



Ready Schools Miami: A Systems Change Effort to Improve Children's Outcomes



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Ready Schools is a radical systems change effort to improve the academic, health, and social outcomes of historically underserved children in one of this country's largest and most diverse communities, Miami-Dade County. Ready Schools is fostering collaboration, coordination, and leveraging of resources among Miami-Dade County's health, social service, early childhood, public school, and higher education agencies to create systems that effectively support children.

Major Programmatic Accomplishments

- To improve the quality of early childhood care and education programs, Ready Schools partners developed a comprehensive quality rating and improvement system and a set of related programs, including degree-granting programs, to improve the knowledge and skills of program directors and providers and to promote evidence-based curricula.
- The Lastinger Center for Learning, one of the Ready School partners, developed a new model of teacher professional development that is embedded in the real work of schools and provides opportunities for teachers to learn from one another. Part of this model is a reinvention of the education graduate degree, which is offered on-site and online and creates a community of learners within schools. On awarding it a highly competitive Investing in Innovation grant, the U.S. Department of Education identified the model as one of the most promising educational initiatives in the country.
- Ready Schools partners have improved children's access to health care through school-based health suites, home visiting, health insurance enrollment, electronic medical files, and soon through virtual clinics.

Major Systemic Accomplishments

- Ready Schools partners mobilized the community to reauthorize The Children's Trust, ensuring over \$100 million in funding a year for services and programs aimed at children.
- Ready Schools partners are promoting racial equity through leadership, data analysis, and program refinement to ensure that the most vulnerable children receive the services they need to be successful.
- Ready Schools partners are influencing state policies for children through their involvement in The Children's Movement, which developed a legislative agenda and is mobilizing public support for child-friendly policies, and through their involvement in developing a statewide framework for decision-making about early childhood policies and investments.

Keys to Ready Schools' Success

- Ready Schools partners share a common goal and work together to plan, implement, and refine programs. By purposefully linking efforts, Ready Schools partners were able to create an effective, coordinated, and comprehensive set of programs that they could not have done independently.
- By generating, connecting, and leveraging resources, Ready Schools partners have substantially grown the investments they received and, through the success of these programs, engendered ongoing support for their sustainability.

Executive Summary



Ready Schools Miami (Ready Schools)—a radical systems change effort to improve the well-being and educational attainment of children in Miami-Dade—is working to ensure that all children living in Miami-Dade County have the range of early supports they need for a promising future. Launched in 2007 by the University of Florida’s Lastinger Center for Learning and The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation with funding by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Ready Schools fosters collaborations among Florida’s social service agencies, community organizations, health centers, early childhood education organizations, public school systems, and universities to provide children and their families with the holistic support needed to improve their outcomes.

Ready Schools approaches early learning, which spans from birth through the end of elementary school, with a systems perspective. Since its inception, Ready Schools has been diligently working to improve the systems in Miami-Dade that contribute to school readiness and success—early care, education, health, and family support. Ready Schools partners work at many levels to support improved outcomes for children: they develop innovative programming, collaborate and coordinate across agencies, and develop and support local and state policies.

Since its inception, Ready Schools has been diligently working to improve the systems in Miami-Dade that contribute to school readiness and success—early care, education, health, and family support.

The key accomplishments of Ready Schools are described below.

Early Care and Education

To increase the quality of early childhood care and education, Ready Schools partners have developed an array of strategies that promote a common set of program standards through the local quality rating improvement system, effective program administration, a better trained early care and education work force, effective use of curriculum, increased use of appropriate learning materials, and the establishment of engaging learning environments. Together, these programs meet the needs of administrators, teachers, parents, and children.

Ready Schools partners successfully launched and implemented Quality Counts, a voluntary standards-based quality rating and improvement system that is currently serving more than one-quarter of early care and education programs in Miami-Dade, approximately 28,500 children ages birth to 5, and nearly 4,000 teachers. Data show that most programs in Quality Counts have improved in their quality.





- Ready Schools partners have improved the management skills of 280 early care and education program directors who completed the Early Childhood Program Administrator's Institute.
- Ready Schools partners advanced the skills and knowledge of early care and education program directors and providers through higher education opportunities. More than 600 providers earned an early childhood credential, 375 providers completed the Great Beginnings program (Florida Child Care Professional Certificate), about 150 providers completed an A.S. degree in early childhood, and 7 early education teachers participated in the University of Florida's job-embedded graduate degree program.
- Ready Schools partners implemented the Curriculum Learning Communities project, which provided intensive training on evidence-based curriculum for 37 centers, 74 teachers, and 22 community members in its first year and 60 centers involving 120 teachers in its second year.
- Two early learning programs—The United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education and the district's new Primary Learning Center—have served as best practices resource centers for educators, child care professionals, and families.



Transition from Early Care and Education to Kindergarten

Ready Schools partners developed tools and resources to improve children's transition from early care and education programs to elementary education.

- Ready Schools partners developed a set of strategies to support successful transition to kindergarten that can be used by parents, teachers in early childhood programs, and teachers in elementary schools; this information will be housed on the Ready Schools website and promoted across Ready Schools partners.
- Ready Schools partners strengthened connections between elementary schools and the early childhood and preschool programs in their areas by having principals invite representatives of local early care and education programs to meet at their schools.

Ready Schools partners have developed a new model of teacher professional development that is embedded in the real work of schools and that provides opportunities for teachers to learn from one another.



Teaching and Learning in Elementary Schools

Ready Schools partners have developed a new model of teacher professional development that is embedded in the real work of schools and that provides opportunities for teachers to learn from one another. They have reinvented the education graduate degree and supported professional learning communities that employ an inquiry process. Through these new models, Ready Schools seeks to improve not just individual teacher practice, but also whole schools by creating a community of learners dedicated to further strengthening practice in the service of student learning and improving school culture.

- The Lastinger Center developed and then scaled up its job-embedded on-site and online graduate program, the Teacher Leadership for School Improvement program, to 110 teachers (93 current students and 17 graduates). The graduate program was identified as one of the most promising educational initiatives in the country by the U.S. Department of Education, which awarded the Ready Schools partners one of the highly competitive Investing in Innovation (i3) grants to expand and study the program.

The job-embedded graduate program was identified as one of the most promising educational initiatives in the country by the U.S. Department of Education.

- In 2009–10, principals and teachers in all 25 partner schools received coaching from Lastinger Learning Facilitators and training on professional learning communities, in which teachers work together to improve student learning. Over 100 teachers attended an introductory course on facilitating professional learning communities, and 144 participated in the Facilitator Learning Community to sharpen their facilitation skills.
- In 2009–10, 164 teachers participated in the Teacher Fellows Program, through which they conducted an inquiry on a data-driven question that is relevant to teacher practice and student learning.
- Ready Schools improved principals' leadership effectiveness by providing professional development to 116 principals through the Principal Best Practice Symposium and to the principals of all 25 partner schools through the Principal Fellows Program.
- More than 400 elementary and early care and education teachers, school administrators, and Community Involvement Specialists shared their inquiry experiences and findings at the 2010 Ready Schools Learning Showcase.
- Ready Schools partners supported data-driven decision-making by helping schools to collect, analyze, and interpret data from the School Culture Survey and Instructional Practices Inventory. They also convened a summer Leadership Institute for the 25 Ready School partner school teams during which the teams developed improvement plans based on those data.



