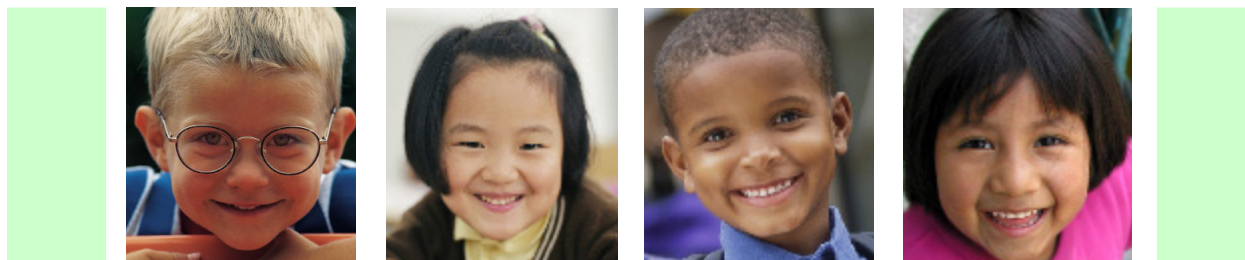


SRI International



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Early Implementation of Ready Schools Miami: Findings of the First-Year Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Ready Schools Miami is a systems change effort to improve the well-being and educational attainment of children at risk of academic, health, and social difficulties in one of this country's largest and most diverse communities, Miami-Dade County. Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and led by The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida, and the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Ready Schools is fostering collaboration, coordination and leveraging of resources among Miami-Dade County's early care and education organizations, public school system, universities, social service agencies, community organizations, and health centers to create systemic supports for early learning from birth through elementary school.

In only a year, Ready Schools partners have made significant progress toward improving the systems in Miami-Dade County that contribute to school readiness and success—early care, education, health and family support. The specific accomplishments achieved by fall 2008 are the following:

- **Collaboration on strategic planning.** Ready Schools has strengthened the linkages among its partners by focusing on shared goals, holding regular formal and informal meetings, forming formal cross-organizational associations such as serving on each other's boards, and building on existing positive relationships.
- **Connecting and leveraging resources.** Through its multiple partners, Ready Schools has brought together hundreds of millions of dollars in support for an early childhood system.
- **Generating and sustaining community support for and investment in children's learning and development.** The Ready Schools partners successfully led the effort to win voter approval of the reauthorization of The Children's Trust, which plays a vital role in Ready Schools as an active planning partner and service provider.
- **Supporting high-quality early care and education (ECE) learning environments.** Ready Schools partners successfully launched Quality Counts, a voluntary standards-based quality rating and improvement system for child care centers and family child care homes. By spring 2008, Quality Counts was supporting 150 centers and 35 family home programs in improving the quality of their care and education. Twice as many early care providers are expected to join Quality Counts in 2008–09. Ready Schools also is offering professional development for ECE providers through the United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education, the Early Childhood Program Administrators' Institute (a year-long management and business leadership training program), and the Early Learning Coalition's training in and a curriculum fair for implementing research-based ECE curricula.
- **Supporting high-quality elementary school learning environments.** Ready Schools, through the Lastinger Center for Learning and Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), helped 16 elementary schools in 2007–08 develop professional learning communities (PLCs) of teachers and administrators who regularly work together to improve student achievement. The Lastinger Center and M-DCPS trained principals and teacher leaders in the PLC model and provided an

external facilitator to support its implementation. This model was expanded to an additional 60 elementary schools in the summer of 2008. The Lastinger Center also established an on-site and online graduate education program through the University of Florida that is offered at the schools and is based on the PLC model. Cohort 1 of the program had 17 students; cohort 2 more than doubled, with 36 students.

- **Strengthening the transition from ECE programs to elementary schools.** The Miami-Dade County Public School District and other Ready Schools partners began efforts to improve and coordinate children's transition from ECE programs to elementary school. These included opportunities for children and parents to visit schools and receive useful information before school began and for ECE program and kindergarten teachers, elementary school principals, and ECE program directors to plan and coordinate their activities to support successful transition.
- **Increasing access to health care.** Access to health care has improved considerably with the HealthConnect initiative led by The Children's Trust. HealthConnect In Our Schools has placed a health clinic and team of health professionals in 165 of the district's schools. HealthConnect In The Early Years serves pregnant teens and first-time mothers with voluntary home visits intended to improve maternal health, pregnancy outcomes, and child health and development. HealthConnect In Our Community works in the neighborhoods to link families with health insurance and health care providers.
- **Increasing early identification and intervention.** Ready Schools partners have expanded early screening and intervention services through their existing work with subsidized ECE programs, Quality Counts, and a pilot program. They have connected ECE programs with community resources that screen, assess, and provide early interventions for young children.
- **Increasing parent engagement.** Ready Schools partners have helped to build parenting skills, increase family literacy practices, and connect parents with other parents and early childhood experts through ECE programs and community resource centers.
- **Using data for planning and program refinement.** Ready Schools partners engaged in several data-collection and evaluation efforts to guide their planning and to refine the programs and activities they already fund.
- **Scaling up the Ready Schools model.** Ready Schools partners successfully met their ambitious goals for scaling up several programs, including Quality Counts, the Lastinger Center professional development model being used with elementary schools, and HealthConnect In Our Schools.

Ready Schools seeks to create a coordinated, integrated system of supports to increase the probability of children's attaining academic and life success. As a systems change agent, however, Ready Schools faces challenges. Among these are creating a simplified message to describe Ready Schools, supporting children's transition from ECE centers to elementary schools, addressing gaps and barriers, and monitoring fidelity while scaling up programs. Attending to these challenges in planning for next year and beyond will support Ready Schools in achieving its full vision.

Ready Schools has made significant progress, even at this early implementation stage. As Ready Schools adds programs and includes more ECE centers and schools, it offers the promise of real systems change capable of increasing children's likelihood of academic and life success.

INTRODUCTION



Too many children in Miami-Dade County are at risk of failure in school. In fall 2007, 13% of children entering kindergarten in Miami-Dade were not yet demonstrating school readiness skills on the Early Childhood Observation System, and 45% and 60% were identified as having some risk in the letter naming and initial sound portions, respectively, on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills.¹ Similarly, in 2007 only 63% of third-grade students in Miami-Dade tested proficient or above in reading on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), and only 70% tested proficient or above in mathematics.² The risk to children’s academic success is compounded by their life circumstances. According to the county government, Miami-Dade is “a community in stress.”³ The median household income is relatively low compared with state and national levels, and one of five people in the county do not have health insurance, with 27% of the uninsured being children.

Ready Schools is a systems change effort in one of this country’s largest and most diverse communities to improve the well-being and educational attainment of children at risk of academic, health, and social difficulties.

A developing movement is under way in Miami-Dade to change these statistics—Ready Schools Miami. Ready Schools is a systems change effort in one of this country’s largest and most diverse communities to improve the well-being and educational attainment of children at risk of academic, health, and social difficulties. Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and led by The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation (ECIF) and the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida, Ready Schools is fostering collaboration, coordination, and leveraging of resources among Miami-Dade County’s early care and education (ECE) organizations, public school system, universities, social service agencies, community organizations and health centers to create systemic supports for children’s early learning from birth through elementary school.

