



The Early Childhood and Community Schools Linkage Project: A Framework for Action

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*“Childhood is a multi-stage process where early investments feed into later investments.
Skill begets skill; learning begets learning.”ⁱ*

Overview

The Early Childhood and Community School Linkages Project, created by The Coalition for Community Schools seeks to connect existing early childhood systems to community schools in three different locales. The Project reflects current research that shows a positive relationship between school readiness and student success—particularly when curricula, services, and expectations are well aligned from early childhood into elementary school. It is our hope that as an early education researcher suggests, “We create aligned institutions so children will experience their transitions with greater ease and facility.”ⁱⁱ

The Coalition’s goal is to show community schools as effective vehicles to promote access to and continuity of high quality curriculum, pedagogy, and expectations across early childhood programs and into the grades. Building on well-developed local capacity, Linkage Project sites will foster improved local, district and state level policies and practices.

Site work will be guided by intentional efforts to move toward broad, long-term results including: 1) improved outcomes for children and families; 2) a sustainable system of 0-8 education and supports; and 3) state level policies and funding mechanisms to ensure statewide linkage across early childhood and community school systems.

This framework outlines the Project and is intended to guide planning and implementation for participating sites. It clarifies project goals and the long-term results that will guide the work; makes the research case for system-wide connections in practice and policy between early childhood programs and community schools; and describes the components of a change strategy to help sites work toward Project goals. Appendices provide additional guidance on developing a results-based action plan and a set of tools to help sites make

choices on how best to move toward long-range results. Because needs and resources differ widely, it is expected that sites will draw on local knowledge and partnerships to develop a range of action plans.

The Challenge

State and local efforts have traditionally considered school readiness and academic achievement as separate and distinct problems. While many communities provide a range of early childhood services including child care, early learning programs, and family support, these services are rarely connected by funding, accountability or standards to the K-12 curriculum. This is true even in states committed to increasing and improving early childhood services. In addition, many children receive no early childhood education or services at all. As a result, up to one-third of the four million children who start school each year are unprepared for academic work.ⁱⁱⁱ Instead of experiencing joy in learning new things, many struggle daily to catch up. Some never do. Lack of school readiness can place entire schools at risk. By the end of the decade some 5,000 American schools will qualify as chronic failures—where current remedies are not working and children are paying the price.^{iv}

Current research confirms that it makes little sense to wait until children are six or seven to involve them and their families in environments that actively support and encourage the child’s whole development—social, emotional, physical, and cognitive. Efforts like the W.K. Kellogg’s Spark Initiative and Harvard University’s Pathway Mapping Project have called national attention to the connection between school readiness and achievement. Both are actively encouraging coordinated state and community efforts to address both issues simultaneously.

Community schools are uniquely positioned to advance this work and many already provide access to a range of early childhood services including family support, child care, and early learning programs. By deepening their connections and relationships with existing early childhood systems, community schools can sustain gains made in early childhood, expand learning environments connected to achievement in the middle grades, and foster a smooth transition to high school and postsecondary success.

Through the Linkages Project, selected community school sites will begin to develop a continuum of learning from 0 to graduation and beyond.

Project Goals

The Linkage Project envisions a deliberate integration of policy and practice at the local, district, and state level. It is designed to improve the **quality and continuity of practice** across early childhood programs and community schools; increase the **scale** of those efforts; and promote their **sustainability**.

The Coalition has identified three local jurisdictions with a mature core of community schools to meet this challenge and take advantage of the opportunity for growth and knowledge development it offers. During a 36-month funding period, these sites will **work toward** achieving:

1. A sustainable, collaborative relationship among early childhood and community school partners at the local and state level;
2. Agreement among partners on project goals and long range results;
3. Implementation of an agreed upon strategic plan to achieve goals and move toward long-term results;
4. State policy that supports early childhood and community school linkages; and
5. Replication and scale up of efforts through shared 'lessons learned' locally and with other districts, communities, tribes where applicable, and statewide.

Long Range Results

Through this work, the Coalition intends to demonstrate that community schools offer a flexible and efficient vehicle for moving

What is a Community School?

A community school is a place and a set of partnerships between the school and community resources. The community school strategy integrates academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and civic engagement to improve student learning and to develop stronger families and healthier communities.

Community schools are centers of the community—open to everyone—all day, every day, evenings, and weekends. Families, local government, higher education institutions, businesses, community-based organizations, and local citizens are all involved.

communities toward long-term, positive results at three levels: Child and Family; School and Community; and State Policy.

The ongoing results envisioned are expected to be used by Project sites to focus and direct their work. Specifically these results call for:

- ❖ All children entering school ready to learn, continuing their positive development, and succeeding academically by 3rd grade. (*Child and Family Level*)
- ❖ A results-driven, sustainable system at the local level that provides continuous high quality services and learning experiences for children and families from birth through the grades. (*School and Community Level*)
- ❖ Supportive state policies and funding mechanisms that ensure the sustainability of linkages between early childhood systems and community schools statewide. (*State Policy Level*)

The Coalition for Community Schools (CCS) Project Team and technical assistance providers will help Project sites address results-based goals within the framework. In the back of the framework are worksheets for helping sites move toward linkage.

Coalition Goals

The Coalition for Community Schools is an alliance of national, state and local organizations working to promote long-term, positive results for children, families, schools and communities. Its mission is to develop strong and sustainable networks of community schools by sharing

information, building understanding and support, informing public and private sector policies, and developing sustainable sources of support.

The Coalition's goals for this Project are to:

1. Develop example sites that demonstrate successful and sustainable early childhood linkages to community schools;
2. Promote communication and efforts to develop supportive district and state policy;
3. Contribute to the knowledge base through "lessons learned" about building integrated systems for supporting the academic and non-academic development of children, youth, and families; and
4. Demonstrate that community schools offer a flexible and efficient vehicle for moving communities toward long-term, positive results for children, families, schools and communities.

Rationale

Current research and policy initiatives confirm that coordinating high quality programming and policy support from early childhood through the elementary grades offers a direct pathway to school improvement. This section notes significant findings and recommendations in both areas and summarizes community school readiness to move toward more effective alignment of services, supports, and learning from early childhood into the grades.

