Websites

Building Bridges: Respecting Diversity within our Community.
http://www.buildingbridges-asheville.org/
The mission of Building Bridges is to enable the Asheville, NC community to confront and overcome racism through a continuing process of changing attitudes and hearts through education, consciousness-raising, nurturing, and on-going support.

CAST: Transforming Education through Universal Design.
http://www.cast.org/index.html
CAST is an educational research & development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals, especially those with disabilities, through Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework for making curriculum more inclusive. On the website you can learn all about UDL including the latest research and development as well as professional development opportunities. The website also features a variety free multimedia learning tools and a library.

Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE).
http://www.cal.org/crede/
CREDE conducts research to develop effective educational practices for linguistic and cultural minority students, including those placed at risk by factors of race, poverty, and geographic location. The website features numerous publications including research and educational practice reports, research and practitioner briefs, multimedia resources, digests, directories, and a newsletter.

Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment.
http://www.adl.org/education/default_anti_bias.asp
This section of the Anti-Defamation League's website includes a checklist, tips and ideas, and a list of resources for creating anti-bias learning environments. It also provides documents on talking with students about diversity and bias and responding to prejudice in the classroom.

Critical Issue: Meeting the Diverse Needs of Young Children.
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/earlycld/ea400.htm
Offers key concepts for educators and families along with illustrative cases and national organizations for additional information.

Cultural Competence.
http://cecp.air.org/cultural/default.htm
This mini informational website from the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice discusses the whats and whys of cultural competence. It also takes a look at what others are doing and how cultural competence is integrated in education and much more.

Dimensions of Diversity: Online Diversity Resource Guide.
http://diversityeducation.cas.psu.edu/OnLineResources.html#Families
This guide provides information on diversity-related curriculum, guides, and papers for youth and adults.

DEC Recommended Practice: Parent Checklist for Special Needs.
http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Parent_Checklist/

EdChange.
http://www.edchange.org/
Professional development, research, and resources for diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural competence.

The Institute on Race & Poverty (IRP).
http://www.irpumn.org/
Investigates the ways that policies and practices disproportionately affect people of color and the disadvantaged.

INTIME ME: Multicultural Education.
http://www.intime.uni.edu/multiculture/index.htm
The mission of INTIME is to help educators improve student learning at all levels and in all content areas. This section of the website explores multicultural considerations in teacher preparation and education.

NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children).
http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSDIV98.PDF
NAEYC's position statement on Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Education.

National Association for Multicultural Education.
http://nameorg.org/
NAME is a non-profit organization that advances and advocates for equity and social justice through multicultural education.

National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC).
http://nccc.georgetown.edu/
The NCCC is a component of the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. It provides training, technical assistance, and consultation; and creates tools, resources, and other supports to promote and sustain cultural and linguistic competency. This website outlines NCCC's definition, conceptual framework, guiding values and principles of cultural competence. It also includes self-assessments, promising practices, distance learning opportunities, and links to other resources.

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC).
http://www.nectac.org
NECTAC is a program of the FPG Child Development Institute and is supported by the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. NECTAC works to support states, jurisdictions and others to improve services and results for young children with disabilities and their families. The site provides information and resources on early childhood policies, research, practices, legislation, and much more.

OSEP Ideas That Work, US Office of Special Education Programs.
http://osepideasthatwork.org/index.asp
The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is dedicated to improving results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities ages birth through 21. This web site is designed to provide easy access to information from research to practice initiatives funded by OSEP that address the provisions of IDEA and NCLB. This web site will include resources, links, and other important information that supports OSEP's research to practice efforts.

Teaching Diverse Learners.
http://www.alliance.brown.edu/tdl/
This website is dedicated to enhancing the capacity of teachers to work effectively and equitably with English language learners (ELLs). It provides access to information -- publications, educational materials, and the work of experts in the field -- that promotes high achievement for ELLs.

Teaching Tolerance: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center.
http://www.tolerance.org/
A place to find thought-provoking news, conversation, and support for those who care about diversity, equal opportunity, and respect for differences in schools and communities. This site includes professional development resources, kits, lessons and activities, and a magazine.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation.
http://ww2.wkkf.org/Pubs/CustomPubs/CPtoolkit/cptoolkit/Sec3-Including.htm
Provides information regarding diversity training, cultural competence, cultural celebrations, and issues of power.