Ready Schools is a system through which organizations coordinate their activities and resources to provide children and their families with the broad-based support they need for educational success.

Ready Schools is a new way of doing business. In contrast to traditional reform efforts that address individual initiatives, Ready Schools is a system through which organizations coordinate their activities and resources to provide children and their families with the broad-based support they need for educational success. As part of Ready Schools, organizations knit separate endeavors into a coherent and coordinated strategy, mobilize and direct resources, and fill service gaps. By fostering collaboration, Ready Schools reflects the understanding that these organizations working together, rather than in isolation, will provide children and their families with the holistic support needed to improve their outcomes. By promoting children’s access to high-quality learning in ECE through fifth grade, as well as providing health and developmental screening and services, Ready Schools supports children’s

cognitive, physical, and social development; their school readiness; and their later academic success and social adjustment.

This report presents findings from SRI International's evaluation of the first year of Ready Schools implementation. It is a snapshot of activities and accomplishments achieved through fall 2008. We describe Ready Schools, establishing it as a systems-change endeavor, and present its main strategies, highlighting the accomplishments during the first year. Finally, we examine the challenges Ready Schools will need to address as it continues to expand its services and its reach. The study methodology is described in the appendix.

UNDERSTANDING READY SCHOOLS



Child outcomes are realized through the interaction of four factors: high-quality learning environments, access to health care, early identification of and intervention for special needs, and parent engagement opportunities.

Ready Schools can be characterized as a radical systems change effort with the overall objective of improving the well-being and academic success of children. Ready Schools strives to ensure that children younger than school age attain the cognitive and social competencies that lead to readiness for kindergarten. These developmental competencies are a child's foundation for achieving proficiency in academic skills during the elementary years. As children move from pre-K to kindergarten and elementary school, Ready Schools works to make the pivotal transition smooth so that children begin school experiencing success and feeling secure in their learning environment. For school-age children, Ready Schools aims to maintain children's healthy development, promote their academic achievement, and minimize their need to repeat a year of elementary education.

In the system envisioned by Ready Schools, child outcomes are realized through the interaction of four factors: high-quality learning environments, access to health care, early identification of and intervention for special needs, and parent engagement opportunities (Exhibit 1). Through a series of strategies and activities, Ready Schools is working to strengthen the accessibility and quality of each factor. For example, Ready Schools posits that ECE program quality can be improved through a comprehensive quality rating and improvement system comprising assessment, technical assistance, resources and training. Teacher quality in elementary schools can be improved through job-embedded professional development and graduate education programs, thus improving the learning environment for students. Locating health centers in schools and community centers will improve children's access to health, dental and mental care. Early screening programs will enable children most in need of health and developmental services to begin receiving them early, before health and developmental issues interfere with their learning. Finally, increasing parents' engagement in their children's learning will promote better learning for children at school and at home.

Ready Schools recognizes the importance not only of each of these factors, but also of creating connections within and among them.

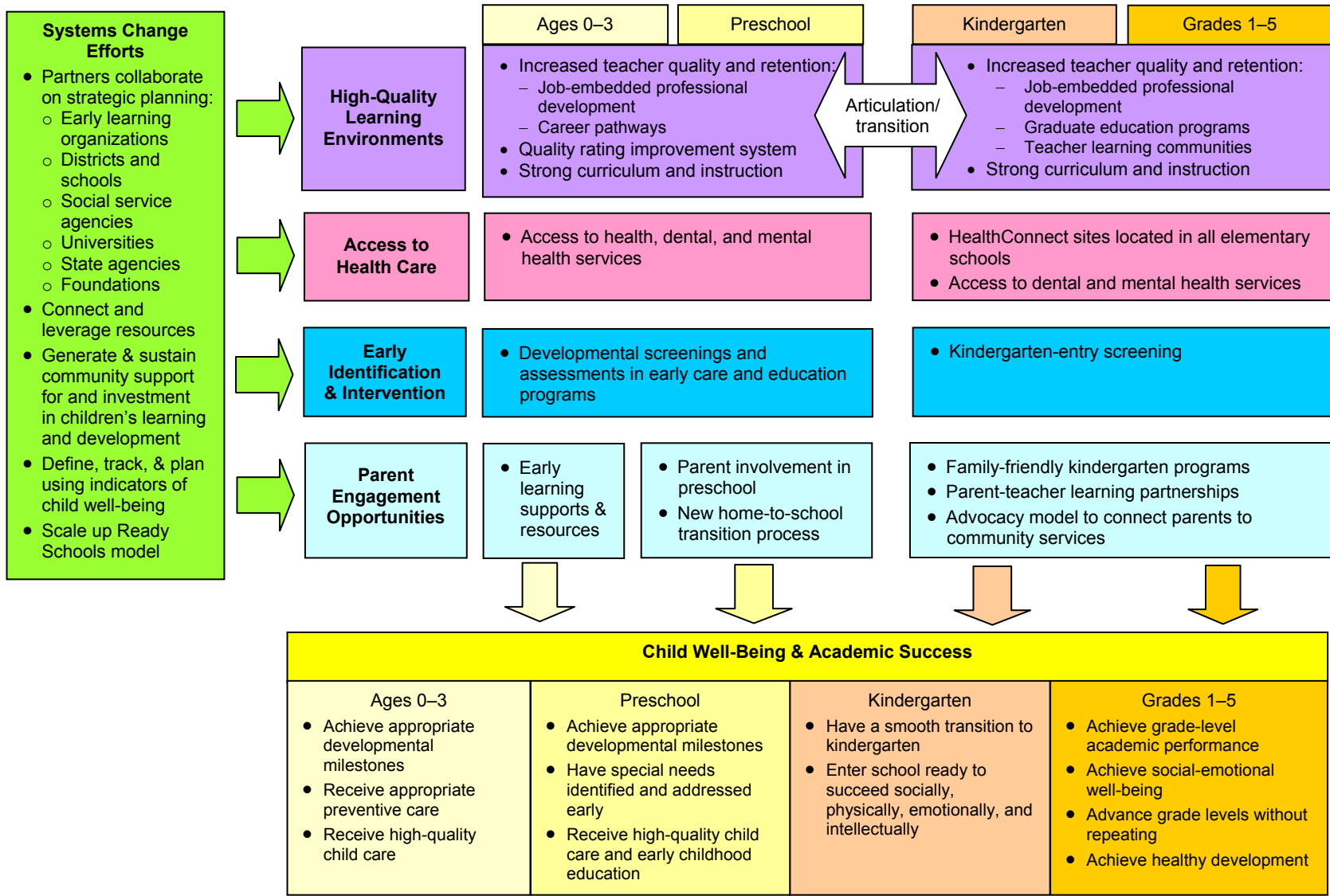
Ready Schools recognizes the importance not only of each of these factors, but also of creating connections within and among them. Fundamental to Ready Schools is the notion that the experiences of children in early care and preschool settings and in elementary school are important factors in their lives. Coordinating services and educational opportunities to meet the changing needs of children at each stage of development promotes a smooth transition from one stage to the next. Connecting the four factors into a coherent system helps ensure

that children’s developmental and academic needs are met and that no gaps remain.