School Improvement: Systemic Change Needed

Since the release of *A Nation at Risk (1983)*, a report on the state of the nation's schools, districts and states have been working to stem what the National Commission on Excellence in Education described as a "rising tide of mediocrity." Since then, along with some school reform successes, has come recognition of a widening gap in achievement between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a federally mandated system of standards, testing, and accountability was enacted to address this disparity based on race and class. While not without serious limitations, test results in some districts have shown that schools can do better and students can succeed.^v

NCLB has successfully focused national attention on underperforming schools, but its restructuring efforts fall short of a sustainable solution. The Reading First Program, for example, was created under the Act to help states and districts introduce research-based reading programs and provide related professional development and assessments to ensure that all students read at or above grade level by the end of third grade. Interim evaluation after two years showed that, while instructional time improved, on average, students' reading comprehension did not.^{vi} After years of implementation, we now know that the nation's most troubled schools require more than a hyper-focus on standards and piecemeal improvements.^{vii}

According to the Turnaround Challenge, an initiative funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates

Foundation, comprehensive cultural and systemic change—not tinkering at the edges—is what's needed. Specifically, state requirements and financial support is needed to help districts fundamentally change the **conditions** under which schools teach and students learn; improve the **capacity** of school staff to create change through relationships with community partners; and organize **clusters** of schools within and across districts working with a lead partner to transform their schools.

School Readiness: Part of the Solution

We now know that school performance is affected by the child's prior development. Neuroscience confirms that from its earliest stages, the infant brain is working to produce neural pathways—the 'mental maps'—needed to understand and use new information. Early experience, as well as a child's genetic gifts, provides her with opportunities to develop sophisticated conceptual schemas, enabling her to organize her world, process complexity, and make deeper and richer connections.

Opportunities for learning—or their absence—can make all the difference in how well children develop core skills and abilities. By age three, children of professionals have vocabularies that are nearly 50 percent greater than those of working class children, and twice as large as those of children whose families are on welfare. By the end of fourth grade, disadvantaged students of all races are two years behind their wealthier peers in reading and math. By eighth grade, they have slipped three years behind, and by twelfth grade, four years.^{viii} Studies show that half of the disparity in reading and math scores between black and white high school students can be explained by skill differences apparent when they started school.^{ix}

The National Education Goals Panel elaborates dimensions of school readiness that go well beyond academic skills. These include social and emotional development and physical well-being and motor development.^x A large body of interdisciplinary research^{xi} shows that children are put at a serious disadvantage when they enter school without the opportunity to develop both cognitive *and* non-cognitive abilities. Conversely, the 'architecture' of the young child's developing brain, as well as preparation for school success, is

maximized when social and emotional abilities as well as literacy and cognitive skills are addressed by parents, informal community programs and professionally-staffed early childhood programs.^{xii}

Ensuring a child's readiness to learn has been an explicitly stated national goal.^{xiii} In 2007, states were federally mandated to create or designate an advisory council as the first step in creating statewide systems of early education and care. More than 30 states already had such councils and since then many have put in place the components researchers agree should be provided, including health and nutrition, family services and support, early detection and intervention for special needs, and early education and child care. However, often centered in separate systems, these components in most states are not well-linked in terms of finance, policy, or comprehensive delivery. Efforts like the BUILD Initiative^{xiv} and PreK-Now,^{xv} are helping to change that picture so that a system of school readiness services and supports focus on the whole child.

Seeking Alignment: A Better Way

Pre-kindergarten intervention alone is not enough to ensure school success. Research shows that the benefit of early childhood programming is unsustainable unless appropriate interventions continue as children transition into the early grades.^{xvi} The same attention to the child's social and emotional development, family well-being, and opportunities for engaged, experiential learning that prepare children to enter school are needed to ensure that they continue to do well there.

By third grade, high stakes testing begins in earnest. At about the same time, children's achievement begins to affect their own perception of what they can do as well as others' expectations for them. Third graders who have not mastered essential literacy skills are greatly at risk of failing to reach academic standards in the middle grades and beyond. In fact, "children's prospects for school success rise not so much when they enter kindergarten ready to learn, as when they complete third grade with solid school readiness skills — especially in reading and math."^{xvii} This readiness to *continue* learning and to build on what they have mastered is supported by the whole child's positive

development—emotionally, socially, and physically as well as cognitively.

Providing remedial help to underperforming students is helpful at any age but it becomes more difficult—and costly—as students grow older and their brain becomes less malleable. The future employability of students whose skills are not improved is seriously diminished. Persistent failure, when multiplied across thousands of underperforming schools, has profound and painful consequences not only for students and their future families, but for our nation's democracy and economic well-being. Quality programs, opportunities and support services in the early years help build a solid foundation for continued school success.

Community Schools: A Natural Linkage

Community schools are grounded in developmental theory. They understand that the most effective way to promote school achievement is to meet the needs of the whole child. They make sure that school age children are ready to learn each day by drawing on a wealth of community resources to support their physical, social, emotional and cognitive development and well-being. And they work with partners and school staff to develop engaging curricula and learning experiences that complement school work and promote academic excellence.

Community schools address both children and families where learning starts. As a result, they provide a variety of development supports and learning activities to family members of all ages—including, in many cases, early education and related services. Working more intentionally with early childhood partners to systemically extend supports to the youngest family members is a natural and logical extension of what community schools are designed to do.

Community Schools and School Improvement

The Coalition for Community Schools agrees with the Turnaround Challenge's call for comprehensive cultural and systemic change—not tinkering at the edges. Marginal change makes for only marginal

improvement. In schools and districts across the country, community schools are already working to transform teaching and learning by creating a set of conditions in which all children can learn and by aiming toward specific results that we expect for all our children.

Partnerships, the core of a community school strategy, have fueled these efforts and steadily increase their capacity for change. As a result, a growing number of districts can point to clusters of successful community schools. Robust relationships with families and community institutions have created a shared motivation to reinvent their schools and help align the assets, resources, and political will to do so.