Other Essential Services

Ready Schools aims to address the full spectrum of children's needs through other essential services that focus on health, developmental screenings, and family engagement. Ready Schools partners have improved children's access to health care through school-based health suites, home visiting, health insurance enrollment, electronic medical files, and soon through virtual clinics. Through developmental screenings in early care and education programs, Ready Schools partners are identifying children at risk of learning delays or other disabilities and connecting them to appropriate services. Further, Ready Schools partners are strengthening the capacity of Miami-Dade's elementary schools and early care and education programs to engage parents in their children's learning.

- Through HealthConnect, led by The Children's Trust in collaboration with the Miami-Dade County Health Department and Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 7,539 women have received voluntary home visits, more than 97,000 students received 500,000 services through HealthConnect health suites placed in schools, and 125,236 children and parents have received health insurance and provider referrals from HealthConnect community health workers.
- More than 18,000 children ages 3 and 4 throughout Miami-Dade County received developmental screenings in the past year, and those identified as being at risk of having a learning delay or disability were referred for further assessment to a local agency at no charge.
- Ready Schools partners provided training for more than 90 Community Involvement Specialists who work with families in Title I schools throughout the district and additional training for 15 Community Involvement Specialists who have been trained to facilitate learning communities with their peers.
- Ready Schools partners supported parent engagement through family literacy and book distribution programs in more than 385 early care and education programs. They also developed materials for parents on how to select high-quality early care and education programs.

Ready Schools partners have improved children's access to health care through school-based health suites, home visiting, health insurance enrollment, electronic medical files, and soon through virtual clinics.

Systems Change

Ready Schools is a complex and comprehensive reform effort. By fostering collaborations among Florida's education, health, and social service agencies, Ready Schools is creating a visionary system that 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. Ready Schools partners have mobilized the Miami-Dade community to fund and support early learning through the reauthorization of The Miami-Dade Children's Trust and are now mobilizing people throughout the state of Florida to support children's issues

through The Children's Movement. Further, Ready Schools partners have institutionalized many of their programmatic endeavors, growing projects developed from seed money into self-sustaining enterprises.

- **Collaborating on Strategic Planning.** Ready Schools' partner organizations have come together to successfully plan, develop, and provide a comprehensive array of programs. The effectiveness of the partnership can be attributed to three factors: alignment of organizational priorities and commitment to Ready Schools, ongoing communication, and formal cross-organizational associations.
- **Partnering to Create Strong and Comprehensive Programs.** Ready Schools partners are purposefully linking efforts to create a more integrated system. They are ensuring that the early care and education programs and elementary schools being served receive the full array of Ready Schools supports, they are using their successful peer facilitation professional development model across programs, and they are working together to design and implement programs to bring the best expertise to the table and maximize every program's impact.



Ready Schools partners have institutionalized many of their programmatic endeavors, growing projects developed from seed money into self-sustaining enterprises.

- **Promoting Racial Equity Through Leadership, Data Analysis, and Program Refinement.** Ready Schools partners are actively putting racial equity at the center of their efforts. Ready Schools hosted a 3-day retreat in December 2009 for about 40 community leaders to determine how to redirect their collective resources to address the racial disparities in the community. Ready Schools leaders are examining disaggregated data to determine how different population subgroups are faring on a variety of outcomes, evaluating their work against these outcomes, and adjusting programs and developing new ones to ameliorate the evident disparities.

Ready Schools partners are actively putting racial equity at the center of their efforts.

- **Generating, Connecting, and Leveraging Resources.** Ready Schools is generating, connecting, and leveraging hundreds of millions of dollars in support for an early learning system. Ready Schools partners also have found ways to grow and sustain the investments they received so that each program they developed became self-sustaining. Support for Ready Schools was maintained even though overall resources across the partner



organizations were decreasing because of the economic recession. Furthermore, several organizations dedicated new dollars to Ready Schools programs, and partner organizations are beginning to assume the financial responsibility for sustaining the work. In addition, Ready Schools partners continued to generate new funding to support children's learning and development, such as the reauthorization of The Children's Trust which provides over \$100 million a year, the directing of \$20 million of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds to the development of an early childhood infrastructure throughout the state, and the winning of an Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

- **Generating and Sustaining Public Support for Children's Learning and Development.** Ready Schools partners put a premium on garnering the support needed to sustain and expand their shared goals countywide, statewide, and beyond. Ready Schools partners can take credit for the reauthorization of The Children's Trust, which guarantees continued funding and programming to improve outcomes for children. Ready Schools partners are working to influence support for children's issues statewide with the development of a legislative agenda and mobilization for its support through The Florida Children's Movement. Ready Schools funded the facilitation of state planning sessions, which led to the development of a statewide framework for decision-making about early childhood policies and resource allocation.
- **Expanding Ready Schools Beyond Miami.** Ready Schools has successfully expanded its teacher development programs within Miami and across Florida and disseminated program components and ideas to other states. The Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund grant will ensure the expansion of the graduate degree program within Miami. Districts across Florida have adopted the Lastinger Center model, and its job-embedded graduate program has been recommended for the use of Title I funding. Ready Schools also has shared the Web-based Early Learning System it uses to house Quality Counts data with other states. Finally, the Lastinger Center has been facilitating work similar to Ready Schools in Hawai'i, Mississippi, and Washington State.



Ready Schools is generating, connecting, and leveraging hundreds of millions of dollars in support for an early learning system.

In summary, Ready Schools partners have made significant progress in creating a coordinated and integrated system of supports to increase the probability that children will attain academic and life success in Miami-Dade. Ready Schools partners have launched and expanded strategic program components that comprehensively address the needs of children for high-quality early care, education, health, and family engagement. They have built strong connections with each other that foster authentic collaboration. They have successfully leveraged existing funds and secured new funds to make their shared mission a reality. They have generated public support and political will to sustain this work. In addition, the partners have successfully scaled their programs throughout Miami-Dade and have begun to export them throughout the state and beyond. By having all Ready Schools partners look at their own work and the well-being of their community through a racial equity lens, Ready Schools partners are working to ensure that *all* children benefit from the innovative system they have developed.