Ready Schools is working to improve children’s outcomes by creating partnerships among the full array of organizations serving young children and their families. These partners are collaborating on strategic planning, connecting and leveraging existing resources, generating and sustaining community support for and public investments in children’s learning and development, defining shared goals (e.g., improved outcomes for children and their families) and monitoring progress on meeting them to guide strategic planning, and expanding the Ready Schools model within Miami-Dade County.

Ready Schools is working to improve children’s outcomes by creating partnerships among the full array of organizations serving young children and their families.

Exhibit 1. Preliminary Logic Model for Ready Schools Florida



CORE STRATEGIES AND PROGRESS DURING THE FIRST YEAR



Ready Schools Miami is complex and wide ranging. It simultaneously works to improve pre-K–5 learning environments, identification of children’s need for and access to health and other social and developmental services, and parent engagement by changing the ways organizations work. Having successfully implemented many of its core strategies, Ready Schools offers promise of real systems change that can improve outcomes for children. The core strategies of Ready Schools are the following:

- Collaborating on strategic planning
- Connecting and leveraging resources
- Generating and sustaining community support for and investment in children’s learning and development
- Using data for planning and program refinement
- Scaling up the Ready Schools model
- Supporting high-quality ECE learning environments
- Supporting high-quality elementary school learning environments
- Strengthening the transition from ECE programs to elementary schools
- Increasing access to health care
- Increasing early identification and intervention
- Increasing parent engagement

Having successfully implemented many of its core strategies, Ready Schools offers promise of real systems change that can improve outcomes for children.

These strategies and the progress Ready Schools has made on them in its first year of implementation are described below.

Collaborating on Strategic Planning

The Ready Schools philosophy is that to provide comprehensive support that spans birth through grade 5, the broad range of agencies serving Florida’s children and their families must work together. Key among the Ready Schools partners are the following agencies:

- **The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation.** One of the developers and grant recipients of Ready Schools, the ECIF works on a variety of projects aimed at providing high-quality education, health, and social and emotional services to all children between birth and age 5.
- **The University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning.** The other developer and grant recipient of Ready Schools, the Lastinger Center is devoted to improving the quality of teaching, learning and leadership in elementary schools.

- **Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS).** The largest school district in Florida and the fourth-largest school system in the country, Miami-Dade County Public Schools serves nearly 350,000 students in about 350 schools.⁴
- **The Children’s Trust.** The Children’s Trust, which was established by voter referendum, invests more than \$100 million annually on programs to improve the lives of children and families in Miami-Dade County.
- **The United Way of Miami-Dade County.** The United Way invests in local health and human service programs and has made early education one of its major causes.
- **The Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade.** The Coalition is responsible for the Miami-Dade Healthy Start system, which provides continuous care coordination for pregnant women and for children from birth to age 3.
- **Early Learning Coalition (ELC) of Miami-Dade/Monroe.** ELC is a nonprofit organization with the mission of promoting early education for children from birth through age 5. ELC oversees the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program, which is available to all 4-year-old children for free, and the School Readiness Program, a subsidized child care program for children who are economically disadvantaged, are at risk because of abuse or neglect, or have a disability. ELC also provides inclusion services for children birth to 5 with disabilities and conducts developmental screenings and assessments.

Other partners that play a significant role in Ready Schools are the University of Miami, Head Start, Florida International University and United Teachers of Dade.

The vision and mission of Ready Schools fit comfortably within each partner organization’s own priorities. As the head of one partner organization said, “Our missions are either easily aligned, or they are very supportive. And I don’t think any of us care about who gets the grant. There’s only one thing I care about and that is getting the system of early education right in the county for all kids. And that is something else we almost all agree on.”

The connections among partners are evident in their working relationships. Under leadership from the ECIF, the Lastinger Center, and M-DCPS, Ready Schools has created formal structures for joint planning that facilitate connections among partners. At regularly scheduled meetings, the partners discuss overall project goals, set priorities, and plan strategies for moving forward. In addition, at biweekly meetings at the school district office, partners plan and coordinate Ready Schools efforts that involve the district schools and ECE programs. Because all partners meet at least monthly, Ready Schools is part of their regularly scheduled work, not an add-on. In addition to dedicated Ready Schools meetings, Ready Schools partners also attend each other’s meetings. For example, the school district sends a representative to ELC board meetings and to the meetings of the other Ready Schools partners.

The vision and mission of Ready Schools fit comfortably within each partner organization’s own priorities.

Connections among partners are supported by formal cross-organizational associations, with a member of one organization having a formal role in another.

In addition to the monthly meetings and other formal opportunities for collaboration, informal and impromptu meetings are facilitated by the proximity of the organizations. Several of the key partners, including the ECIF and The Children’s Trust, are housed in or near the United Way’s main office building. Other agencies maintain symbolic offices in the building. The ELC, for example, originally had offices in the building but had to relocate when it grew too large for the space. For solidarity, the United Way still keeps an office for the ELC so it can “fly the flag that they are here.” The United Way building also has conference facilities that all the partners, including the school district, use. As the United Way’s president said, “The theory was we will see each other and have opportunities to plan together.”

Building on existing working relationships, Ready Schools has strengthened the linkages among partners across the system.

Connections among partners are also supported by formal cross-organizational associations, with a member of one organization having a formal role in another. For example, the ECIF President, David Lawrence Jr., chairs The Children’s Trust board and sits on the Early Learning Coalition and the United Way boards. Ana Sejeck, chief operating officer of The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, chairs one of United Way’s key investment committees. The superintendent of the Miami-Dade Public Schools, formerly Rudy Crew and now Alberto Carvalho, also sits on The Children’s Trust board, and Harve Mogul, president of the United Way, is on the ELC board. The school district also has brought administrators together from the four major departments at its central office—Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Development, School Operations, and Fiscal—to support Ready Schools.

Before Ready Schools, efforts had been made to link organizations, but they were tied to a particular program or funding stream; coordination was lacking at the macro level. Building on existing working relationships, Ready Schools has strengthened the linkages among partners across the system. As one partner said, “For many years we have known each other. We sat at each other’s table for meetings. It has been in the last three years that I have seen real and authentic collaboration.”

Connecting and Leveraging Resources

Through its multiple partners, Ready Schools is bringing together millions of dollars in support for an early childhood system.

Through its multiple partners, Ready Schools is bringing together hundreds of millions of dollars in support for an early childhood system. The ELC manages \$160 million a year, with 70% of those funds dedicated to children’s access to programs and 30% to program quality. The Children’s Trust manages more than \$100 million a year, with half allocated to children ages 0–5. The United Way of Miami-Dade brought in more than \$95 million in 2006–07, with a portion of that sum aimed at early learning, and the Miami-Dade Public Schools’ operating budget is about \$3 billion a year. In addition to the millions of dollars dedicated to early learning, Ready Schools is supported by a \$10 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which provides the funding needed to create the leadership to build the Ready Schools system as well as to fill service gaps.