Community Schools and School Readiness

Community schools promote a life-long learning continuum that begins well before the grades and continues long past graduation. Community school partners explicitly state that the development of the whole child is a critical factor for student success. Children do better when their families do better. In order to achieve the result that children enter school healthy and ready to learn, community schools provide services and supports the span the generations. They intentionally seek out family members; work to provide welcoming, single site sources of services, learning and recreation; and engage them as shared decision-makers. Many community school initiatives already provide – or are connected to a range of early childhood programming including Head Start, day care, infant and well baby clinics, family support groups, intergenerational and pre-literacy programs. All of these help create relationships with young families and create a culture of involvement in their child’s learning throughout the grades.

Community Schools and Effective Alignment

The Coalition’s 2003 review of research and community school practice emphasized the importance of creating comprehensive learning environments throughout a child’s educational career.^{xviii} To call attention to the beneficial alignment between ECE services and school achievement, it highlighted Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers which provided children ages three through

nine with sustained educational programming, health and nutrition services as well as family support and parent involvement activities. A 15-year longitudinal study of these children found more parent involvement, lower rates of grade retention and special education placement, and lower rates of early school dropout and delinquent behavior. The Coalition and its members understand the value of linked education and support and the need to build systems equipped to reach every child.

The W.K. Kellogg SPARK Initiative, designed to

The 5 Conditions for Learning

Community school advocates believe that the present emphasis on academics exemplified by the No Child Left Behind Act is too narrow an approach to public education. We believe that schools together with their communities must work to fulfill five conditions for learning that the Coalition has identified as necessary for every child to succeed, based on an analysis of recent research.

Condition #1: The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.

Condition #2: Students are motivated and engaged in learning -- both in school and in community settings, during and after school.

Condition #3: The basic physical, mental and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.

Condition #4: There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families and school staff.

Condition #5: Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive and respectful and connects students to a broader learning community.

Learn more about the specific studies that support each of the five conditions for learning in the full [Making the Difference report](#) in Chapter 2, page 15.

promote school readiness and academic success, calls for the alignment of curriculum, expectations and pedagogy both horizontally and vertically across the early learning years and into the grades.

Its alignment principles are familiar to community school partners:

- ❖ Strong linkages and partnerships;
- ❖ Steadfast leadership;
- ❖ Informed and engaged parents and caregivers;
- ❖ Equitable access to quality care and education; and
- ❖ Focused transition efforts across levels of learning.^{xix}

Community schools are well positioned to create the kind of linked infrastructure that this degree of alignment requires. Despite their diversity, attention to the multiple needs of the young child—as intimately connected to academic success—is one of every community school’s distinguishing features. Similarly their guiding principles promote a capacity that can leverage the demands of both school improvement and school readiness into system-wide change.

The Linkage Process

This section presents two related change strategies (theory of change) to provide initial guidance to sites in meeting Project goals.

Figure 1 shows a 5-Stage Spiral.^{xx} This method for creating collaborative community change has helped communities across the country use resources more effectively to improve supports and services and achieve better results for children, families, and communities, leading to the development of community schools. Each stage includes a set of milestones that mark progress from one stage to the next. Its stages include: Getting together; building trust; developing a strategic plan; taking action, and going to scale by replicating and expanding successful initiatives.

Figure 2 shows a 5-Stage Linkage Helix—a double spiral. It presents a set of stages similar to those in the 5-Stage Spiral but it highlights the process of **linking systems**—as the Linkage Project seeks to do. Like the Spiral, the Linkage Helix illustrates a flexible strategy to connect systems through a series of repeating stages. These stages include: Empowering bi-level (top down and grassroots) leadership; engaging an intermediary organizations; organizing around results; using policy to improve practice; and keeping growth or scale and sustainability front and center. It also suggests a related set of milestones—the “cross-walk and cross-talk” that need to occur as systems begin to connect. These milestones are based on current knowledge—which is only just being developed.

The Coalition fully expects that the work of Linkage sites will substantially add to what is known about the cross walk and cross talk needed to link systems. Further refinement of this planning tool will make it easier for others interested in this process to develop their own linkage efforts and constitute a major Linkages accomplishment.

Each stage is composed of a set of milestones that let the collaborative groups (collaboratives) know that it is making progress. Collaboratives should move through these milestones at their own pace, working on some but not others, and

in more than one stage at a time. It may be important to repeat stages as new people and partners are engaged and as the collaborative continues to clarify its purpose and intent. Also, “spiraling back” isn’t a sign of failure; instead, recursive looping demonstrates a deepening of efforts. Even after action plans have been successfully launched, the 5-Stage Linkage Helix process (as well as the 5-Stage Spiral) calls for replication and expansion of what works. With each iteration, collaborative efforts move closer to reaching long range results.

Linkages sites should find these planning tools useful in developing their action plans. Each site brings a unique collaborative history, capacity, and set of needs to this work. Communities will make progress toward project goals in their own way. The remainder of this section describes the 5-Stage Linkage Process in more detail.