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I. Introduction



The needs of Miami-Dade's children have been well documented:

- Nearly one in five children in Miami-Dade is living below the poverty level.
- One-quarter of children lack health insurance.
- One-third of entering kindergarteners lack the skills necessary for school success.
- Close to half of elementary students and more than two-thirds of high school students are not reading at grade level.¹

It is easy to imagine how this can happen. Consider the case of José. Living in poverty, José's parents sent him to one of the few early care and education centers they could afford. Although the center personnel were dedicated to the children they served, they lacked training in child development and appropriate curriculum for their young charges. The center had few books, and other toys and materials were worn with age. José was fortunate enough to be screened for development disabilities, but when he was flagged for further assessment, his parents had difficulty getting an appropriate referral. At the age of 5, José entered kindergarten already behind, lacking even basic knowledge of letter sounds. His elementary school teachers, like his preschool teachers, did not have the pedagogical training to address José's particular needs, and he fell further and further behind grade level. His academic weaknesses were compounded with other challenges. José had no regular health care, so his poor eyesight was not diagnosed and he went without glasses for years. Lacking a solid foundation, José did not have a promising future.

Ready Schools Miami (Ready Schools)—a radical systems change effort to improve the well-being and educational attainment of children in Miami-Dade—is working to ensure that José and children like him have the range of early supports they need for a promising future. Through Ready Schools' efforts, the story can now be much different for José. Living in poverty, José's parents send him to one of the few early care and education centers they can afford. However, through Ready Schools efforts personnel at this center are now well trained and able to offer an enriching, developmentally appropriate curriculum. The center is full of books and other materials to provide José a well-rounded experience. When José is screened for developmental disabilities and identified for further assessment, he now receives a referral to a regional center and gets the services he needs to keep him on an upward trajectory. With a solid foundation, José can now enter elementary school at age 5 knowing his initial letter sounds. Like his prekindergarten teachers, through Ready Schools, his elementary school teachers have been well trained and they now work collaboratively to determine the best pedagogical approaches to





meet all their students' needs. José has his vision screened at the on-site health clinic and after receiving a free pair of glasses, learning to read becomes easier for him. As José advances through school, he continues to achieve at grade level, and his future is very promising.

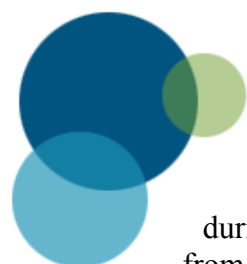
By promoting children's access to high-quality learning environments and to essential health and developmental screening and support services, Ready Schools aims to improve children's physical, cognitive, and social development; school readiness; and later academic and social adjustment outcomes.

Ready Schools advances a systems perspective about early learning, from birth through the end of elementary school. Launched in 2007 by the University of Florida's Lastinger Center for Learning and The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation with funding by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Ready Schools fosters collaborations among Florida's social service agencies, community organizations, health centers, early childhood education organizations, public school systems, and universities to provide children and their families with the holistic support needed to improve their outcomes. By promoting children's access to high-quality learning environments and to essential health and developmental screening and support services, Ready Schools aims to improve children's physical, cognitive, and social development; school readiness; and later academic and social adjustment outcomes.

This report documents the achievements of Ready Schools since its inception 3 years ago. It identifies how the myriad educational, social service, and health care agencies supporting youth in Miami-Dade have built partnerships and worked together to better support children's well-being and learning, detailing the many interventions developed as part of a system of supports. A description of the study methodology is appended.



II. Understanding Ready Schools



The overall objective of Ready Schools is to improve 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 kindergarten readiness. These developmental competencies are a child's foundation for achieving academic proficiency during the elementary years. Ready Schools works to make the pivotal transition from pre-K to kindergarten smooth so that children begin school experiencing success and feeling secure in their learning environments. For school-age children, Ready Schools aims to maintain their healthy development, promote their academic achievement, and minimize their need to repeat a year of school.

To accomplish its goals, Ready Schools is drawing on the expertise and resources of a broad spectrum of organizations. Key among the Ready Schools partners are the following:

The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation	One of the developers and grant recipients of Ready Schools, The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation works on a variety of projects to provide high-quality education, health, and social and emotional services for 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	The largest school district in Florida and the fourth largest school system in the country, Miami-Dade County Public Schools serves over 163,000 children at 255 elementary and K–8 schools. More than 60% of children in the district qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and over 70% speak a language other than English at home.
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.
Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe	The Early Learning Coalition is a nonprofit organization with the mission of promoting early education for children from birth through age 5. The Early Learning Coalition oversees the Voluntary Prekindergarten program 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. The Early Learning Coalition also provides developmental screenings for all children in the School Readiness Program and inclusion services for children from birth to age 5 with disabilities.
The United Way of Miami-Dade	The United Way invests in local health and human service programs and has made early education one of its major causes. The United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education was designed to elevate the quality of early care and education by providing a resource library and training center, a business learning center, a research center, and a demonstration school.
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.



Together, these organizations are collaborating systemically to realize the goals of Ready Schools. In the system envisioned by Ready Schools, child outcomes are accomplished through the interaction of four factors: high-quality learning environments, access to health care, early identification of and intervention for special needs, and family engagement opportunities (Exhibit 1). Using a set of specific strategies and activities, Ready Schools is working to strengthen the accessibility and quality of each factor. For example, Ready Schools posits that the quality of early care and education programs can be improved through a comprehensive quality rating and improvement system with components for assessment, technical assistance, resources, and training. Teacher quality in schools—and thus the learning environment for students—can be improved through job-embedded professional development and graduate education programs. 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 in need of health and developmental services to receive them early, before health and developmental issues interfere with their learning. Finally, increasing families’ engagement in their children’s learning will promote better learning at school and at home.