As a system effort, Ready Schools works to mobilize resources that already exist in the community; it does not rely solely on garnering new resources. To leverage resources in support of the shared goals, many of the partner organizations collaboratively fund programs, and many of the organizations fund each other. According to one partner, “It’s very hard to know who is funding what and who is doing what because everybody is helping out.” For example, the ECE Administrator Institute, a program designed to increase the knowledge and skills of ECE directors, is funded jointly by the United Way and the ECIF. Although the United Way funds 19 programs related to children, it also gives grants to The Children’s Trust and the ELC to support the training the ELC provides. Quality Counts is funded primarily by The Children’s Trust, but the ECIF funds the Web-based Early Learning System (WELS) database that Quality Counts uses to track applications and progress, and the ELC is helping to fund some programmatic pieces and financial incentives for programs and staff. By tying their funds together, Ready Schools partners can create programs and structures in support of children and their families.

Generating and Sustaining Public Support for Children’s Learning and Development

Perhaps one of the most significant accomplishments of Ready Schools was the recent reauthorization of The Children’s Trust, which plays a vital role in Ready Schools as an active planning partner and service provider. The original authorization of The Children’s Trust in 2002 came with a sunset provision requiring that The Children’s Trust be returned for voter approval. The Children’s Trust was up for voter reauthorization in August, and Ready Schools partners worked industriously to ensure its continuation.

The vote on August 26, 2008, was clear: 85 percent of Miami-Dade voters supported The Children’s Trust. Reauthorization of The Children’s Trust ensures the continuation of a key partner in Ready Schools, guarantees continued funding and programming to improve outcomes for children, and demonstrates a high level of public support for children’s development and learning.

Besides The Children’s Trust reauthorization, Ready Schools has generated support for targeted strategies among ECE programs and elementary school staff. For example, Ready Schools held a two-day meeting of ECE program directors and staff to help guide the design of Quality Counts, the ECE program quality rating and improvement system, and to secure their support for this quality improvement strategy. Similarly, Ready Schools met with the principals of the 60 elementary schools that were launching the Lastinger Center’s professional development model and graduate education programs to gain their input and to establish support for these professional development approaches throughout the district.

Reauthorization of The Children’s Trust ensures the continuation of a key partner in Ready Schools, guarantees continued funding and programming to improve outcomes for children, and demonstrates a high level of public support for children’s development and learning.

Supporting High-Quality ECE Learning Environments

Across Miami-Dade County, 1,325 licensed child care providers serve about 94,000 children under the age of 6. These providers operate from 960 child care centers, 237 family day care homes that can serve up to six children from birth through age 5, and 128 large family child care homes that can serve up to 12 children.⁵ A Ready Schools goal is to improve the quality of all centers so that children across the county have access to high-quality early learning. Quality Counts supports the goal of uniting early childhood programs of all types—private ECE centers, family homes, Head Start, and VPK programs—with a common set of standards, record-keeping practices, and supports for quality improvement.

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Quality Counts: A new quality rating and improvement system

In its first year, Ready Schools met its goal of strengthening ECE centers through development and implementation of a multifaceted standards-based quality rating and improvement system.

Quality Counts, launched in January 2008 by The Children’s Trust and the ELC, is a voluntary quality rating and improvement system for child care centers and family child care homes. It was designed through extensive community and statewide input and through a comprehensive review of other quality rating and improvement system investments around the country. By July 2008, more than 150 centers and 35 family child care homes were participating in Quality Counts, and many other ECE programs will participate next year. Quality Counts provides a formal assessment of program quality using clearly defined quality standards, assistance in developing a quality improvement plan, and supports to fulfill the plan.

ECE programs or homes participating in Quality Counts are self-assessed by the program director and formally assessed by an external evaluator in six areas using a five-star scale: the learning environment, staff educational qualifications, adult-child ratios and group sizes, family engagement, program administration, and curriculum. Equally as important as the rating system is the improvement system. Quality Counts surrounds the ECE centers with the technical assistance and supports needed to enhance their quality. Supports include the following:

- **Technical assistance.** Using the information gathered through the self-study and the formal assessment, a Quality Counts specialist supports the program director and staff in developing a quality improvement plan. The plan identifies the support the ECE program needs to meet its short- and long-term quality improvement goals and provides timelines for meeting those goals.
- **Grants.** Grants for materials and equipment to support the successful completion of quality improvement plans are made throughout the year, contingent on the ECE program’s progress in meeting its quality improvement plan.

- **Career assistance and educational scholarships.** Staff in participating ECE programs can receive career assistance and educational scholarships from the Quality Counts Career Center. Career advisors are available to help create career development plans with program staff and to help identify each program’s training needs. The Quality Counts Career Center offers TEACH scholarships to child care practitioners to earn credentials or degrees in early childhood education. The training registry developed by The Children’s Forum maintains lists of staff employed in the early childhood field, their credentials, and approved training activities, thus providing a central location for recording and validating credentials.
- **Wage supplements.** Quality Counts supplements ECE staff wages through the WAGES[®] incentive program. WAGES is designed to increase job stability for teachers, improve child care quality by reducing turnover, and encourage continued education of teachers and assistant teachers in ECE programs and family homes. WAGES gives priority to teachers working at child care programs that participate in Quality Counts. The program provides education-based salary supplements for low- to moderate-wage earners who work with children age birth to 5. Child care practitioners participating in WAGES can increase their supplement award amounts by successfully completing additional education. WAGES in Miami-Dade County is funded by The Children’s Trust and the ELC of Miami-Dade/Monroe.
- **Achievement awards.** Financial achievement awards are given to ECE programs that receive four- and five-star ratings through Quality Counts and that agree to serve as model sites and share their expertise with the community through tours, professional development, or other activities.

Data for Quality Counts are maintained in WELS (Web-based Early Learning System). WELS, designed to be a paperless system, contains extensive data on each program and each staff person, produces comprehensive baseline reports for each program based on the formal assessment results, and helps Quality Counts specialists construct targeted quality improvement plans with the program director. WELS is used to document each investment—of time and funding—in each program and keep track of each program’s needs. WELS also is used to help maximize the support investments. For example, all the approved materials and equipment for grants are in WELS, and these materials are linked to each element of the formal assessment. When the rating report is completed, a “personalized shopping cart” is available for each program with a prioritized list of the materials needed for program improvement. This system helps maximize the effectiveness of allocating grant resources and the efficiency of selecting and processing grants. Already, a growing number of communities and states are interested in using WELS for their own quality improvement work.

In addition to working with private ECE centers and family homes, Quality Counts is partnering with two large publicly funded early childhood systems in the community: VPK and Head Start. These partnerships will enable Quality

Counts to expand the supports it offers. For example, M-DCPS VPK and Head Start will use their existing curriculum specialists and other resources to fund the Quality Counts investments after formal assessments of ECE programs are completed. These partnerships also support the community goal of having high-quality practices and common standards across early childhood programs of all types.

The successful launch of Quality Counts can be attributed to the collaborative nature of Ready Schools. Quality Counts exemplifies the concept that “it takes a village.”

The successful launch of Quality Counts can be attributed to the collaborative nature of Ready Schools. Quality Counts exemplifies the concept that “it takes a village.” Quality Counts is funded by The Children’s Trust, the ELC of Miami-Dade/Monroe, and the ECIF. It is administered by ELC in collaboration with Florida International University, University of Miami Mailman Center for Child Development, Devereux Florida, Family Central, The Children’s Forum, and the United Way Center for Excellence. The partnerships among these organizations and the ability to leverage resources from each made the development and implementation of Quality Counts possible.