Articles & Reports

Equity in Special Education Placement: A School Self- Assessment Guide for Culturally Responsive Practice.
http://www.spannj.org/pti/Equity_in_Special_Ed_Placement_Self_Assessment.pdf
This is a comprehensive measure for administrators and is similar to the HighScope Ready School Assessment with a particular focus on equity and culturally responsive practices.

Espinosa, L. M. **Challenging Common Myths About Young English Language Learners**. January 2008. FCD Advancing PreK-3rd Series No. 8.
http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/challenging-common-myths-about-young-english-language-learners
Challenges six commonly held beliefs about the development of young children who are learning English as their second language and presents research evidence drawing from a variety of disciplines that can better shape education policies for all children.

An Overview of Diversity Awareness. 2001. Pennsylvania State University.
http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/pdfs/ui362.pdf
This publication provides an overview of the concept of cultural diversity and can help you become more aware of the various dimensions of diversity as well as your own cultural identity, attitudes, perceptions, and feelings about various aspects of diversity.

Russakoff, Dale. **PreK-3rd: Raising the Educational Performance of English Language Learners (ELLs).** January 2011. PreK-3rd Policy to Action Brief: #6.
http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/prek-3rd-raising-educational-performance-english-language-learners-ells
This brief spotlights major issues facing those taking up this challenge and offers them emerging policy solutions. The primary focus will be on the 75 percent of ELLs who speak Spanish, and who are believed by scholars to be at high risk for school failure.

Books

Castro, D. C, Anyakoya, & B., Kasprzak, C. **The New Voices: Nuevas Voces Guide to Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Early Childhood.** 2010. Paul H Brookes Publishing.
http://www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/castro-70465/index.htm
As early childhood programs and schools become more culturally and linguistically diverse, professionals need to create settings that welcome new voices and help all children succeed. This comprehensive professional development course gives them the in-depth practical guidance they need.

Cartledge, G., Gardner, R., & Ford-Pearson, D. Y. **Diverse Learners with Exceptionalities: Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom**. 2008.
http://www.amazon.com/Diverse-Learners-Exceptionalities-Culturally-Responsive/dp/0131149954
This text focuses on the special needs of culturally and racially diverse learners with exceptionalities.

Jensen, E. **Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do about It.** 1999. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109074.aspx

Obiakor, F. E. **It Even Happens in "Good" Schools: Responding to Cultural Diversity in Today's Classrooms.** 2001. Corwin Press.
http://www.corwin.com/books/Book19555
This insightful work offers case studies, observations, and solutions to the challenges presented by cultural diversity.

Tools

Diversity Toolkit.
http://www.nea.org/diversitytoolkit/
This online toolkit from the National Education Association covers various aspects of diversity including class and income, English language learners, gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, and social justice. It offers basic information, a short list of strategies and tools, and suggestions for how to find out more.

APPENDIX E, RESOURCES FOR ENGAGING ENVIRONMENTS

Websites

National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAYCE).
http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/dap
Position paper and key messages on developmentally appropriate practice.

Natural Learning Initiative (NLI).
http://www.naturalearning.org/
NLI has compiled a wide variety of resources to promote the importance of the natural environment in the daily experience of all children.

New Horizons for Learning: Environments for Learning.
http://education.jhu.edu/newhorizons/strategies/topics/Environments%20for%20Learning/index.html
New Horizons for Learning is now part of the Johns Hopkins University School of Education. It remains a leading-edge resource for educational change by identifying, communicating, and helping to implement successful educational strategies. In this section of the website you will find articles by visionary architects and educational planners all about discovering and creating the best environments for learning.

The NC Children and Nature Coalition.
http://ncchildrenandnature.org/resources/for-educators/
Comprehensive resources for engaging children in outdoor classrooms.

Quality in Outdoor Environments for Child Care.
http://www.poemsnc.org/
Provides a link to the Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale.

UNC: FPG Child Development Institute.
http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/
Provides ECERS and SACERS instruments for evaluating early childhood environments as well as much more information.