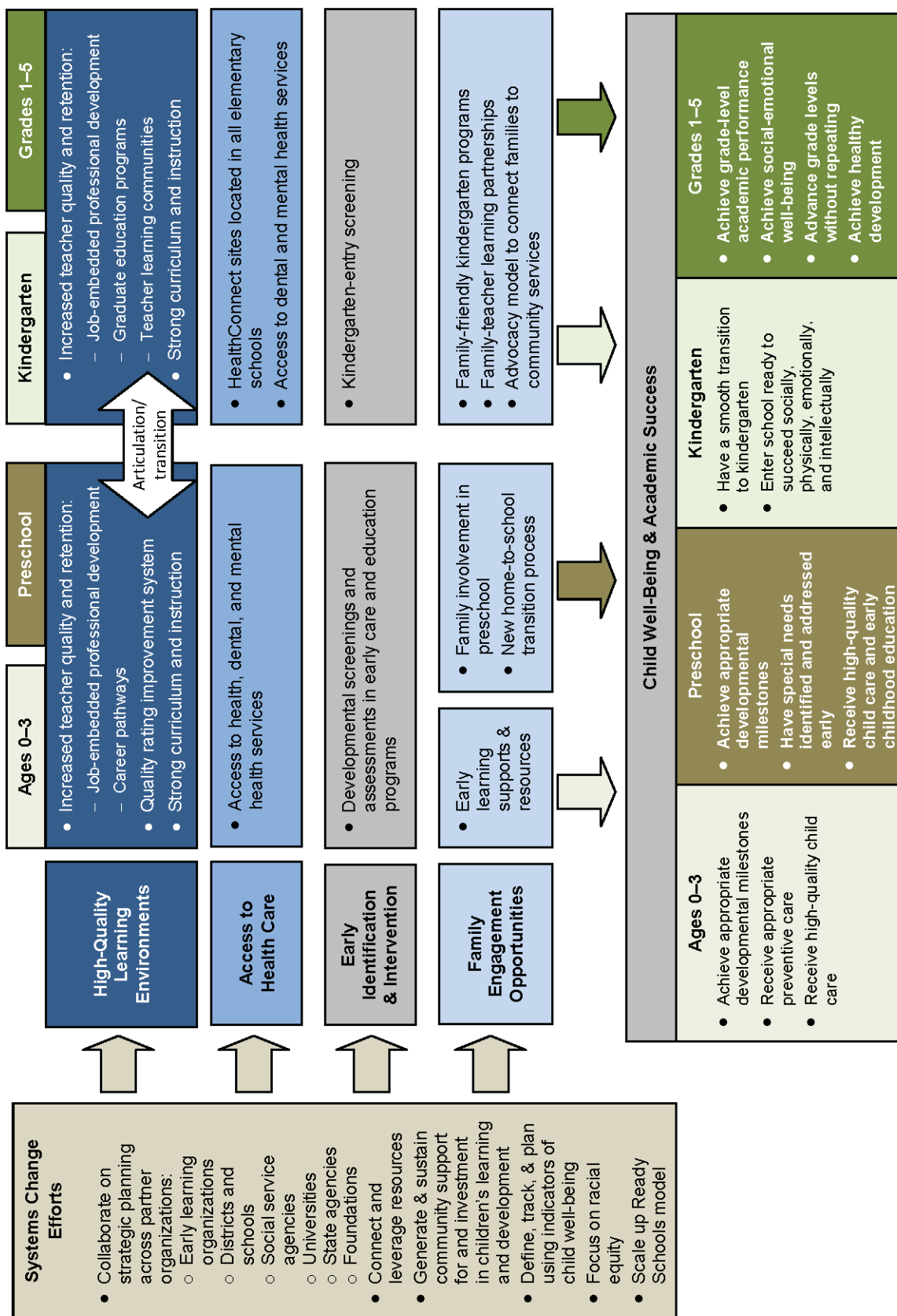


In the system envisioned by Ready Schools, child outcomes are accomplished through the interaction of four factors: high-quality learning environments, access to health care, early identification of and intervention for special needs, and family engagement opportunities

Ready Schools recognizes the importance of each of these factors and the necessity of creating connections within and among them. Fundamental to Ready Schools is the notion that children’s experiences in early care and preschool settings and in elementary school are important factors in their lives. Coordinating services and educational opportunities to meet children’s changing needs at each stage of development fosters 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 through the partnerships created among the full array of organizations serving young children and their families. The Ready Schools 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, guiding strategic planning by defining shared goals and monitoring progress on meeting them, focusing on racial equity, and expanding the Ready Schools model within Miami-Dade and in other communities in Florida and elsewhere.

Exhibit 1. Logic Model for Ready Schools Miami

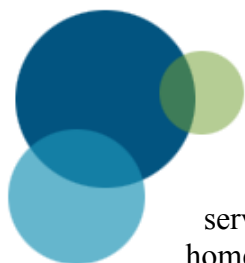




In Sections III and IV, we look closely at the initiatives and strategies Ready Schools partners have developed to improve early care and education programs and elementary schools and how they are changing children's educational opportunities. In Section V, we describe efforts to improve the quality of other essential services such as health care and family involvement. We then examine from a systems perspective how key agencies in Miami-Dade County have increased their impact by working together on behalf of children. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on how all the pieces fit together to improve outcomes for children.



III. Early Care and Education



A Ready Schools goal is to improve the quality of all child care programs so that children across the county have access to high-quality early learning. Across Miami-Dade, 1,370 licensed child care providers serve approximately 94,000 children under the age of 6. These providers operate from 1,002 child care centers, 233 family day care homes that can serve up to six children from birth through 5 years, 115 large family child care homes, and 25 religious exempt facilities.² To improve the quality of all types of programs, Ready Schools partners have developed several strategies and resources, described below. These multiple efforts work together to promote a common set of program standards, effective program administration, a highly trained early care and education work force, effective use of curriculum, increased use of appropriate learning materials, and the establishment of safe facilities and engaging learning environments.

Improving Early Care and Education Quality Through Quality Counts

Ready Schools partners have developed Quality Counts, a multifaceted standards-based quality rating and improvement system for early care and education. Launched in January 2008 by The Children's Trust and the Early Learning Coalition, Quality Counts is a voluntary quality rating and improvement system for all early learning programs, including child care centers and family child care homes, Head Start programs, school-based early childhood classrooms, and Voluntary Prekindergarten programs. 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.

Ready Schools partners have developed Quality Counts, a multifaceted standards-based quality rating and improvement system for early care and education.

Quality Counts provides a formal assessment of program quality using clearly defined program standards, assistance in developing a quality improvement plan, and supports to fulfill the plan. Early care and education programs or homes participating in Quality Counts are self-assessed by the program director and formally assessed by an external evaluator using a 5-star scale in six areas: 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 early care and education programs with the assistance needed to enhance their quality. Supports include the following:

- **Technical assistance.** Using the information from the self-assessment and the formal assessment, a Quality Counts technical advisor supports the program director and staff in developing a quality improvement plan. The plan identifies the support the early care and



education program needs to meet its short- and long-term quality improvement goals and provides timelines for meeting those goals. To further strengthen program support, in 2010 the technical assistants participated in 5 days of training to learn the Lastinger Center model of professional learning communities, including peer facilitation skills and the use of protocols to guide peer discussions. The technical assistants use these facilitation skills at trainings and visits with Quality Counts programs to help program staff collaborate on curriculum, instruction, and student learning and model how they can continue to do so independently.



- **Grants.** Throughout the year, grants are made for materials and equipment to support the successful completion of quality improvement plans.
- **Achievement awards.** Financial achievement awards are given to early care and education programs that receive 3-, 4-, and 5-star ratings through Quality Counts and that agree to serve as model sites to share their expertise with the community through tours, professional development, or other activities. Programs receiving achievement awards have the flexibility to use their grant money for materials or for activities approved by the Early Learning Coalition and The Children's Trust.
- **Career assistance and educational scholarships.** Staff in participating early care and education 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 child care practitioners scholarships to earn credentials or degrees in early childhood education. The training registry developed by the Children's Forum maintains a database of staff employed in the early childhood field, their credentials, and approved training activities, thus providing a central location for recording and validating credentials, as well as data for analysis and planning.
- **Wage supplements.** For private sector centers and family care homes participating in Quality Counts, the WAGES[®] incentive program provides education-based salary supplements for low- to moderate-wage earners who work with children ages birth to 5. WAGES is designed to increase job stability for teachers, improve child care quality by reducing turnover, and encourage continuing education of teachers and assistant teachers in early care and education programs and family homes. Child care practitioners participating in WAGES can increase their supplement award amounts by successfully completing additional education.
- **Data tracking.** Ready Schools partners also developed the Web-based Early Learning System database to house Quality Counts data. The database, designed to be paperless, contains extensive data on each program and each staff person and produces comprehensive baseline reports for each program based on the formal assessment results, which help Quality Counts technical assistants construct targeted quality improvement plans with the program director. The web-based database is used to document the time and funding invested in each program and to keep track of each program's needs. It also