Improving ECE learning environments through professional development

Another way to enhance the quality of ECE programs is to provide professional development and curricular resources and training for program directors and teachers. At the core of ECE professional development efforts stands the United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education. Center for Excellence programs are funded not only by the United Way, but also by many Ready Schools partners, including the ELC, the ECIF, and The Children’s Trust. The Center for Excellence, which opened in 2006, serves as a best-practices resource center for educators, child care professionals, and parents. It houses a school for 140 children (ages 6 weeks to 5 years) that is used to demonstrate and test innovative early childhood education curricula and to support the training of child care providers and teachers from ECE programs throughout the community. The Center for Excellence also has a resource library and training center. The center offers many training opportunities for parents, child care providers, teachers, local businesses, researchers, Quality Counts specialists and other technical assistance providers, and others in the community dedicated to advancing quality early childhood education.

At the core of ECE professional development efforts stands the United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education.

Through the Center for Excellence, Ready Schools partners are building the capacity of program directors through an Early Childhood Program Administrators’ Institute. Inaugurated in the 2007–08 school year, the Administrators’ Institute recruited 70 ECE program directors for a year-long management and business leadership training program. Participants complete three college courses, each worth three credits, taught by Miami-Dade College adjunct professors and offered in three locations across the county. All three courses enable participants to satisfy the educational requirements for Florida’s Advanced Level Child Care and Education Administrator Credential. In addition to spending time in class, participants work with a mentor in business management who provides support and guidance throughout the year. Classes,

books, and materials are provided at no cost. The inaugural class of directors graduated with their advanced credential.

Ready Schools partners also are working to expand early childhood professionals' knowledge of and skills in implementing research-based ECE curricula. The ELC promotes developmentally appropriate curricula by sponsoring a curricular resource and materials fair and training in the use of a variety of curricula (e.g., CIRCLE Teachscape, Creative Curriculum, a science curriculum, a physical education curriculum). All subsidized VPK programs—more than 900 in Miami-Dade—may select one or two curriculum packages for free. Packages offered include those approved by the state for VPK programs. In addition, the ELC supports the use of high-quality curricula through its \$3 million federal Early Reading First grant. Finally, district ECE program teachers receive a week-long training on topics that support the content of the High Scope curriculum the programs use.

Ready Schools partners are working to expand early childhood professionals' knowledge of and skills in implementing research-based ECE curricula.

Supporting High-Quality Elementary School Learning Environments

Miami-Dade County Public Schools has 214 elementary schools serving nearly 160,000 students in grades K–5.⁶ The Lastinger Center for Learning, in partnership with M-DCPS, has taken on the primary responsibility for improving teaching and learning in the schools. Urban school reform is no easy task; yet the Lastinger Center and M-DCPS, under the auspices of Ready Schools, can boast the implementation of improvement efforts in 16 elementary schools in a year. Additionally, the Lastinger Center has launched on-site and online graduate education programs to increase teachers' credentials and skills in the classroom.

Job-embedded professional development in elementary schools

To increase quality in elementary schools, Ready Schools has adopted a reform model developed by the Lastinger Center for Learning with collaborative involvement from M-DCPS partners. The Lastinger Center model is to establish professional learning communities (PLCs) of teachers and administrators with the shared goals of improving instructional practice and improving student outcomes. The Lastinger Center website states that

[A PLC] consists of a group of teachers and administrators who agree to work regularly together to produce improved student achievement... [and as] a group... establish and publicly state student learning goals, help each other think about better teaching practices, look closely at curriculum and student work, and identify school-wide issues that affect student achievement.⁷

The Lastinger Center model is to establish professional learning communities of teachers and administrators with the shared goals of improving instructional practice and improving student outcomes.

To foster PLCs in elementary schools, the Lastinger Center and M-DCPS provide a variety of supports. Key among them is a leadership development program. Recognizing that school leadership is distributed rather than focused in a single administrator, the Lastinger Center and M-DCPS provide training for all leaders in a school, including the principal and teacher leaders. In the summer before implementation of PLCs, 5- to 10-member school teams attend a five-day introductory workshop on Ready Schools and the Lastinger Center model.

During the workshop, a Lastinger Center or M-DCPS facilitator works with the school teams to help them understand how Ready Schools might function in their school, familiarize them with the Lastinger Center model, and help them create an action plan for the upcoming school year.

A second three-day session is held immediately before the start of the school year to train two to three teachers from each school to lead implementation of the model. Teachers are trained to facilitate PLC meetings and to use formal protocols to guide the meetings. They also work with an external facilitator to develop plans for their first three PLC meetings. The teachers are supplied with materials and links to online resources for ideas and meeting activities. Training teacher leaders is critical because the Lastinger Center model relies on teacher leaders to organize, plan, and lead PLC meetings. These teacher leaders also play a role in developing the open school culture desired by the Lastinger Center by being the first to share their instructional practices or lessons with their peers in the PLCs.

External facilitators support the PLCs by modeling protocols for teacher leaders, offering ideas for leading meetings, distributing articles for discussion, and providing icebreakers for meetings.

The external facilitator maintains an ongoing relationship with the teacher leaders. External facilitators support the PLCs by modeling protocols for the teacher leaders, offering ideas for leading meetings, distributing articles for discussion, and providing icebreakers for meetings. In addition, external facilitators assist schools with collecting and analyzing the data that guide the PLCs.

A key practice of PLCs is to use data to inform practice. To supplement the academic data from the standardized and teacher-developed assessments, the external facilitators administer a school culture survey and conduct the Instructional Practices Inventory, an assessment of instructional practices and student engagement. The facilitator helps the staff analyze, discuss, and create action steps based on the data.

Teachers in Ready Schools elementary schools can earn a University of Florida master's degree or education specialist degree through an on-site and online program at their schools.

Graduate education programs

Another notable accomplishment of Ready Schools is the development of job-embedded graduate education programs based on the principles of PLCs. Teachers in Ready Schools elementary schools can earn a University of Florida master's degree or education specialist degree through an on-site and online program at their schools. The program, focused on teacher leadership in school reform, emphasizes an inquiry-based approach in which participants engage in a PLC with colleagues from their school who are also enrolled in the degree program. As a cohort, they examine their teaching practices, collect evidence about student learning, and share their learning with their colleagues. The program is free for teachers who commit to stay at their school for the two years of the graduate program and three years thereafter. Cohort 1 of the program had 17 students. Enrollment for Cohort 2 more than doubled, to 36 students.

Strengthening the Transition from ECE Programs to Elementary Schools

Ready Schools partners recognize the importance of making the pivotal transition to kindergarten smooth so that children begin elementary school successfully and feel secure in their new learning environment. This transition depends on children acquiring in their ECE programs the cognitive, communicative and social-emotional skills that they need to succeed in school.

The Miami-Dade County Public School District and other Ready Schools partners recently initiated efforts to improve and coordinate the transition from ECE programs to elementary schools. In spring 2008, the district hosted a visit to the first cohort of 16 Ready Schools elementary schools for ECE children and their parents. Staff members presented activities parents could do with their children over the summer to help prepare them for school and also provided free backpacks filled with books and school supplies for each child. The district has also offered opportunities for ECE program and kindergarten teachers, elementary school principals, and ECE program directors to plan and coordinate their activities to support transition. The district planned a joint professional development training for district and nondistrict pre-K teachers to support the alignment of the Houghton Mifflin curriculum (one of the VPK-approved curricula and the textbook series used by the district) with the High Scope and the Building Early Language and Literacy (BELL) curricula that many of the ECE programs in the county use.