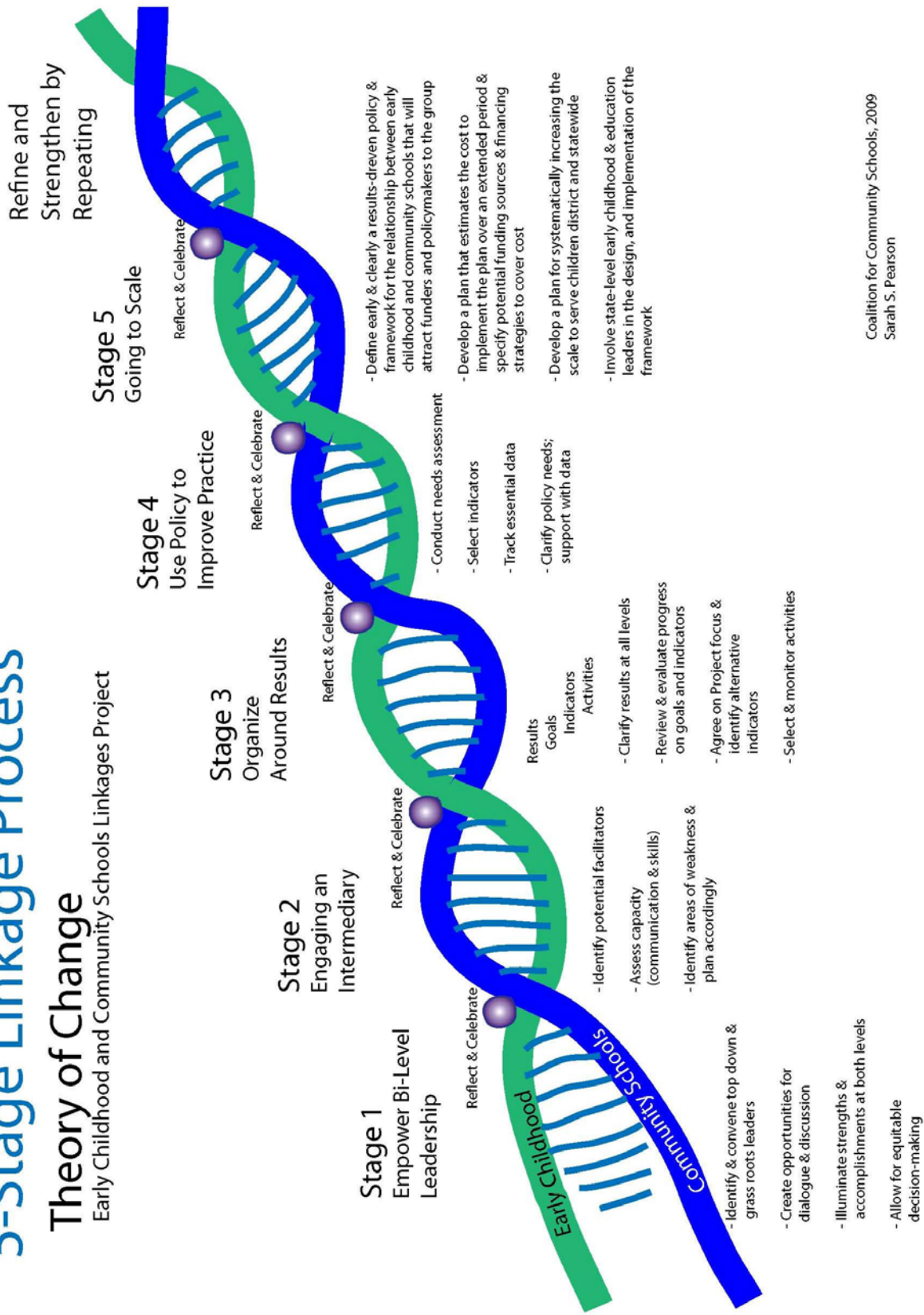
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Figure 1: 5-Stage Spiral

5-Stage Linkage Process

Theory of Change

Early Childhood and Community Schools Linkages Project



Coalition for Community Schools, 2009
Sarah S. Pearson

Figure 2: 5-Stage Linkage Helix

Stage 1: Empower Bi-Level Leadership—Top Down, Bottom Up

Research conducted by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation suggests a framework for change that begins from either the top down, or bottom up. Regardless of where it begins, it links vision with practice and support with action. Top down change begins with a vision. The first task of high-level decision-makers is to sell their vision to others. The power of their position gives them distinct advantages. It enables them to demonstrate to others the importance of their plan, to seek funding for it, and to give permission to implement it.

Grass-roots change can begin with action initiated by stakeholders like parents, teachers, students and others in the community. Bottom up change is fueled by local wisdom and the empowering passion felt by people whose lives will be directly affected by change efforts. It creates a sense of ownership and the readiness to act now and seek permission later.

The most significant challenge for top-down leaders is to inspire and lead change that is enthusiastically embraced by their constituency. The most significant challenge for bottom-up change agents lies in sustaining and expanding their improvements. When top-down and bottom-up efforts influence each other, they can create significant and enduring change within complex systems.

To ensure scope and sustainability, leaders at each level need to tap into each other's strengths and build trust and mutual respect. Ideally, top-down efforts to change minds will be empowered by grass-roots wisdom, passion and support. Conversely, bottom-up efforts require the knowledge and the institutional, financial, and political support that top-level leadership provides.

Community school initiatives are built on strong stakeholder engagement among both top down and bottom up leaders. Schools, districts, cities, counties, parent organizations, higher education institutions, community-based organizations, and state agencies are all involved. It is expected that the Linkages sites will use the keys to

stakeholder engagement that have been well-tested in community schools:

- ❖ 1 to 1 dialogue about issues of common concern, such as interaction with concerned parents and community residents and conversations about poverty and race;
- ❖ Shared learning experiences focused on data, sites visits, personal stories and experiences, proven programs and practices;
- ❖ Realistic operational planning to achieve early successes; and
- ❖ Developing local champions with the skills and ability to move the strategy forward.

At the grassroots level, sites will be expected to strengthen leadership skills of parents and community residents whose voice is needed to make changes and the capacity of existing leadership development organizations working with them. To this end, the project will build partnerships with leadership programs rooted in the community, and create new programs only where necessary.

At the institutional level, sites will work through existing partnerships supporting community schools and early childhood programs to identify how leadership behaviors must change and seek to influence leadership development for principals, teachers and early childhood program personnel to enable them to work more effectively together.

Cross-walk and Cross-talk

- ❖ Identify and convene top down and grass roots leaders;
- ❖ Create opportunities for honest dialogue and to air assumptions;
- ❖ Illuminate strengths and accomplishments at both levels;
- ❖ Allow for equitable decision-making.

Stage 2: Engaging an Intermediary

Complex initiatives—like the Linkages Project—require significant management capacity. Sites are cautioned not to rely solely on school staff, volunteers, or an assortment of consultants to mount this effort. A capable intermediary organization is needed to facilitate the project's intended linkage between systems. It should be engaged early on and involved in the earliest stages of planning and development.

This critical partner will most likely be a trusted community-based organization, community foundation, council, agency, or other entity with demonstrated experience in building relationships and in moving and sustaining an agenda. An effective intermediary brings both commitment and skills to the table. Sites should look for seasoned organizations that have a track record of successful involvement in community-based initiatives and in working to sustain, not just initiate, these efforts.