maximizes the investments made through Quality Counts by tailoring grant allocations based on the individual needs of centers. For example, all the approved materials and equipment for grants are in the database, and these materials are linked to elements 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. By prepopulating quality improvement plans with the steps programs need to take to improve quality and identifying which materials will help them meet their quality goals, the database helps systematize the quality improvement process for early childhood programs, ensuring that they do quality improvement work and use quality improvement resources in targeted and effective ways. The database also helps the early childhood system better direct funding to make the greatest difference for local programs. For example, quarterly reports run from the database identify the professional development topics most needed by programs so that funding for training can be prioritized.

Benefits of Quality Counts

Quality Counts is making a difference for early care and education centers across Miami-Dade County, including all Head Start and Early Head Start programs and a growing number of public school Voluntary Prekindergarten classrooms. As of August 2010, a total of 452 early care and education programs—28% of all programs in Miami-Dade County—were voluntarily participating in Quality Counts.³ These programs serve approximately 28,500 children ages birth to 5 and nearly 4,000 teachers. Almost 200 additional early care and education centers and family day care homes are on the waiting list to participate in Quality Counts.

Quality Counts programs represent the range of programs serving young children in the county—ECE (early care and education) centers, family child care homes, Head Start Centers, and public school prekindergarten classes. In 2009, extra effort was placed on recruiting public elementary preschool programs to participate in Quality Counts, especially those in Ready Schools model schools, and Ready Schools partners met with the teachers’ union to make sure that participation in Quality Counts aligned with the teachers’ current contract. These efforts paid off, as the number of public school prekindergarten classes doubled from 2009 to 2010 (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Number of ECE Programs Participating in Quality Counts by Year

	2008	2009	2010
ECE Centers	165	233	260
Family child care homes	35	70	70
Head Start Centers	0	72	80
Public school prekindergarten classes	0	20	42
Total ECE programs	200	395	452



Participation in Quality Counts is having an impact on program quality. Just over half (51%) of the 407 child care programs Quality Counts assessed at program entry had a baseline rating of 3 or higher on the scale of 1 to 5 stars. Of the 102 early care and education programs that received star rating assessments at program entry and a year later, 70% of the programs had increased and 5% had maintained their quality from baseline as measured by total points earned across the six assessment components. Most gains were movement from ratings of 2 or 3 stars to ratings of 3 or 4 stars.

Some of the improvements in program quality may have been due to the educational supports received by center staff. Through Quality Counts, 2,200 teachers received scholarship awards to earn credentials and advance their educational levels, and as of August 2010, 2,450 teachers were working on career development plans. In addition, in 2009, 996 teachers representing 239 Quality Counts programs participated in WAGES, up from 235 participants in Year 1 and 710 in Year 2.

Improvements also may have been the result of feedback from their environmental rating assessments (e.g., Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised and Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised), which are used as part of the star rating and needs assessment process. Interviewed directors and teachers reported that feedback from these assessments helped them to identify weaknesses and subsequently improve daily routines and practices such as hand-washing and how to arrange the furniture, toys, and materials in the room.

Participation in Quality Counts is having an impact on program quality: 70% of the programs had increased their quality from baseline.

Other improvement efforts stemmed from Quality Counts achievement awards, which some centers used to improve their facilities. For example, some centers renovated their bathrooms to allow for better supervision of children and to have a bathroom that is ADA accessible while others improved playground equipment and outdoor space. Technical assistants supported centers across a range of areas including modifying room arrangements and materials, planning lessons, connecting with relevant professional development opportunities, acquiring materials (e.g., books, supplies, equipment, and toys), obtaining award money faster, talking with children, integrating learning with outside play, and implementing infant diaper-changing procedures.

Directors and teachers also reported improvements in their programs due to professional development and technical assistance offered through Quality Counts. In interviews, directors and teachers credited Quality Counts for their improved skills or capacity in using certain curricula and more intentionally integrating literacy and math instruction into lessons and play activities. The directors and staff also learned new and improved ways to interact with children and manage behavior problems. Finally, early care and education program staff members reported learning the importance of engaging parents and talking with them on a daily basis so that they know what is going on in the children's lives and can share important information about what the children learned at school with parents. One teacher said, "It's easier to approach parents when you have a problem if you've already developed an open relationship." Program

directors reported that because of professional development made possible through Quality Counts, their teachers are more motivated, feel like they have more value, and therefore are happier.

Quality Counts: Looking Forward

With Quality Counts successfully developed and launched, Ready Schools partners are now turning to refining the model. After looking carefully at program data, Quality Counts partners realized that a greater focus was needed on how to measure and support improvements in sites that serve the most vulnerable children in the community. To this end, surveys and focus groups were conducted with the partner agencies and the literature on best and evidence-based practices being used in other states was carefully reviewed. Based on this research, the standards used by Quality Counts are being revised and simplified to better focus on what matters most: interactions between teachers and children and the professional preparation of teachers and staff. Further, the supports provided through Quality Counts are being evaluated and the improved system will be finalized in 2011. The overall orientation of Quality Counts will change as a result of these planning efforts. Quality County will provide supports to all programs in the community, but provide deeper support to those sites serving the community's most vulnerable children.



As part of the program improvement efforts, Ready Schools partners are developing ways to help programs that did not show improvement in their star ratings over time. Partners are gathering information about the centers that were not as successful in improving their quality and using it to identify patterns in center characteristics that might suggest additional supports or ways of providing supports that could be offered. The United Way Center for Excellence will have an early childhood specialist for Quality Counts programs to call with questions. Also, these programs will be able to request additional visits from Quality Counts technical assistants that are not tied to assessment or training to allow more time to discuss the programs' needs.

Last, Quality Counts partners are trying to make the training more accessible to staffs at more centers countywide. Staff members in remote areas of the county have difficulty attending trainings held in more central locations. Other program personnel have difficulty attending trainings during certain hours. The current plan is to move trainings geographically to cover all areas of the county and to offer trainings at various times to increase accessibility.

Improving Knowledge and Skills of Early Care and Education Program Directors

Another way Ready Schools partners are enhancing the quality of early care and education programs is by providing program directors with administrative training through the **Early Childhood Program Administrator's Institute**. The United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education operates the Early Childhood Program Administrator's Institute, which is a yearlong management and business leadership training program for early childhood center directors and assistant directors. Participants complete three college courses, each worth three



credits, taught by Miami Dade College adjunct professors. The courses are offered in three locations across the county with choices of morning, evening, and Saturday sessions. 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, contingent on directors completing the institute.