The Whole Child: School Environments.
http://whatworks.wholechildeducation.org/featured-topics/school-environments/
This section of the Whole Child website from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) contains articles, podcasts, and real life examples covering topics such as shaping spaces to facilitate learning, designing a classroom for inclusive learning, and matching physical structures to learning and school culture.

Documents

Characteristics of a good learning environment for young children.
A checklist created by P. L. Snowden (2007).

Articles & Reports

FirstSchool Design Collaborative. **FirstSchool Design Guide: Optimal Learning Environments for Children Three to Eight.**
2008. FirstSchool, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
http://firstschool.us/design-guide
The purpose of the FirstSchool Design Guide is to help communities develop optimal indoor and outdoor learning
environments for children ages 3 to 8. The guide offers the rationale for the FirstSchool approach, the evidence base for
our principles, examples of how those principles can be expressed and supported in the physical environment, technical
considerations, and design specifications.

Supported Inclusion Tip Sheet: Creating a Positive Environment. 2008. City of Toronto and the Early Childhood Services
Team: Community Living Toronto.
http://www.ccdh.org/vendorimages/ccdh2008/ccdh/creating-Positive-environment.pdf
Developed by the, this tip sheet shows how thoughtful arrangement of the indoor and outdoor environments can support
and include all children.

Books

Ritchie, S. & Willer, B. **Physical Environment: A Guide to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standard and Related Accredi-
tation Criteria**. 2008. NAEYC.
http://www.naeyc.org/store/node/402
This resource is a self-study guide for programs seeking accreditation from the National Association for the Education of
Young Children. It focuses on NAEYC's "Physical Environment" program standard and can be used by anyone to ensure that
a program's physical elements are sending the right messages.

Isbell, R., & B. Exelby. **Early Learning Environments that Work**. 2001. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House.
http://www.amazon.com/Early-Learning-Environments-That-Work/dp/0876592566
The authors of this book explore how to manipulate furniture, color, materials, storage, lighting, and more to encourage
learning through classroom arrangement. The authors provide detailed illustrations and photographs to help you set up or
arrange what you already have in the classroom.

Tools

Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC).
http://store.tcpress.com/0807740616.shtml
This rating scale is designed to evaluate the use of developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten through third grade
classrooms, in terms of physical environment, social context, and instructional context. It can be used in classrooms serving
both children with and without disabilities.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).
http://www.teachstone.org/about-the-class/
CLASS is an observational tool for assessing classroom quality based on teacher-child interactions in PreK through third
grade. Three important domains of interaction are examined: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional
support. The system can be used for professional development, planning, evaluation, and research.

Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale (POEMS).
http://www.poemsnc.org/
This measure was designed to help teachers/caregivers and administrators learn more about creating higher quality
environments for children's outdoor play and learning. It is a tool to assess the quality of outdoor environments for children
three to five years old and a self-study resource for planning new construction or for improving existing space.

APPENDIX F, RESOURCES FOR EFFECTIVE CURRICULA, INSTRUCTION, AND CHILD ASSESSMENT

Websites

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).
http://casel.org/
CASEL is a not-for-profit organization that works to advance the science and evidence-based practice of social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL is a process for helping children and even adults develop the fundamental skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work, effectively. This website offers a wealth of information about SEL, why it is important, school programs, tools for families and research, as well as public policy and advocacy resources.

Creative Curriculum.
http://www.teachingstrategies.com/page/ccs_overview.cfm
Teaching Strategies provides curriculum, assessment, and professional development resources for early childhood professionals, families, and communities. Site includes alignment of this curriculum and assessment tools with the North Carolina Foundations.

Curriculum Mapping 101.
http://curriculummapping101.com/
The curriculum mapping model based on Dr. Heidi Hayes Jacobs's work clearly addresses the necessity to synthesize various models and create a framework that focuses on the recommendations, requisites, and desires that affect students' learning and teaching environments. This website is loaded with information and resources on this topic.

Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies for Guiding Their Success.
http://www.ncprek.nc.gov/Foundations/index.asp
These early learning standards are expectations for preschooler success from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Office of Early Learning. This website also includes Foundations' alignment with the Common Core, an effective practices brief, a toolbox of training resources, and more.