Candid conversations should be conducted up front to ensure that a potential intermediary has the range and depth of skills needed to support this work. They should be able to show evidence of their ability and willingness to supervise a multiyear agenda, provide professional development, seek finance, generate data, participate in research and evaluation, and build community support. Areas in which capacity is absent or weak should be identified and alternative arrangements made to meet these needs.

Ideally, sites will select intermediaries that are familiar with early childhood issues, have already established effective working relationships with key school and community leaders, and, if possible, have ties with decision-makers at the state as well as local level.

Cross-walk and Cross-talk

- ❖ Identify potential facilitators;
- ❖ Assess capacity (commitment and skills);
- ❖ Identify areas of weakness and plan accordingly.

Stage 3: Organize Around Results

To avoid confusing activity with progress, Linkage sites need to answer three key questions as they begin planning their work: Where do we want to end up? How will we get there? How will we know if we're making progress? Thinking carefully about results, goals and indicators can help sites choose activities that will keep them focused and productive. In this section, we briefly describe each of these components. Appendices provide more detailed information about developing a results-based action plan and a series of worksheets to help

sites target resources toward clear and agreed upon ends.

Results: Where Do We Want To End Up?

As used in this framework, results, sometimes called outcomes, are broad statements of what caring communities expect and want to provide for all their children—and the systems that serve them. They are what should exist but in most cases they are major accomplishments that will take years, not weeks or months, to fully attain. Sites are not expected to achieve any one of the broad results but their work must be designed to begin moving toward each of them.

The Linkages Project seeks to advance long range results at three levels including that:

- ❖ All children enter school ready to learn; continue their positive development, and succeed academically by 3rd grade. (Child and Family Level)
- ❖ A results-driven, sustainable system at the local level provides continuous high quality services and learning experiences for children and families from birth through the grades. (School and Community Level)
- ❖ Supportive state policies and funding mechanisms ensure the sustainability of linkages between early childhood systems and community schools statewide. (State Policy Level)

Goals: Benchmarks on the Way to Results

Because results are so broad, it helps to break them down into their component parts, called goals. Goals are benchmarks that must all be met to achieve a result—but they do not all have to be tackled at the same time. Sites may be primed and ready to move on one goal but may need more time to acquire the resources or expertise to move on another. Discussing realistic choices in goals ensures that sites move efficiently and do not overextend themselves.

Indicators: How Will We Know If We Have Made Progress?

Indicators are interim measures of advancement toward a specific goal. Typically, any goal will have several indicators. Once sites agree on the goals they want to reach, they will need to decide on the indicators that will show them that progress is being made. It is important for sites

to understand that indicators need to be chosen before any action is taken. They are what you will be looking for to tell you how well you're doing.

Activities: How Do We Get There?

Actions or activities are what sites decide to do to achieve specific indicators. They might involve different partners, target different populations—for example, parents, school and child care staff, health care providers, the media—and be structured and evaluated very differently. The Linkages Project encourages this diversity and local innovation. It also encourages sites to develop and share new ideas and flexible approaches. Sites need to carefully consider which of many activities they will undertake to move specific indicators.

Cross-walk and Cross-talk

- ❖ Clarify results at all levels;
- ❖ Review and evaluate progress on goals and indicators;
- ❖ Agree on Project focus and identify alternative indicators; and
- ❖ Select and monitor activities.

Stage 4: Use Policy to Improve Practice

Direct service delivery is only a small part of what is envisioned in this Project. Research on community schools indicates that absent a strong policy foundation, the most promising initiatives are not likely to be replicated or sustained. In order to make a lasting difference, sites must build a coordinated set of services supported by policies, funding, and evaluation at the state as well as district and local levels. The challenge will be to move toward the creation of a seamless, linked, and sustainable system of high quality, early childhood programs and community schools. Local efforts must seek to transform and strengthen current practices rather than simply add to them.

Effective policy, however, must be informed by practice and supported by political will. Collection of relevant data and frequent communication with policymakers with a range of constituencies is necessary to create an environment conducive to policy change. Sites must be clear about their objectives and use data

to support them. Through targeted messages, they need to develop receptive relationships with policymakers and organized groups with influence on decision-making bodies. Ongoing communication at all levels of implementation will help identify the barriers preventing progress and help specify the policy actions that can resolve them.

Cross-walk and Cross-talk

- ❖ Conduct needs assessment;
- ❖ Select indicators;
- ❖ Track essential data;
- ❖ Package data and develop target messages for specific audiences; and
- ❖ Clarify policy needs; support with data.

Stage 5: Keep Scale and Sustainability Front and Center

The Linkages Project is specifically intended to build on and further develop an infrastructure capable of significantly expanding the number of children who can benefit from its improvements. It is expected that efforts to increase the size and scale of interventions will drive the initiative, rather than serve merely as hoped-for ends. Accomplishing these steps will serve as important indicators of progress toward results at both Level 2 and 3. CCS will revisit the sustainability issue at cross-site convenings and offer more in-depth technical assistance on this issue as necessary.

Most Linkages sites have already developed a substantial core of community schools by building bi-level leadership, partnering with an intermediary, strategically focusing on results, and using policy to permanently improve practice and transform systems. Sites are expected to use this fertile ground to grow effective relationships between quality early childhood programs and community schools and to embed in each a coherent set of policies and practices. The aim will be to make these consistent across both systems and create a seamless and responsive transition between early childhood and the grades.

Cross-walk and Cross-talk

- ❖ Define early and clearly a results-driven policy and practice framework for the relationship between early childhood and

community schools that will attract funders and policymakers to the work.

- ❖ Develop a plan that estimates what it would cost to implement such a plan over an extended period and specify potential funding sources and financing strategies that would be able to cover the cost.
- ❖ Develop a plan for systematically increasing the scale of effort such that all children in district & state are served.
- ❖ Involve state-level early childhood and education leaders in the design, and implementation of the framework.

Evaluation

Linkage Project sites will benefit from two kinds of evaluation. An external evaluation conducted by The John Gardner Center will look closely at how sites progress toward project goals. The design and implementation of this evaluation has yet to be determined.

The second kind of evaluation will be an on-going, internal self-assessment conducted by the sites themselves. This process is intended to keep sites focused and to keep the CCS Project Team and technical advisors aware of site needs so they may be addressed. Appendices present tools and information that should help sites reflect on their work, and make periodic assessments and mid-course corrections as required. Sites may use these worksheets, supplemented with only as much additional writing as is necessary to justify their conclusions and to identify areas of concern, as the basis of the Project's twice annual programmatic reporting.