After the M-DCPS VPK programs join Quality Counts, learning communities will be developed with Ready Schools early childhood programs, Head Start programs, and private child care programs in the area. These learning communities will focus first on working together to implement the quality improvement plans and eventually will address curriculum alignment and transition activities.

Increasing Access to Health Care

The Ready Schools vision is that all children have access to high-quality health care to address their physical, behavioral, and/or mental health care needs. Ready Schools believes that only healthy children can benefit fully from their early learning and elementary education settings. Access to health care has improved considerably with the HealthConnect initiative led by The Children's Trust.

Under HealthConnect In Our Schools, a health clinic and team of health professionals consisting of a nurse or nurse practitioner, a social worker, and two health aides are being placed in schools in Miami-Dade. HealthConnect clinics provide students with immunizations; vision, hearing, and dental screenings; eyeglasses; home visits; general health care; and health presentations on hand washing, dental hygiene, and lice prevention. Additionally, HealthConnect nurses and social workers make referrals for more comprehensive medical care or evaluations. Teachers and administrators credit HealthConnect with decreasing

The Miami-Dade County Public School District and other Ready Schools partners recently initiated efforts to improve and coordinate the transition from ECE programs to elementary schools.

Access to health care has improved considerably with the HealthConnect initiative led by The Children's Trust.

absenteeism and increasing instructional time because students with minor health concerns can be treated on campus and return to class rather than being sent home. HealthConnect services were offered in 100 schools in 2007 with 65 more added in 2008, with the goal of extending the services to every school in Miami-Dade County in the years to come.

A part of the HealthConnect initiative is HealthConnect In The Early Years, a voluntary home visitation program for pregnant teens, first-time mothers, and other mothers who request services. The services provided are health education, prevention, and support to improve maternal health, pregnancy outcomes, and child health and development. The third HealthConnect program is HealthConnect In Our Community, through which community health workers and health navigators work with families, neighborhood by neighborhood, to help them identify health care needs and link them to health insurance and appropriate health care providers.

Increasing Early Identification and Intervention

Ready Schools seeks to ensure that children with social, emotional, or cognitive needs are identified early so that they can begin receiving the support services they need to succeed in school. Ready Schools partners have expanded early screening and intervention services through their existing work with subsidized ECE programs, Quality Counts, and a pilot program. These efforts include the following:

Ready Schools partners have expanded early screening and intervention services through their existing work with subsidized ECE programs, Quality Counts, and a pilot program.

- **Screenings of children in subsidized care and Quality Counts.** The Miami-Dade County Division of Child Development Services, with funding from the ELC, conducts pre- and post-assessments of children ages 3 and 4 throughout the county who receive state-subsidized child care services (excluding Head Start children) and at centers participating in the Quality Counts quality rating and improvement system.
- **NEED pilot program for early identification and intervention.** With a grant from the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation, the ELC and the ECIF have expanded the capability of ECE programs to recognize and respond to children with special needs. The pilot program, the Natural Environment Educational Development (NEED) “recognition and response” model, has been successfully introduced in 12 Miami-Dade child care centers. Intervention specialists, known as NEED coaches, work with the ECE programs to implement strategies for early recognition. They train ECE staff in intervention strategies for working with children with disabilities, in how to recognize when to make referrals for additional assessment and support, and in methods of engaging and supporting children’s families in these efforts. The program also offers professional development for pre-K teachers and a learning portfolio/profile for all 4-year-olds with easy-to-use information about assessments, interventions, and family experiences.

Ready Schools partners also connect ECE programs with community resources that screen, assess, and provide early interventions for young children.

- **Early Steps.** Early Steps offers free child developmental assessments for children in Miami-Dade County between birth and age 3 who a doctor, parent, or caregiver suspects may have a developmental delay or disability. Early Steps has two locations in Miami-Dade County: the University of Miami Mailman Center for Child Development Early Steps in north Miami-Dade County and Miami Children’s Hospital Early Steps in south Miami-Dade County. This program is often referred to as the Infant and Toddler Early Intervention Program or Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Early Steps is monitored by Children’s Medical Services of the Florida Department of Health.
- **The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System- (FDLRS)- South.** FDLRS-South arranges for free evaluations for children ages 3 to 5 who do not attend Miami-Dade Public Schools and who a doctor, parent, or caregiver suspects have a developmental delay or disability. FDLRS-South assists families in preparing referral packets and sending the packets to the Regional Center Prekindergarten Diagnostic Team closest to the families’ home. The Child Find program operated by FDLRS-South is mandated under Part B of IDEA.
- Students already enrolled in a Miami-Dade County Public Schools program are evaluated in their school or in their region.

Ready Schools partners connect ECE programs with community resources that screen, assess, and provide early interventions for young children.

Increasing Parent Engagement

One of the goals of Ready Schools is to provide parents with more opportunities to be involved in their children’s ECE programs and elementary schools, to encourage parents to continue their children’s learning at home, and to teach parents skills to support them in these roles. Ready Schools partners build parenting skills, increase positive family literacy practices, and connect parents with other parents and early childhood expertise through ECE programs and community resource centers through a variety of programs.

- **Family literacy programs.** The Miami-Dade Family Learning Partnership, a coalition of local organizations that views parents as their children’s first and most important teachers, offers family and adult literacy programs and family support services. The Family Learning Partnership operates family literacy programs that distribute books and promote the importance of literacy to parents (including Family of Readers and Reach Out and Read Miami).
- **Institute for Child Family Health (ICFH) parent workshops for ECE programs.** ICFH offers parent workshops in ECE programs designed to improve the well-being of families facing complex medical, academic, or mental health challenges. ICFH offers parenting courses that help these families learn effective ways of caring for their children to avoid abuse

Ready Schools partners build parenting skills, increase positive family literacy practices, and connect parents with other parents and early childhood expertise through ECE programs and community resource centers.

or neglect and to promote a healthy attachment relationship between parent and child.

- **Parent to Parent services for parents of children with special needs.** Parent to Parent of Miami, Inc., is a community parent resource center that delivers information, educational training, and support for families whose members include children or adults with disabilities and/or special needs. Most Parent to Parent of Miami board and staff members are parents and professionals who have a family member with a disability. Services are provided in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole.
- **Parent Academy workshops and school family liaisons in elementary schools.** The Miami-Dade Public Schools Parent Academy trains parents through classes held at schools throughout the county as well as online. Topics include effective discipline, nutrition, financial management and child development. Ready Schools plans to pay stipends to family liaisons working at Title I schools or to lead kindergarten teachers at non-Title I schools to support additional Parent Academy workshops and develop learning communities between ECE program and kindergarten teaching staff members.

Using Data for Planning and Program Refinement

Ready Schools partners are engaging in data collection and evaluation to inform their planning and to refine the programs and activities they already fund.