Benefits of Administrator's Institute

In the past 3 years, 280 early care and education program directors completed the Early Childhood Program Administrator's Institute. A fourth cohort began in fall 2010. Program directors who participated in the administrator's institute reported in interviews that they learned about project and financial management, including how to prepare a budget for a center and how to improve the enrollment and other administrative forms the centers use. An owner of a program who plans to participate in the administrator's institute along with her program director this coming year reported that she was interested in the program because all the directors she knows who went through the training thought it was great. She also mentioned the benefit of the institute offering 9 credit hours that can count toward a degree because she is working on her master's degree and the director is working on her bachelor's degree.

To provide formal professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals in Miami-Dade, Ready Schools partners have established child care professional certificate programs, early childhood education associate degrees, and a job-embedded master's degree program.

Administrator's Institute: Looking Forward

To determine how to further strengthen the institute, the United Way Center for Excellence held three focus groups in 2010 that included 20 participants from the first three program cohorts. The focus group participants reported liking the institute, but they also suggested some areas for improvement. For example, they identified a disconnect between what the institute's evaluation tool measures and the course content. Thus, they felt that the evaluation results were not reflecting what people were learning from the institute. During the focus groups, program directors also mentioned they would like to have more contact with leadership from The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, The Children's Trust, and the Early Learning Coalition to discuss plans for the early childhood community. The United Way Center for Excellence plans to respond to both these suggestions for strengthening the program. Finally, the institute will add a mentoring component to help participating administrators be more ready for and successful with their participation in Quality Counts.

Improving Higher Education Opportunities

To provide formal professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals in Miami-Dade, Ready Schools partners have established child care professional certificate



programs, early childhood education associate degrees, and a job-embedded master's degree program. Further, an early childhood bachelor's degree program is under development.

The Children's Trust funded Florida State University to work with Miami Dade College to develop a 12-credit series, **Great Beginnings**, which consists of four early childhood professional development courses: Mind in the Making, 10 Components of Infant Toddler Care, Birth-3 Curriculum, and Introduction to Early Childhood/Infants-Toddlers. For each of these courses, Florida State University developed an extensive program to train professionals to train others (i.e., a train-the-trainer model), created supplemental teaching materials, translated the materials into Spanish, and established a cadre of trainers equipped to teach classes. The early childhood professionals who complete the four courses earn a **Florida Child Care Professional Certificate** for either infant/toddlers or preschool children.

To expand the professional capacity of early childhood teachers, Miami Dade College is developing an **Early Childhood Education Associate in Science (A.S.) degree program**, with support from The Children's Trust to engage national experts to inform new and cutting edge content for each class in the degree program. In addition to developing the full A.S. degree program, Miami Dade College also received state approval for an Early Childhood Education Bachelor's degree program into which the A.S. degree program will fully articulate. Through the Ready Schools partnership, Miami Dade College is in the final stage of developing an **early childhood certification and a bachelor's degree program for early care and education** for providers using a job-embedded, practice-centered, and inquiry-oriented professional development approach.

The University of Florida also launched a **job-embedded master's (M.Ed.) and specialist degree (Ed.S.) program in education** in 2009 as part of its Teacher Leadership for School Improvement program (described in Section IV). This program offers a degree in curriculum and instruction with a specialization in teacher leadership for school improvement in early care and education. The master's degree program helps early care and education educators to become master teachers and helps early learning coaches to become better mentors and more knowledgeable about evidence-based practices. Through this on-site and online program, participants learn with a cohort of colleagues within the embedded structure and routines of early learning organizations. Participants actively engage in a professional learning community with a focus on practice: They examine and reflect on their own practice, collect evidence of student and teacher learning, and share and apply new knowledge with others in the learning community. The program is free of charge except for books and materials.

Benefits of College Degree Programs

Hundreds of early care and education providers have completed the various programs offered by Miami Dade College. Since fall 2007 (the beginning of Ready Schools), more than 600 providers have earned an early childhood credential through Miami Dade College, 375 providers have completed the Great Beginnings program, and about 150 providers have completed an A.S. degree in early childhood.

In addition, seven early education teachers participated in the University of Florida's job-embedded master's and specialist degree program. Two of these teachers work at the United Way Center of Excellence. Their program director reported that they have applied what they have learned, such as protocols to guide discussions and peer facilitation, at the center, and in so



doing transforming it. “We breathe protocols; it’s such an easy way to get information out of the staff and to discuss important information with parents.” The job-embedded master’s degree program students have helped other staff members in their center to experience the power of a community of learners and the effectiveness of using peer facilitation protocols. The director reported, “Now it’s not only them [the master’s degree students] using it. If other teachers have a conflict in a team, they ask, ‘What protocol should we use?’”

College Degree Programs: Looking Forward

Miami Dade College’s new bachelor’s degree program is on target to begin in January 2012. The plan is to open with part-time and full-time cohorts of about 30 students each, assuming sufficient funding for and interest in the program. The Quality Counts’ scholarships are expected to be a major funder of students in this degree program.

Ready Schools partners are working to expand and deepen early childhood professionals’ knowledge of and skills in implementing research-based early care and education curricula.

Further, in September 2010, Miami-Dade County Public Schools received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education under its Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund. The purpose of this grant is to enhance early learning instruction to high-need students by developing an early childhood specialization within the University of Florida’s existing job-embedded master’s program, providing opportunities for a wider range of teachers to improve their instruction by participating in learning communities, and offering opportunities for principals to enhance their ability to facilitate change within their schools by participating in learning communities. This initiative will enable more preschool teachers working in district elementary schools to participate in the job-embedded master’s degree program and learning communities.

Strengthening Early Care and Education Curriculum

Ready Schools partners also are working to expand and deepen early childhood professionals’ knowledge of and skills in implementing research-based early care and education curricula. In 2009–10, the Early Learning Coalition, together with several Ready Schools partners, launched the **Curriculum Learning Communities** project. In this program, staff members from early care and education programs participate in local learning communities focused on one of two early childhood curricula: High Scope or Creative Curriculum. Learning communities are comprised of staff from programs located in close proximity, making joint training and collaboration easier. As part of the Curriculum Learning Communities project, the director, one infant/toddler teacher, and one preschool teacher from each participating early care and education program receive 20 days of intensive training spread out over 12 to 15 months to help them become curriculum experts. Between training sessions, the participants have 4 to 6 weeks to take knowledge back to their peers and complete homework that involves trying out new practices. This structure is designed to enable them to report back on their individual and collective experiences with implementing new practices and engage in discussions on how to strengthen implementation with other participants in their network of learning communities. The

participants also are trained by the Lastinger Center in how to be a peer facilitator of a learning community within their own early care and education program. They receive 5 days of training on how to facilitate a learning community, including how to bring an idea forward, give feedback to peers, and use Ready Schools self-assessment and discussion protocols. In addition, all directors receive a 2-day overview and meet twice during the year, and all the staff in each early care and education program receive general introductory training on the curriculum. Each program in the Curriculum Learning Communities project receives a stipend to help pay for substitute teachers during the training sessions and receives all the curriculum materials and training at no cost.