High Scope.
http://www.highscope.org/
High Scope Educational Research Foundation develops research-validated curriculum and assessments for preschoolers, infants, and toddlers and conducts research. Site includes alignment of the North Carolina Foundations with High Scope's Key Developmental Indicators.

National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAYCE).

1. Position statements on Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation including documents specific to English language learners and children with disabilities
   http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape

2. Position paper and key messages on Developmentally Appropriate Practice
   http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/KeyMessages.pdf

New Horizons for Learning: Teaching and Learning Strategies.
http://education.jhu.edu/newhorizons/strategies/index.html
Part of the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, New Horizons for Learning is leading-edge resource for educational change. In this section of the website you will find information on some of the best researched and the most widely implemented methods of helping all students to learn more successfully. The information includes a description of how the teaching and learning strategies work, where they have been applied, results, and where to find further information from experts in the field, books, websites, and other resources.

North Carolina Standard Course of Study K-12. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.
http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/
The Standard Course of Study includes the curriculum that should be made available to every child in North Carolina's public schools. It is part of the Department of Public Education's continual improvement efforts. The curriculum will be revised on a regular basis to remain consistent with the changing needs of our nation, state, and local communities.

What Works Clearinghouse- Early Childhood.
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/topicarea.aspx?tid=13
The WWC publishes intervention reports that evaluate research on early childhood education curricula and instructional strategies for 3- to- 5-year-old children.

Articles & Reports

Bogard, K. & Takanishi, R. **PK-3: An Aligned and Coordinated Approach to Education for Children 3 to 8 Years Old.** 2005. Vol. XIX, No. III.SRCD Social Policy Report.
http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/PREK3RD/resources/463961.jsp
This report summarizes the research basis for the PreK-3rd approach and the developmental basis for PreK-3rd. It reviews the findings regarding the timing and dosage of early educational experiences, program quality, and teacher preparation and compensation.

Howard, M. **The Progress of Education Reform: Early Care and Education – Aligning the Early Years and the Early Grades.**
February 2008. Education Commission of the States.
http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/77/68/7768.pdf
This issue of The Progress of Education Reform addresses the policies and practices associated with sustaining school readiness and boosting achievement for young children throughout the early elementary years. It outlines the disconnect between systems of early care and education and K-12 and offers solutions for aligning early years and early grades policies.

Klein, L. G., & Kenitzer, J. (2006). **Effective Preschool Curricula and Teaching Strategies.** Pathways to Early School Success. Issue Brief No. 2.
http://nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_668.pdf
This report from the National Center for Children in Poverty explores lessons from research and practice about the role of an intentional curriculum and professional development and supports for teachers in closing the achievement gap for low-income preschool age children.

North Carolina Guide for the Early Years. 2nd Edition, 2009. North Carolina Public Schools.
http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/primaryk3/guide4early-years.pdf
The NC Guide for the Early Years is designed to be a major resource for early learning professionals, combining the latest research about how preschool and Kindergarten children learn with time-tested strategies and essential teaching tools.

Promoting Positive Outcomes for Children with Disabilities: Recommendations for Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation. 2007. Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC).
http://www.dec-sped.org/About_DEC/Position_Statements_and_Concept_Papers/Promoting_Positive_Outcomes
This document is organized into three major sections that parallel and are consistent with the organization of the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement (2003): Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation. Each section begins with a key recommendation, followed by the rationale for the recommendation, key issues for children with disabilities, specific indicators of effectiveness, and frequently asked questions.

Sadowski, M. **Core Knowledge for PK-3 Teaching: Ten Components of Effective Instruction.** 2006. The Foundation for Child Development
http://fcd-us.org/resources/core-knowledge-pk-3-teaching-ten-components-effective-instruction
This report outlines the ten areas of core knowledge for teachers working in classrooms with students from Pre-K through Third Grade.

Starting Strong Curricula and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education and Care. 2004. OECD.
http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/23/36/31672150.pdf
Description of five curricula across the globe including: Experiential Education, The High/Scope® Curriculum, The Reggio Emilia Approach, TeWhāriki, and The Swedish curriculum.