Ready Schools partners are engaging in data collection and evaluation to inform their planning and to refine the programs and activities they already fund. Ready Schools partners, for example, are evaluating specific components of the Ready Schools model. The ELC has funded a study to examine longitudinal trends over the last three years in results from the literacy assessments and social-emotional development assessments conducted with more than 8,000 children each year. In addition to many evaluations of its funded programs, The Children’s Trust has conducted a community needs assessment that includes educational and other population indicators of child well-being and works with a vendor to keep the data current. The Children’s Trust supplemented this information by funding a countywide household telephone survey. The Children’s Trust also is participating in the National Neighborhood Indicators Project (NNIP), which involves 25 cities across the country and is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. NNIP supports communities in identifying and tracking local community indicators associated with school readiness. The goal is to make data broadly accessible in a community (rather than accessible only to a single agency) so that everyone in the community is informed and can act on that knowledge.

In addition, Ready Schools partners hired SRI International to conduct a three-year evaluation of how Ready Schools is changing early care, education, health, and social service systems to help children be more successful in school. This evaluation also will examine changes in the quality of learning environments and educational outcomes as Ready Schools expands its implementation. The information on strategies and outcomes produced by the evaluation will be critical to the scaling up of Ready Schools and to the national

conversation on how best to promote children's school readiness and long-term academic success.

Scaling Up Ready Schools Components

Ready Schools has been successful in scaling up several programs. Launched in spring 2008, Quality Counts is the most prominent means for improving the quality of ECE programs across Miami-Dade County. The goal was to enroll 200 centers and 35 family child care homes in Quality Counts in Year 1. Program leaders were pleased when the initial call for applications was met with a tremendous response: within three weeks, Quality Counts received more than 200 applications.

By July 2008, more than 150 centers and 35 family child care homes were participating in Quality Counts, and aggressive expansion is planned. In fall 2008, early childhood programs at elementary schools participating in Ready Schools began participating in Quality Counts, accounting for 90 VPK classrooms at 75 schools. More than 85 Head Start programs also entered Quality Counts in fall 2008.

Ready Schools also met its ambitious goal of scaling up the Lastinger Center model for improvement from 16 to 76 elementary schools by summer 2008. The goal is to involve all the district's 230 elementary schools by the end of 2011.

Finally, HealthConnect was operating in 100 schools in 2007 with plans to expand by 50% in the fall of 2008. HealthConnect is aimed toward operating in all district schools in the years to come.

Ready Schools has been successful in scaling up several programs.

LOOKING FORWARD



Ready Schools has made significant progress, even at this early implementation stage, demonstrating the potential for changing academic and life outcomes for children.

Ready Schools is a complex effort to create a coordinated and integrated system of supports to increase the probability that children will attain academic and life success. Ready Schools recognizes that creating high-quality early learning environments for young children requires the participation of many diverse players who are committed to pursuing the difficult tasks at hand and to learning about the process while actively engaged in it. Ready Schools has made significant progress, even at this early implementation stage, demonstrating the potential for changing academic and life outcomes for children. As a systems change effort, however, Ready Schools faces challenges. Attending to these challenges in planning for next year and beyond will support Ready Schools in achieving its full vision.

Develop a Simplified Message to Describe Ready Schools

Even though Ready Schools partners share a set of goals and activities, the ways they are connected and the ways they coordinate their services need to be better explained to others.

Ready Schools is not an ordinary reform effort because it is so comprehensive and multifaceted. Although innovation is what makes Ready Schools so promising, it is also what makes Ready Schools difficult for traditional reformers and the general public to understand. Even people actively involved in it provide different definitions of Ready Schools. Some say Ready Schools is an effort to change the entire early childhood system, whereas others say it pertains only to the elementary schools. Some see it as spanning ECE and elementary schools but not including activities related to health or social services.

Even though Ready Schools partners share a set of goals and activities, the ways they are connected and the ways they coordinate their services need to be better explained to others. Ready Schools partners, ECE program staff, elementary school staff, and the public would benefit from a clearer description of how Ready Schools extends beyond schools and how the collaboration of its partners is expected to improve children's health, social and educational outcomes. A more widely shared vision for Ready Schools will strengthen trust and understanding across agencies, ECE centers, schools and the public.

Ready Schools partners can help build stronger connections among ECE programs and schools to support children's successful transitions to elementary schools.

Support Children's Transition from ECE Centers to Elementary Schools

Ready Schools has forged strong connections among the lead agencies as demonstrated by its joint planning and joint funding efforts. But on the ground, the ECE centers and schools are still functioning largely as silos. Ready Schools partners can help build stronger connections among ECE programs and schools to support children's successful transitions to elementary school.

Some transition activities are under way, but they are not widespread. ECE program directors report that they help prepare children for elementary school by introducing them to kindergarten concepts and instructional activities, orienting parents and students to kindergarten expectations, enlisting a liaison to assist children and families, meeting with parents to discuss how they can help, and meeting with elementary school staff. At only a few of the 10 ECE programs visited, however, were these activities mentioned. Similarly, a few elementary schools promote successful transition by holding orientation meetings with parents before children start school and coordinating with local ECE programs on transition, but again such activities are rare. Staff at both ECE programs and elementary schools indicated that supporting children’s transition between pre-K programs and elementary schools needs more attention. It makes sense for Ready Schools to concentrate on quality learning environments before addressing the transition between these environments. But as Quality Counts takes hold and the Lastinger Center model comes to fruition in elementary schools, the next logical area for attention is the gap that still exists between the two levels.

Address Gaps and Barriers

Ready Schools aims to address the full spectrum of children’s needs. Initial efforts have been directed to specific aspects of learning environments and access to health care. As work in these areas becomes more institutionalized, Ready Schools should inventory its programs to identify gaps in services and strategically determine which areas to work on next.

For example, at the 10 ECE centers visited, program directors and staff frequently expressed concern about the lack of comprehensive medical and dental insurance among their programs’ children and families. Families’ lack of insurance results in unresolved dental health issues, use of emergency rooms as the primary source of health care, and a general lack of regular and preventive medical and dental care. To address their students’ health and dental needs, several ECE programs have built relationships with local community agencies that provide services at low or no cost. ECE programs funded by Head Start appear better able to connect children and families with health services, given that comprehensive wraparound care has long been part of the program’s philosophy. In general, however, most ECE programs do not have arrangements for health and dental screenings or support for obtaining health insurance.

Similarly, gaps still exist in identifying children with special needs early. Children’s access to developmental screenings and services differ by ECE program, by whether the child is in subsidized care, and by the child’s age. Recognizing this as a service gap, Ready Schools could help in the strategic planning for expanding the identification of special needs. Further, there may be other areas for which services are not yet provided. An annual inventory and prioritization process will help Ready Schools maintain focus and allocate resources effectively, while keeping the larger vision in mind.

ECE program directors and staff frequently expressed concern about the lack of comprehensive medical and dental insurance among their programs’ children and families.

Children’s access to developmental screenings and services differ by ECE program, by whether the child is in subsidized care, and by a child’s age.

Almost every ECE program director interviewed cited the inability of ECE programs to provide health insurance as a barrier to staff retention.