In addition to early care and education program staff, some Quality Counts technical assistants also participated in the trainings so they could better support the use of curriculum in Quality Counts centers and so they could become High Scope curriculum trainers.

Finally, some of the programs that participated in the first year are now serving as models for other early care and education programs participating in the second cohort of the Curriculum Learning Communities project, and some of the teachers who participated in the first year are serving as curriculum trainers for the second-year programs. To support their role as curriculum trainers, those teachers received an additional 3 weeks of training, and Ready Schools personnel are helping them develop agendas to teach the new participants.



Benefits of Curriculum Learning Communities Project

In the first year of the Curriculum Learning Communities project, 74 teachers from 37 early care and education centers and 22 community members (technical assistance staff from Quality Counts, Miami Dade College, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and Child Development Services) completed training. Currently, 40 new centers and 20 returning centers, involving 120 (62 preschool and 58 infant/toddler) teachers, are participating in regional learning communities.

In interviews, participants enumerated the ways that the Curriculum Learning Communities project was enhancing their centers. They reported that participation has changed how they talk about children, how they think about program quality, and how they work with other teachers. For example, one director noted that before program participation, all the teachers were working in isolation. Now they are meeting and having conversations about how they work with children. As she described, teachers are sharing practice rather than just information, and they are opening the doors to their classroom for whoever wants to see. As another center director said, the Curriculum Learning Communities project helped the teachers see themselves as professionals. Some of the Curriculum Learning Communities participants who also participated in Quality Counts attributed increased star ratings in Quality Counts to the Curriculum Learning Communities project.

To systematically assess the effect of the Curriculum Learning Communities project, Lastinger Center staff members are collecting pre- and post-project data from each program. Researchers are using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and Arnett Caregiver



Interaction Scale to measure teacher-child interactions, as well as a checklist to measure school climate, culture, and curriculum implementation. Collection of post-project data was completed in January 2011.

Curriculum Learning Communities Project: Looking Forward

Because the first year of implementation was successful, project administrators did not believe changing the overall approach was necessary. The changes being made are to help the project serve more centers while keeping the alumni engaged and informed. To do this, Ready Schools partners are developing ways to give more support online, build the skills of peer facilitators so they can become more independent, and provide incentives and remuneration that can be sustained as the project grows. For example, the partners plan to use videos and protocols developed during the first year of the Curriculum Learning Communities project to support work with teachers in the second year and beyond and to put some of these tools online.

Improving Quality Through Model Early Care and Education Centers

Ready Schools partners opened two early learning centers in Miami-Dade County to serve as best practices resource centers for educators, child care professionals, and families. One is the **United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education**, and the other is the **Primary Learning Center**, the newest school in Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

The United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education, which opened in 2006, joined the Bounce Learning Network in 2008 to become one of 11 Educare centers in the United States. It houses a school for 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 early care and education programs throughout the community. The Center for Excellence also has a resource library and a training center. The center offers many training opportunities for parents/guardians, 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.

In August 2009, Miami-Dade County Public Schools established a new school, the Primary Learning Center, in one of its administration buildings. The Primary Learning Center serves preschool through first-grade children and supports district and community professional development efforts run by district early childhood curriculum specialists. This school is already involved in Ready Schools and has a teacher who serves as a Ready Schools coach to other schools. The school also has a HealthConnect health suite on-site (described in Section V) and offers workshops for parents based on their interests. District Superintendent Carvalho serves as the school principal and regularly spends time in classrooms reading to students.

Benefits of Model Centers

The Center for Excellence serves approximately 130 children and their families. The center hosted numerous training workshops for Quality Counts participants and other early care and education programs, including helping 15 centers apply for Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment (APPLE) accreditation. The Primary Learning Center currently serves 90 students and has another 100 students on a waiting list. District staff members report that parents love the program, especially those who work in the district office and find it easy to visit during

lunch. The Primary Learning Center is designed to facilitate unobtrusive observations by families and teachers participating in training.

Model Centers: Looking Forward

As an Educare center, the Center for Excellence receives training and support from the Ounce of Prevention Fund and network peers and has access to top professionals. For example, all its staff members will be trained on Touchpoints™ over the next 3 years to help them engage families at key points in children's development. They will learn how to help parents know what to expect from their children, reduce parents' frustration and self-doubt, increase parenting skills, and create a strong bond between parents and providers. Staff members also will be able to use this learning in their professional development of providers working in other centers.

The Primary Learning Center also continues to expand its capacity to serve children and strengthen the skills of early care and education providers. For example, the district plans to extend the grades served by the Primary Learning Center to preschool through third grade in the next few years. The center also is starting to partner with universities by providing preservice and inservice teachers being trained by the universities with opportunities to observe the Primary Learning Center's classrooms as part of their coursework.

Improving Children's Transition From Early Care to Elementary School

In 2008–09, Ready Schools partners began working on new tools and models to further help more children have successful transitions from early care and education programs to elementary education. To identify useful transition resources for parents, early care and education programs, and elementary schools, Ready Schools partners gathered transition tools being used by schools in Florida and in other states. In 2009–10, a work group of members from various Ready Schools partner organizations reviewed these resources and developed guiding principles and a set of strategies to support successful transition to kindergarten that can be used by parents, teachers in early childhood programs, and teachers in elementary schools. The information will be shared through the Ready Schools website, which is currently being updated. The plan is to send e-mail announcements about the website to parents, early childhood programs, and elementary schools when the site is completed, estimated to be by March 2011.



Another way Ready Schools partners worked on enhancing supports for children transitioning to kindergarten was to strengthen connections between elementary schools and the early childhood and preschool programs in their areas. District administrators held a transition-to-school meeting with all elementary school administrators at which they encouraged them to make connections with childcare centers and Voluntary Prekindergarten programs in their areas.



Benefits of Transition Activities

Ready Schools partners have made substantial progress on developing new tools and resources to aid in children's successful transition to kindergarten. Ready Schools partners will be able to measure the benefits of these resources over the next few years as they are made widely available.

Ready Schools has constructed a comprehensive set of programs to improve early care and education throughout the county.

Transition Activities: Looking Forward

As mentioned, online resources about the transition to school will be available in early 2011 as part of the launch of the new and improved Ready Schools website. Further, in addition to holding meetings with school administrators, district administrators are making changes to the district's transition-to-school handbook and how it is presented to administrators. District administrators are working on the handbook with Ready Schools partners, and they will have representatives from the teacher's union review it. The district also plans to form clusters where schools will be hubs for all early childhood programs in their area to meet or discuss ways to get children ready for school and transition to kindergarten.