Books

Cook, R., Klein, M., & Tessier, A. **Adapting Early Childhood Curricula for Children InInclusive Settings**, 6th edition. 2003. Prentice Hall.
http://www.amazon.com/Adapting-Childhood-Curricula-Children-Inclusive/dp/0131124889
This book is organized around four themes: how all young children learn, children in the context of their family, traditional developmental domains, and the need to take a synthesized view of the "whole" child. Dozens of developmentally-appropriate, activity-based strategies for adapting curriculum to suit both children and their families are provided in every chapter.

Copple, C. & Bredekamp, S., eds. **Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8. Revised** 3rd edition, 2009. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
http://www.naeyc.org/store/node/162
Now fully revised and expanded, the bestselling 2009 version comes with a supplementary CD containing readings on key topics, plus video examples showing developmentally appropriate practice in action. Chapters describe children from birth through age 8 in detail, with extensive examples of appropriate practice for infant/toddler, preschool, kindergarten, and primary levels

Howes, C., & Pianta, R. C., eds. **Foundations for Teaching Excellence: Connecting Early Childhood Quality Rating, Professional Development, and Competency Systems in States**. 2011. Brookes Publishing Company.
http://www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/howes-71226/index.htm
This book is the first effort to integrate at a state level three critical components of teacher quality: Early Childhood Education Competencies, Professional Development, and Quality Rating Systems. This is the book decision-makers and administrators need to begin developing coordinated, effective teacher quality systems—ones that not only get teachers ready for the classroom, but also promote continuous learning of new skills and strategies.

Marzano, R. J. **The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction**. 2007. ASCD.
http://shop.ascd.org/Default.aspx?TabID=55&ProductId=790
In The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction, author Robert J. Marzano presents a model for ensuring quality teaching that balances the necessity of research-based data with the equally vital need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Filled with charts, rubrics, and organizers, this methodical, user-friendly guide will help teachers examine and develop their knowledge and skills, so they can achieve that dynamic fusion of art and science that results in exceptional teaching and outstanding student achievement.

McLachlan, C., Fleer, M., & Edwards, S. **Early Childhood Curriculum: Planning, Assessment, and Implementation.** 2010. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
http://www.amazon.com/Early-Childhood-Curriculum-Assessment-Implementation/dp/0521759110
This book addresses current approaches to curriculum for infants, toddlers, and young children. It provides a comprehensive introduction to the curriculum issues that student teachers and emerging practitioners will face and equips them with the decision-making tools that will ultimately enhance and promote young children's learning.

Stronge, J. H. **Qualities of Effective Teachers.** 2nd Edition, 2007. ASCD.
http://shop.ascd.org/ProductDetail.aspx?ProductId=699
Educators involved with teacher professional development can use this book to focus on cultivating teacher qualities that are most apt to raise student achievement. The 2nd edition extends this results-based approach to include teachers who work with at-risk and high-ability students.

Tools

Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC).
http://store.tcpress.com/0807740616.shtml
This rating scale is designed to evaluate the use of developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten through third grade classrooms, in terms of physical environment, social context, and instructional context. It can be used in classrooms serving both children with and without disabilities.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).
http://www.teachstone.org/about-the-class/
CLASS is an observational tool for assessing classroom quality based on teacher-child interactions in PreK through third grade. Three important domains of interaction are examined: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. The system can be used for professional development, planning, evaluation, and research.

Self-Assessment and Planning Tool for Curriculum and Assessment.
http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/ecprofessional/CAPE%20Self-Assessment%20&%20Planning%20Tool.pdf
Part of NAEYC's resources for Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth Through Age 8, this self-assessment and planning tool can be used for evaluating any curriculum and assessment system and helps users identify specific areas in need of improvement.

APPENDIX G, RESOURCES FOR TEACHER SUPPORTS AND ADULT LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Websites

Child Care WAGE$®.
http://www.childcareservices.org/ps/wage.html
The Child Care WAGE$® Project provides education-based salary supplements to low-paid teachers, directors, and family child care providers working with children between the ages of birth–5.