Appendix A: Developing a Results-Based Plan

Creating a linked system with results at three levels is a complex and long term undertaking—not unlike reconstructing a crumbling system of roads into an efficient freeway with multiple lanes, connectors and desirable destinations. But it need not be overwhelming.

This section is designed to help sites first visualize the big picture and then zoom in on the most strategic starting points given their needs, resources and level of development. It lays out a process and provides tools to help sites assess their current status with respect to goals and indicators for each Linkage result, to decide where it makes the most sense to focus their efforts; and to select and monitor the activities that will move their chosen indicators. Taken together, these steps should enable sites to develop their own results-based action plan.

The Big Picture

Systems change occurs at multiple levels simultaneously. Sites are expected to address each of the three results—one at each level—that are at the heart of the Linkage Project. Appendix B: Selecting Goals and Indicators provides a separate work sheet for the key result at each level. It includes some of the component goals for each result and suggests a variety of indicators that sites can use to show interim progress. These goals and indicators, while reflective of current research, are by no means exhaustive. However, this format should make it possible for sites to visualize the breadth of potential work at all three levels, help them review indicators across goals and results, and see useful interconnections among them.

Selecting Goals and Indicators

Linkages sites need to work at all three levels but sites are not expected to tackle every goal—or even most of them—at the same time. Within each level, sites are invited to identify the goal(s) they wish to address and, for each goal, to select the indicators they intend to move. Here, too, it is important for sites to understand that they do not need to work on every—or even most—of these suggested indicators. In addition, sites may choose their indicators from

the suggestions provided or develop their own.

Sites are encouraged to think carefully about these lists. Each community has its own history and set of strengths and needs. Sites need to select indicators—or develop ones appropriate for their community—that will move them toward chosen goals and long term results.

The Selecting Goals and Indicators work sheet is also designed to help sites identify which indicators they may already be working on; which ones they are ready to take on; and which others are best left for later. For each indicator the work sheet asks if sites are: 1) Not There 2) On the Way; 3) Achieved 4) Exceeded. Sites have the opportunity to review each indicator and decide whether or not they wish to choose it as a Project Focus. We encourage partners to work through these worksheets together. The process will inevitably air assumptions and expectations. When thoughtfully conducted it will help build trust and ownership. (See below: Using Planning Tools Effectively.)

Selecting and Tracking Activities

Once sites have chosen goals and indicators, they need to decide on the best set of activities, events, or programs they will undertake to make progress toward them. A variety of actions may be targeted on a single indicator. Conversely, some activities may address more than one interim indicator. Appendix C includes a Selecting Activities worksheet. Sites can use this tool to 1) make front-end decisions about which activities to pursue, 2) monitor their implementation, and 3) craft appropriate adjustments and next steps.

Partners bring many creative ideas to the table. Sites need to keep in mind the specific goals and indicators they are intending to change as they make decisions about how they will direct their valuable assets. Relevance, resource, and opportunity costs should be basic considerations. How relevant is each one to your chosen indicators? How costly? What opportunity costs might be entailed by drawing them away from other efforts?

In selecting activities, sites need to clarify responsible partners and specify a timeframe for implementation. Who will oversee the activity and ensure its implementation? At what point should an event have occurred or activities

initiated? Partners will also need to stay abreast of whether implementation has occurred within the given timeframe. If it has been, what contribution has been made to the selected goal or indicator and what next steps are called for? If it has not been successfully completed, what mid-course corrections might be indicated?

Recognizing Interconnections

As sites review these worksheets, they will notice an interrelationship in goals and some redundancy in interim indicators across goals at all three levels. It will be helpful if sites realize that efforts at all levels are mutually reinforcing. For example, the goal that “children are enriched by abundant positive early learning experiences and successfully transition into elementary school” is a Level 1 goal. However, it is closely related to the Level 2 goal that “curricula, pedagogy, and expectations are aligned between early childhood programs and community schools.” Achievement of both of these goals is greatly facilitated by movement toward the Level 3 goal that state policy calls for “continuity of shared standards, developmental teaching methods, and support services between early childhood programs and the grades.” The Linkage process encourages simultaneous effort at all three levels.

Sites will also notice the importance of developing a strong collaborative operating partnership with a seasoned intermediary. The Level 2 goal, “organizational, leadership, and funding ties exist between early childhood programs and community schools” describes the functional heart of the Linkages Project. The strength of these organizational, leadership, and funding connections will determine the degree to which local systems change, sustain, and expand those changes— and children and families benefit.

Using Planning Tools Effectively

A process for honestly reviewing results, goals and interim indicators can help early childhood and community school partners cultivate their partnership and build a vital sense of ownership. Such conversations may also disclose disagreement and tension between early

childhood providers and community school staff due to differences in education and training; credentialing requirements, teaching schedules, pay scales, as well as administrative and accountability demands. In regards to this important process, we offer a set of field-tested basic assumptions partners should bear in mind as they begin negotiating the terms of their relationship.^{xxi}

Basic Assumptions for Early Childhood and Community School Partners to Consider

1. Schools and early care providers will benefit from being as specific as possible with each other. It is important to establish a tone of cooperation and trust. Vagueness can undermine agreements over time.
2. A framework for collaboration and partnership enables both sides to pursue multiple strategies, rather than staking everything on one item that may be one on which the other party has no leverage or available resources. A broad agenda ensures a broad set of discussions where there exist possibilities for finding shared goals.
3. While EC systems may be “not well-organized,” it also remains true that many public schools systems are fragmented, especially in carrying out early childhood roles which may be scattered across multiple units. Internal negotiations within both EC provider groups and school districts are essential to develop a clear position for these external discussions.
4. Both groups need to be able to win something in the negotiations; neither should assume that the other will easily give up resources without getting a valued benefit in return.
5. Both sides must recognize the natural tensions built into negotiations, which may result in a shift of focus to marginal items, rather than the larger ones that really matter.