Some factors are beyond the purview of Ready Schools but affect its success. For example, Ready Schools has put considerable effort into increasing the skills and knowledge of ECE teachers through professional development and scholarships for degree programs. When ECE teachers complete their degrees, however, they often move to better paying jobs or jobs that provide them with health insurance (e.g., jobs with the school district). Almost every ECE program director interviewed cited the inability of ECE programs to provide health insurance as a barrier to staff retention. Arranging for health insurance for ECE providers is not a goal of Ready Schools, but it may be necessary to reach other goals. Ready Schools would benefit from identifying external factors that affect program goals and determine whether they can be addressed. For example, could ECE providers get health insurance through Quality Counts? If not, are there ways Ready Schools could assist ECE programs in providing health insurance? The success of Ready Schools may hinge on factors that have not even been considered yet.

Monitor Fidelity While Scaling Up

As Ready Schools continues to grow, it will be important to monitor the fidelity of newly participating ECE centers and schools and those that joined in prior years.

Ready Schools has ambitious plans for scaling up several programs, particularly those for developing high-quality learning environments at the early childhood and the elementary school levels. Over the next three years, Ready Schools plans to triple the number of ECE programs in Quality Counts, from 200 to 600, which will represent more than 65% of licensed centers in Miami-Dade County. Further, Ready Schools extended the Lastinger Center model from 16 to 76 elementary schools in the summer of 2008 and ultimately plans to extend the model to the district's 230 elementary schools. Increasing participation so rapidly, however, can pose challenges. Not only are more financial resources required for materials, stipends, training and other direct expenses, but increased staff capacity also is needed (e.g., to conduct the program assessments for Quality Counts and to provide external facilitation in the Lastinger Center schools).

As Ready Schools continues to grow, it will be important to monitor the fidelity of newly participating ECE centers and schools and those that joined in prior years. All the Ready Schools efforts reflect research-based practices. Programs such as the Lastinger Center model might prove ineffective if they are not implemented as designed; for example, if they are watered down because of insufficient resources or support personnel. Further, bringing in new ECE centers or elementary schools should not come at the expense of the early participants, which may still need monitoring and support. Each ECE center and elementary school represents different populations with different needs. Scaling up is never easy and always requires careful attention.

Conclusion

In only a year, Ready Schools partners have made significant progress toward improving the systems that contribute to school readiness and success—early care, education, health and family support systems—in Miami-Dade County. They have launched strategic program components that comprehensively address children’s learning and development, and they continue to develop services to fill important gaps. The Ready Schools partners have built strong connections with each other that allow for authentic collaboration. They also have generated resources and developed data-tracking tools to support the effective delivery of services. In addition, the partners have engendered enthusiasm for and high levels of participation in their new efforts. As Ready Schools continues to add programs and include more ECE centers and schools, it offers the promise of real systems change capable of increasing the probability of children’s attaining academic and life success.

Ready Schools offers the promise of real systems change capable of increasing the probability of children’s attaining academic and life success.

ENDNOTES



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APPENDIX: STUDY METHOD



This report presents the findings from the first year of a three-year evaluation of Ready Schools that SRI International (SRI) is conducting. The report documents the Ready Schools early implementation—what was planned, what programs have been implemented, and how those programs have been organized and administered across the partner organizations and in the ECE programs and schools.

System-Level Case Study

To collect data for the evaluation, SRI conducted a system-level case study. In February 2008, SRI researchers interviewed 14 individuals representing seven Ready Schools partner organizations to understand the systems change efforts under way. The interviews focused on the core missions of each organization, each organization's history with Ready Schools, the activities and services the organization provides for children and families, program quality improvement efforts, and coordination and linkages with other organizations. The interviews also addressed enabling factors that support the Ready Schools vision and the challenges each organization has encountered in implementing the vision.

SRI also interviewed five administrators from the Miami-Dade County Public School District, asking about the functions and goals of the various district departments and how they relate to Ready Schools; key district priorities and strategies; district efforts to improve schools' teaching quality and learning environments; district policies and practices that support or impede Ready Schools efforts; coordination and linkages among district departments and with outside organizations; and successes achieved and challenges encountered in implementing Ready Schools.

Elementary School Case Studies

During site visits to five elementary schools, SRI researchers interviewed the principal and a sample of four to six teachers involved in Ready Schools efforts. Interviews addressed the school context (e.g., student demographics, teacher characteristics, and school practices regarding joint planning, parent involvement, and use of data); the school's participation in Ready Schools activities; connections with ECE programs; the influence of Ready Schools on the school; changes in available district support and policies; supports for and challenges to implementing Ready Schools components; and effects on teachers, the learning environment, and students. Researchers also interviewed each school's external facilitator to understand that role and to obtain the facilitators' perspectives on how the schools have engaged in Ready Schools and the changes that have occurred as a result.

The schools visited represent the range of schools participating in the early implementation of Ready Schools, as well as different geographical regions of Miami-Dade County. Student enrollment in the schools varied from about 340 to more than 1,200 students. In four of the five schools visited, more than three-quarters of the students received free or reduced-price lunches, an indication of poverty, with participation across the five schools ranging from 36% to 96%. The schools primarily serve minority populations, with four of the five schools having more than 95% minority student populations.

The schools had an average of 17% of teachers in their first year of teaching—from one school with 12% of teachers in this category to another school with 31%. Despite the high percentage of teachers new to teaching, the teachers in the schools we visited averaged 13 years of experience, ranging from an average of 9 years at one school to 15 years at another. In terms of educational attainment, 46% of teachers at the schools held advanced degrees.

ECE Center Case Studies

SRI also collected data in site visits to 10 ECE programs. SRI researchers interviewed the program director and a sample of teachers about the program and community context; the program's participation in Ready Schools activities; connections with elementary schools; Ready Schools' influence on the program; supports for and challenges to implementing Ready Schools components; and effects on teachers, the learning environment, and students of Ready Schools.

Like the elementary schools, the 10 ECE programs visited represent the variety of ECE programs involved in Ready Schools as well as different geographical regions of Miami-Dade County. Student enrollment ranged from 10 to more than 200 students, with the number of staff (e.g., directors, teachers, assistant teachers) ranging from 3 to 60. The ECE programs included Head Start, private large and medium-size centers, and one home-based program. All but one of the ECE programs served children primarily from low-income families that received child care subsidies from the ELC or Head Start or were enrolled in free Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK). The ethnicity of the children the ECE programs served varied by center, reflecting the community where the program was located; generally, however, the programs served Hispanic children whose families were of various nationalities, Haitian children, and a smaller number of African American and non-Hispanic white children. Many students who enter these ECE programs do not speak English. All the centers had bilingual staff who spoke the languages of the children they served. Finally, eight of the ECE programs visited served children with special needs, but the percentage of those children served cover a wide range—from 3% to 70% of the students enrolled.

Few ECE teachers held a bachelor's degree. The majority had an A.A. degree or less, although many were working on their A.A. or B.A. degrees. ECE program staff had a range of 1 year to 34 years of experience, but most of the ECE teaching staff interviewed had 6 to 10 years of experience. Most of the program directors had more than 15 years of experience. The directors indicated that annual turnover ranged from 5% to 10% of their teaching staff.

Most of the ECE programs visited had received accreditation. Four were accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and three by Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment. The remaining three programs were working toward accreditation. Most of the ECE programs also used an evidence-based curriculum. Four programs used the High Scope curriculum or a modification of it, and two used Creative Curriculum. The other three programs used thematic curricula they developed.