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).
http://www.ccsso.org
CCSSO is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization that provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. CCSSO works in four strategic areas: Educator Workforce; Information Systems and Research; Next Generation Learners; and Standards, Assessment, and Accountability. Resources on this site include a publication about Model Core Teaching Standards, a white paper on a High-Quality Educator Development System, and research results about the Effects of Teacher Professional Development on Student Achievement.

Education Northwest: Creating Strong Schools & Communities.
http://educationnorthwest.org/
Formerly the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Education Northwest conducts more than 200 projects annually, working with schools, districts, and communities across the country on comprehensive, research-based solutions to the challenges they face. The website's extensive resource section includes much on training and technical assistance as well as research, evaluation, and assessment.

Edutopia: Teacher Development.
http://www.edutopia.org/teacher-development
Edutopia.org, an initiative of the George Lucas Educational Foundation, contains a deep archive of continually updated best practices, from classroom tips to recommendations for district-wide change.

Learning Forward.
http://www.learningforward.org/index.cfm
Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council) is an international membership association of learning educators focused on increasing student achievement through more effective professional learning. The website features the newly revised 2011 Standards for Professional Learning, a blog, newsletters, e-learning, and tons of information and resources on all aspects of professional learning.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Training Opportunities.
http://www.naeyc.org/ecp/trainings
NAEYC is dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8. Follow this link to find training opportunities for early childhood professionals.

The North Carolina Association for the Education of Young Children (NCaeyc).
http://www.ncaeyc.org/profdev/profdev.html
NCaeyc is the state affiliate of NAEYC. This site lists professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals.

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center).
http://www.tqsource.org/
The TQ Center was created to serve as the premier national resource to which the regional comprehensive centers, states, and other education stakeholders turn for strengthening the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools—and for finding guidance in addressing specific needs, thereby ensuring highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Professional Learning Communities.
http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/profdev/resources/proflearn/
Provides detailed definitions, specific steps, and resources for implementing professional learning communities (PLCs), or adult learning communities (ALCs), as they are called in the Ready Schools Toolkit.

North Carolina Institute for Child Development Professionals.
http://ncicdp.org/
Promotes the implementation of a comprehensive professional development and recognition system that links education and compensation for child development professionals to ensure high quality care and education services for children and families. Includes a library of professional development resources.

NC Professional Development Guidelines and Standards.
http://www.ncpublicschools.org/profdev/standards/
This section of the Public Schools of North Carolina website includes a Professional Development Rubric, Guidelines for Professional Development in NC, NC Standards for Professional Development, a Professional Development Tool Kit, and a Standards Tutorial. You can also find plenty of professional development resources, a repository, conferences and summer institutes, a directory, and online courses.

PBS TeacherLine.
http://pbs.org/teacherline
Professional development for PreK-12 educators. A service of PBS Teachers.

Transforming Early Childhood Education, Pre-K to Grade 3.
http://www.naesp.org/transforming-early-childhood-education-pre-k-grade-3
This section of the National Association of Elementary School Principals' (NAESP) website includes information on important NAESP task force reports, policy statements, and related publications such as Building and Supporting an Aligned System: A Vision for Transforming Education Across the Pre-K-Grade Three Years and Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do.

Articles & Reports

Bogard, K., Traylor, F., Takanishi, R. **Teacher Education and PK Outcomes: Are We Asking the Right Questions?** September 2007. Foundation for Child Development.
http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/PREK3RD/resources/522248.jsp
This commentary by FCD staff, published in Early Childhood Research Quarterly, challenges recent research that finds no relationship between PreK-3rd teacher qualifications (degree, major, or certification) and child outcomes.

Croft, A., Coggshall, J. G, et. al. **Job-Embedded Professional Development: What It Is, Who Is Responsible, and How to Get It Done.** Issue Brief. April 2010. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center, and the National Staff Development Council.
http://www.tqsource.org/publicatio ns/JEPD%20Issue%20Brief.pdf
Job-embedded professional development refers to teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning.

Catapano, S., Huisman, S. & Song, K. **Are We There Yet? Perspectives from Partners in a Community of Practice.** Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts. March 2008, p. 2-20. http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/spil/publications_ijlsc.html
This article has a complete discussion of the theory, development, and implementation of communities of practice.