Appendix B: Worksheet - Selecting Goals and Indicators for Child & Family

Level 1 – Child and Family						
Result	Children enter school physically, emotionally, cognitively and socially ready and are succeeding academically by 3rd grade.					
	GOAL: Healthy, well-timed births. Women receive comprehensive reproductive health services including family planning, prenatal care, adequate nutrition and parenting education.	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N
		1	2	3	4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Increased percentage of families who utilize these services; decrease in premature births; decrease in self-reports of unplanned pregnancies. 					
	GOAL: Physical development. Children meet developmental milestones, maintain normal weight and are able to fully use their physical abilities.					
	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N	
		1	2	3	4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Children receive health services at recommended developmental intervals. They receive timely and comprehensive care for identified needs. 					
	GOAL: Reduction of chronic absenteeism. Early chronic absence (i.e. missing 10% or more of school per year regardless of excused or unexcused) is defined and chronically absent students are identified and assisted.					
	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N	
		1	2	3	4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Schools have developed the capacity to track attendance using a universal student identifier. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Each school has an attendance team, which makes sure that families are contacted and home visits occur. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Schools partner with community agencies and families to understand the factors contributing to early absence to develop appropriate responses tailored to their realities. 					
	GOAL: Parental Involvement. Parents are involved in their child's school and school work.					
	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N	
		1	2	3	4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Parents facilitate learning by arranging for appropriate study time and space, monitoring homework, and/or actively tutoring their children at home. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Parents volunteer at school activities, work in classrooms and participate in school governance. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Parents who need help speaking and reading in English have access to affordable ESL classes. Translators and bilingual material are available at school. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Parents serve as outreach liaisons to other parents on behalf of the school. 					

GOAL: Supported and supportive families. Children live in families that support their physical, emotional, cognitive & social development.	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N
	1	2	3	4	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator – Families know where to find multiple kinds of support of and are able to obtain it. Early support is available so that families can address problems early and manage crises. 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator – Families gain, share and use knowledge and skills to support their children's overall development 					
GOAL: High quality early learning continues into the grades. Children have abundant positive early learning experiences & successfully transition into elementary grades.	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N
	1	2	3	4	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: Increased number of slots in high quality early learning programs. 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: More children meeting age-appropriate developmental milestones. 					
GOAL: Effective teaching and learning in K-3 classrooms. Children are engaged in learning and master basic reading and writing skills by 3rd grade with achievement differences not explained by race or income.	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N
	1	2	3	4	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: More children reading and writing at grade level. 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: More children gaining age-appropriate work habits in primary grades (i.e., persistence, task completion) 					

Appendix C: Worksheet - Selecting Goals and Indicators for School & Community

Level 2 – School & Community						
Result	A results-driven, sustainable system of community schools provides continuous high quality services and learning experiences from early childhood through the grades.					
	GOAL: ECE and CS are operationally connected. Organizational, leadership, and funding ties exist between early childhood programs and community schools.	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N
		1	2	3	4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Intermediary has strong connections to both ECE and CS. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Planning teams consist of ECE and CS staff, family members & community representatives. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: ECE parents participate in CS leadership positions. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Specific ECE and K-3 funding streams are identified and tapped to support joint efforts. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Increased space in/near CS for ECE programming. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Knowledge of and agreement on CS requirements (health, academic, etc.) for entering ECE students. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Methods established for communicating the developmental strengths and needs of students entering CS. 					
	GOAL: Results-driven. Agreement on results and indicators drives development across early childhood and community school efforts.	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N
		1	2	3	4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: A statement summarizing results and agreement on specific goals and interim indicators developed and used by partners as a planning tool. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Proposed activities are routinely vetted on the basis of their direct relationship to moving agreed-upon indicators and reaching goals. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Sites design action plans to move indicators and reach goals; specify participants and timeframes; and use them regularly to review and revise progress. 					
	GOAL: Aligned teaching and learning. Curricula, pedagogy, and expectations are aligned between early childhood programs and schools.	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus? Y/N
		1	2	3	4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Continuation of parent participation and parent leadership strategies from ECE into CS. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: ECE and CS staff respect the differences, similarities, demands and opportunities for mutual support and improvement between high quality early childhood programming and community schools. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: ECE and CS jointly plan and participate in professional development opportunities. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: ECE and CS staff share curricula and work to develop age-appropriate continuity in methods and instructional methods. 					

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: ECE and CS staff share strategies for working with children from diverse cultural and ethnic groups. 					
GOAL: Scale-up underway. A district-wide plan is expanding the number of community schools with coherent links to early childhood programming.	Not There Yet	On the Way	ON Target	Exceeds Target	Project Focus?
	1	2	3	4	Y/N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: A clear policy and practice framework for the relationship between ECE and CS has attracted the interest of funders and policymakers. 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: Data-based maps indicate where and how many children are not currently being served. 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: Plans target expansion to specific groups (all 3 year olds; low performing districts); and are justified based on available research and data. 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: Financing plans anticipate current and phased in costs. 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: State-level early childhood and education leaders are involved in continued planning and implementation. 					

Appendix D: Worksheet - Selecting Goals and Indicators for State Policy

Level 3 – State Policy						
Result	Mutually supportive policies and practices link early childhood systems and public education.					
	GOAL: Policy support. Explicit policy statements by agencies outline the relationship between school readiness and school improvement and continuity of shared standards, developmental teaching methods, and support services between early childhood programs and the grades.	Not There Yet 1	On the Way 2	ON Target 3	Exceeds Target 4	Project Focus? Y/N
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Sites participate in existing state local children's collaboratives (i.e., Success by Six; Smart Start; Build Initiative). 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Contact is established with state ECE Advisory Council, Children's Cabinet, and other federally mandated collaborative education groups. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Site districts are represented on the State Advisory Council and its committees. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Policymakers are informed by site visits, data, information on prove programs and practices. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Linkage partners include state staff experienced in collaborative work. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Shared standards for ECE/CS are developed that reflect current research on brain development and learning engagement, social-emotional development, as well as literacy, math and science skill building. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Constituents are kept informed; state leaders are held accountable. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Key leaders champion ballot initiatives/legislation to support linked ECE/CS. 					
	GOAL: Redirected resources. Redirection of existing state resources to support the continuity of early childhood services and supports into the grades at more schools.	Not There Yet 1	On the Way 2	ON Target 3	Exceeds Target 4	Project Focus? Y/N
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Resources from state and federal funding streams including general health, mental health, disabilities services and family support, are identified. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Barriers to more flexible use of categorical funding streams across ECE/CS are clarified and communicated to state policymakers. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Policymakers are informed of gaps between existing funding streams and all the resources necessary to fund comprehensive systems. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: Tying pre-k funding into K-12 school funding formula is explored. 					
	GOAL: Joint professional development. Revision of professional development programs to promote shared curriculum, pedagogy, and instructional models.	Not There Yet 1	On the Way 2	ON Target 3	Exceeds Target 4	Project Focus? Y/N
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator: A plan for professional development includes ongoing training. 					