An Emerging Overview of NC's Approach to Professional Development for Early Care and Education and School Age Professionals. July 2010. North Carolina Institute for Child Development Professionals. http://www.ncicdp.org/documents/An%20Emerging%20Overview%20July%202010.pdf
This document was developed to inform the work of state, local, and regional partners as they work respectively and collectively to improve the quality of early care and education and school age care professionals.

Shore, R. PreK-3rd: **Teacher Quality Matters.** July 1, 2009. FCD Policy to Action Brief Series No. 3. http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/prek-3rd-teacher-quality-matters
Describes 1) Why effective teaching matters for student outcomes; 2) How schools can organize to sustain effective teaching in every classroom; and 3) What high-quality instruction looks like in PreK-3rd classrooms

Books

Carr, J. F.,Harris, D. E., & Herman, N. **Creating Dynamic Schools Through Mentoring, Coaching, and Collaboration.** 2005. ASCD. http://shop.ascd.org/ProductDetail.aspx?ProductId=381
Create a school environment that ensures improvement ideas are more likely to succeed by using the guidelines and strategies from this book. After the authors present the foundational principles of group decision-making in a collaborative school, they explain the functions that are key to a dynamic school that embraces change and improvement. Learn how these functions come together to form a learning community that is committed to a continuous improvement cycle.

Easton, L. B. **Protocols for Professional Learning.** The Professional Learning Community Series. 2009. ASCD. http://shop.ascd.org/ProductDetail.aspx?ProductId=1073
Once you understand the rationale for a Professional Learning Community and know the steps to setting one up, you still need some really good plans for how to use your PLC to explore topics and solve problems. That's where this handy guide comes in with 16 different protocols for facilitating PLC conversations and activities.

Hall, P. A. & Simeral, A. **Building Teachers' Capacity for Success: A Collaborative Approach for Coaches and School Leaders.** 2008. ASCD. http://shop.ascd.org/ProductDetail.aspx?ProductId=1030
Emphasizing just three things—identifying teachers' strengths, maximizing their potential, and building their capacity— this book lays out a clear and practical pathway toward higher student achievement. Front-line advice from a principal and an instructional coach helps you increase your faculty's instructional effectiveness by implementing the principles of strength-based school improvement.

Hord, S. M. & Sommers, W. A. **Leading Professional Learning Communities: Voices from Research and Practice.** 2007. Corwin Press. http://www.amazon.com/Leading-Professional-Learning-Communities-Research/dp/1412944775
This research-based, step-by-step guide shows principals how to build leadership capacity, embed professional development, create a positive school culture, develop accountability, and increase student achievement. It also discusses the constant focus needed on student and teacher learning and the commitment and courage necessary to lead a PLC.

Semadeni, J. **Taking Charge of Professional Development: A Practical Model for Your School.** 2009. ASCD.
http://shop.ascd.org/ProductDetail.aspx?ProductId=1070
Overcome budget cuts, lack of leadership, top-down mandates, and other obstacles to professional development by using this book's take-charge approach.... guides you through a systemic method to professional development..... Learn how to combine three key elements—time, a motivational system, and teacher leadership—to generate a high-energy schoolwide improvement effort.

Stronge, J. H. **Qualities of Effective Teachers.** 2nd Edition, 2007. ASCD.
http://shop.ascd.org/ProductDetail.aspx?ProductId=699
Educators involved with teacher professional development can use this book to focus on cultivating teacher qualities that are most apt to raise student achievement. The 2nd edition extends this results-based approach to include teachers who work with at-risk and high-ability students.

Tools

Early Childhood Professional Development Systems Toolkit, with a Focus on School-Age Professional Development. July 2009. National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC).
http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/pd_toolkit/index.html
This toolkit provides a compilation of early childhood professional development resources and is intended to serve as a practical guide. It includes definitions, overviews, State stories, selected resources, State examples, and planning tools. Available free online.

Lauer, P. A., Dean, C. B., Martin-Glenn, M. L., & Asensio, M. L. **Teacher Quality Toolkit**. 2nd Edition, 2005. Aurora, CO: McREL
http://www.mcrel.org/topics/TeacherPreparation/products/225/
The Teacher Quality Toolkit 2nd Edition incorporates McREL's (Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory) accumulated knowledge and experience related to teacher quality and standards-based education to support the continuum of teacher learning by providing tools and resources to improve both pre-service and in-service teacher education. Each chapter in this toolkit provides self-assessment tools that can guide progress toward improved teacher quality and describes resources for designing exemplary programs and practices. Available for free download.

APPENDIX H RESOURCES FOR ASSESSING PROGRESS AND ASSURING QUALITY

Websites

Ensuring Quality in Head Start: The FACES (Family and Children Experiences Survey) Study.
http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/performance-measurement/ensuring-quality-in-head-start-the-faces-study
Head Start has developed an outcome-oriented accountability system, which combines scientific research with program-level reporting and monitoring, and is based on a consensus-driven set of criteria for program accountability.

Evaluation Publications and Resources.
http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/publications-resources
Part of the Harvard Family Research Project website, this section provides links to publications and resources covering topics such as Evaluation Methodology & Design, Evaluating Family Involvement, Evaluating Early Care and Education, and Results–Based Accountability.

National Network for Collaboration.
http://crs.uvm.edu/nnco/
This website provides information, activities, and links related to collaboration including: change process, identifying goals, assessing progress, communication skills, and community capacity building.

Program Development and Evaluation.
http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/
This website from the University of Wisconsin-Extension provides detailed information on a program development model that includes situational analysis, priority setting, program action, the logical model, and evaluation.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Technical Assistance & Quality Assurance Center.
http://www.childcareservices.org/ps/teach_ta_qac.html
This website addresses assuring quality. It provides built-in support and accountability for safeguarding your early childhood professional development investments.

The Urban Child Institute.
http://www.theurbanchildinstitute.org/articles/research-to-policy/research/ensuring-quality-in-pre-k-classrooms-improves-outcomes-for-kids
This website provides key initiatives, resources, and articles for ensuring quality in PreK as it relates to improved outcomes for children.

Articles & Reports

Schultz, Tom. Tackling PK-3 **Assessment & Accountability Challenges: Guidance from the National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force**. July 2008. The State Education Standard.
http://nasbe.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=159:additional-resources&catid=90:ecen-project-resources

Books

Boudett, K. P., City, E. A., & Murnane, R. J. **Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning.** 2005. Harvard Education Press.
http://www.amazon.com/Data-Wise-Step-Step-Assessment/dp/1891792679
This book presents a clear and carefully tested blueprint for school leaders. It shows how examining test scores and other classroom data can become a catalyst for important schoolwide conversations that will enhance schools' ability to capture teachers' knowledge, foster collaboration, identify obstacles to change, and enhance school culture and climate.

Frey, N. E. & Fisher, D. B. **The Formative Assessment Action Plan: Practical Steps to More Successful Teaching and Learning.** 2011. ASCD.
http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/111013.aspx
Two of ASCD's most popular authors, Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher, reveal how to create a failsafe assessment system that covers all three essentials: 1) Ensure students understand the purpose of the assignment, task, or lesson, including how they will be assessed; 2) Provide students with information about their successes and needs; and 3) Capture the performance data that teachers need to guide student learning.

Snow, C. E. & Van Hemel, S. B., eds. **Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How.** 2008. National Academies Press.
http://www.amazon.com/Early-Childhood-Assessment-Why-What/dp/0309124654
Well-planned and effective assessment can inform teaching and program improvement, and contribute to better outcomes for children. The value of assessments requires fundamental attention to their purpose and the design of the larger systems in which they are used. Early Childhood Assessment addresses these issues by identifying the important outcomes for children from birth to age 5 and the quality and purposes of different techniques and instruments for developmental assessments.

Tools

NCDPI Comprehensive Needs Assessment.
http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schooltransformation/assessments/
Within the District and School Transformation section of the Public Schools of North Carolina website, this sub-section provides information and resources for needs assessment. The Comprehensive Needs Assessment provides a framework which provides schools and districts with a clear view of their strengths, areas for improvement, challenges, and successes. It enables a systematic review of practices, processes, and systems and serves as the corner stone of continuous improvement.