Appendix E: Worksheet - Select and Monitor Activities

Indicator:	
Activity Name:	
	Guiding Questions
Relevance & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is this activity relevant to the indicator? • What resources are required and what opportunity costs are entailed as a result?
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will provide oversight? • Who implements the activity?
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the estimated completion date? • Is an extension required? Why?
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a mid-course corrections required? • How has this activity contributed to the indicator?
Next Steps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we build on this accomplishment to further goals and/or results? • What lessons have we learned that we want to share?

Appendix F: Linkage Stories

The following stories illustrate some of the activities already underway to connect early childhood services and supports to elementary education. They show early efforts at all three Linkage levels: Supporting children and families; promoting school level linkage; and introducing state level policy change.

Level 1: Supporting Children & Families Enabling a Smooth Transition

Joining Hands is a locally developed model to ensure that children move smoothly and successfully into kindergarten and the elementary grades by creating continuity through partnerships among Head Start, pre-K, public schools and community agencies. The New Mexico SPARK initiative has refined and expanded this transition process in participating schools. Principal-led teams are comprised of early childhood and elementary grade teachers, parents, and community-based service provider. Members receive intensive training in child development, as well as age appropriate curricula and teaching approaches and action plans address ways to align curriculum based on best practices; help teachers provide developmentally and culturally-appropriate early childhood education, help parents assist their children's learning; and help all children build a strong social, emotional and academic foundation for school success. Changes in school operation have been seen in the introduction of parent liaisons; providing substitute teachers to allow school staff to participate in team meetings; and transfer of assessment data across preschool and kindergarten programs.^{xxii}

Level 2: Promoting School Level Linkage Overcoming Barriers

Wisconsin school districts decide if they want to offer state-funded pre-k programs and whether they will work with local partners. Collaboration coaches, paid for by the state, work with district and early childhood providers

to facilitate partnership. For example, districts working to create closer ties between Head Start programs and its pre-k initiative came up with three different ways to overcome differences in teaching credentials. The school district requires a BA degree plus certification for teachers; Head Start requires an AA. Some districts hire a public school certified teacher to work in the Head start program; some provide funds to Head Start programs to hire their own; and some encourage team teaching-- pairing credentialed district teachers with Head Start teachers.

Bringing Head Start into Public Schools

The Montello School District in Wisconsin combines Head Start and school district pre-k funding streams to provide the same high quality early education to more children. 37 percent of enrolled children are not funded by Head Start but monitors could not determine differences in services. Since this funding change, the number of Head Start students enrolled in this program has grown four fold.^{xxiii}

District-wide Scale Up

The SPARK Initiative (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids), funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation fosters partnerships among communities, schools, businesses, state agencies and families to ensure that vulnerable children are ready for school and that schools are ready for all children. In 2006, the Miami-Dade School District, under the leadership of Superintendent Rudy Crew, built upon and expanded work begun by Florida's SPARK efforts. The Ready Schools Miami Initiative uses a comprehensive, systematic strategy to connect the school district, elementary schools, early learning centers, community-based organizations, higher education, the health community, and families. A district wide scale up is underway. Partnerships have placed teams of health professionals in each school and professional development sessions and data

sharing have been instrumental in creating continuity and quality across education levels.^{xxiv}

Level 3: State Level Policy Change Redirected Funding

Oklahoma legislators approved the Education Reform and Funding Act in 1990, moving pre-k funding into the state school funding formula. Subsequent legislation in 1998 allowed all school districts to receive formula funding to serve all four-year-old children regardless of income.^{xxv}

Professional Development and Better Classrooms

New Mexico lawmakers, in an effort to promote qualified teachers, set aside 20 % of allocated pre-k funds in 2005 for professional development and higher education scholarships. In 2006 they added \$1.5 million in one time costs for developmentally appropriate equipment and classroom safety and \$4 million to design and equip pre-k classrooms statewide.^{xxvi} In West Virginia all 4 year-old children must have access to pre-k by the 2012-13 school year. Pre-K is folded in to the state school funding formula and requires county school systems to coordinate their pre-k programs and contracts.^{xxvii}

End Notes

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- ^x As conceptualized by the National Education Goals Panel, school readiness encompasses more than cognitive and literacy skills. The Goals Panel elaborated on five dimensions of school readiness: (1) physical well-being and motor development; (2) social and emotional development; (3) approaches to learning; (4) language development; and (5) cognition and general knowledge. Source: National Education Goals Panel, 1995. *Reconsidering Children's Early Development and Learning: Toward Common Views and Vocabulary.* Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel. <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/Reports/child-ea.htm>.
- ^{xi} Pathways Mapping Initiative: Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007.
- ^{xii} National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004). *Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships: Working Paper No. 1.* Cited in Pathways Mapping Initiative: Children Ready for School, p. 0-7.
- ^{xiii} The Goals 2000: Educate America Act established "Ready to Learn" as the first National Education Goal in 1994.
- ^{xiv} A multi-state partnership created by a consortium of national and local funders of early childhood programs to assist states to construct a coordinated system of services and supports.
- ^{xv} An advocacy organization that supports voluntary kindergarten for all 3 and 4 year olds.
- ^{xvi} Pathways Mapping Initiative, p. 0-9.
- ^{xvii} Graves, B. *Getting There: PK-3 as Public Education's Base Camp.* New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development, 2005, cited in Pathways.
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- ^{xix} SPARK Working Paper, p.3.
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