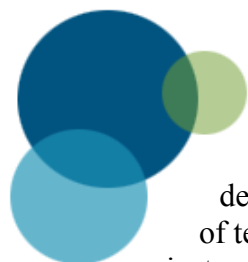
Conclusion for Early Care and Education Section

Ready Schools has constructed a comprehensive set of programs to improve early care and education throughout the county. Together, these programs meet the needs of administrators, teachers, parents, and children. As one director said,

Quality Counts [with its connected early childhood improvement supports] is like a balance of what the children need, what the parents need, what I need as an administrator, and what the teachers need, too. So everybody gets what they need.

Linkages between Quality Counts, the Early Childhood Program Administrator's Institute, the new early childhood certificate and degree programs, the Curriculum Learning Communities project, district programs and policies, and new materials for supporting children's transition are further increasing the effectiveness of early childhood programs and providers by giving them a comprehensive set of supports.

IV. Elementary Teaching and Learning



Ready Schools partners have developed a new model of teacher professional development that is embedded in the real work of schools and that provides opportunities for teachers to learn from one another.

The Lastinger Center for Learning has developed a professional development model that emphasizes building professional learning communities of teachers and administrators to achieve the shared goals of improving instructional practice and student outcomes. It also has developed a job-embedded graduate degree program for teacher leaders who can support professional learning communities in their schools as well as improve their own instructional practices.

To date, Ready Schools partners have provided a comprehensive system of professional development to 25 elementary school partners and an array of learning opportunities to all 200 elementary schools in the district. A new federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant has identified the Ready Schools model as one of the most promising educational initiatives in the nation and will allow Ready Schools to double the number of schools it can serve. Supports provided to improve teaching and learning in schools are described here.

Developing Master Teachers Through a Job Embedded Master's Program

Developing teachers who are masters at their craft and leaders in their field is a goal of Ready Schools. To reach it, the University of Florida, through the Lastinger Center, offers the Teacher Leadership for School Improvement program to teachers at Ready Schools partner schools. Through the job-embedded graduate program, teachers can earn a Master in Education (M.Ed.) or Specialist in Education (Ed.S.) degree from the University of Florida Graduate School of Education. The program is a 2.5-year practice-based, job-embedded on-site and online graduate program offered free of charge for teachers in the 25 partner Ready Schools who commit to stay at their school for at least 5 years (including their time in the program). Teachers in the job-embedded graduate program engage in inquiry-based learning, preferably with a cohort of peers from their school, and serve as a foundation for transforming the school culture into a professional learning community. A goal of the program is to develop master teachers, within the context of high-needs schools, who can ultimately improve student learning and achievement and support their peers' growth in the teaching practice.

Coursework is centered on current teacher practice, with participants applying what they learn in their graduate coursework in their school or classroom, trying and reflecting on new techniques and strategies, collecting evidence about the effectiveness of new techniques and strategies, providing classmates with feedback, and sharing their learning with their colleagues. Participants in the





job-embedded graduate program are encouraged to present their learning and experiences at the Learning Showcase (described under “Improving Teaching and Learning Through Inquiry”).

Benefits of the Job-Embedded Master’s Program

The job-embedded graduate program has been key to supporting the implementation and growth of the Lastinger Center model in partner Ready Schools. Teachers leave this job-embedded practice-based program with tools for improving instruction in the classroom and the culture of the school. As of fall 2010, a total of 93 teachers were enrolled in job-embedded graduate program and 17 had graduated.

Teachers leave the job-embedded practice-based program with tools for improving instruction in the classroom and the culture of the school.

In interviews, teachers enrolled in the job-embedded graduate program consistently praised the program for the practical, embedded nature of the coursework. The graduate program requires teachers to conduct inquiries and try new techniques in the classroom. Teachers recounted specific ways they had changed their instructional practices based on their class projects, such as using new ways to build vocabulary, differentiating instruction for specific students, trying new strategies for teaching reading, and developing stronger and more engaging lesson plans. Teachers emphasized how the graduate program has taught them strategies that are easily translated into the classroom and that go beyond what they learned in their teacher training or undergraduate programs. For example, teachers shared:

I can take what I am learning and directly implement it. It’s not just theory.... The ability to apply it in the classroom has made it real and meaningful.

Everything that you do in the course you are able to do with students. Whatever they are teaching you, you can immediately bring in the classroom, which I think is beneficial because you are actually putting to practice what you are learning.... Let’s say you have a child who has an issue and you want to be able to help that child, they teach you how to research ways to help that child and you test it out.

[The job-embedded graduate program] is the first time in my [17-year] education career that I have been able to bring in the knowledge [I’m learning] into the classroom. My bachelor’s didn’t do it, my national board certification didn’t do it, but this program has.

Teachers also expressed an appreciation for the graduate program’s cohort approach and the collaboration fostered among participants in the program. One teacher described her transformation.

[Before this job-embedded graduate program], I never came out of my classroom. Everything was within my four walls. I did what I did, and it didn’t interest me what other people [in the school] were doing. The amount of collaboration that I’m involved in right now with other teachers, the amount of learning that I have

done [is much more than in the past]. With these courses, I've been able to learn so much from the teachers in my school.

Teachers in the job-embedded graduate program also reported that its benefits extend beyond the teachers directly involved in the program because they share and model what they are learning with others in their schools both informally and more formally through school-based professional learning communities. As one participant explained, “As you take every class, something inside of you says, ‘I have to show this to a colleague and I’ve got to get them involved in teacher leadership.’” Another teacher described how teachers in the graduate program encourage other nonparticipants to engage in inquiry-based learning.

Some teachers that are in [the job-embedded graduate program] encourage other teachers to participate. So I think it becomes a domino effect that helps build a culture. If everybody can have the same mindset of inquiry and ‘What can I do to improve?’ then we are building a culture. That constant willingness to improve becomes contagious.



The Job-Embedded Master’s Program: Looking Forward

The job-embedded graduate program will continue to expand as part of the Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund grant the district received. As part of this grant, the University of Florida is developing an early childhood specialization within the existing job-embedded master’s program, which will be offered to 100 prekindergarten through third-grade teachers in 25 Title I schools.

“The job-embedded graduate program is the first time in my (17-year) education career that I have been able to bring in the knowledge [I’m learning] into the classroom. My bachelor’s didn’t do it, my national board certification didn’t do it, but this program has.”— First Grade Teacher

Improving Teaching and Learning Through Inquiry

A key component of the school reform model developed by the Lastinger Center and embedded in all Ready Schools supports is the process of inquiry. Two primary supports for engaging teachers in the process of inquiry to improve instruction are professional learning communities and the Teacher Fellows Program. Both are forms of professional development in which teachers engage in a collaborative, inquiry-based learning community where practice is made public and craft knowledge is shared freely. Each teacher examines his or her practice, participates in critical reflection, engages in critical and supportive dialogue with others, reads about and implements innovative practices, collects evidence of student learning, further adapts practices based on that evidence, and shares his or her learning with other teachers. According to



the Lastinger Center website, the inquiry-based reform model “targets individual teachers, entire faculties, small teacher teams, principals and other educational leaders in the systemic and comprehensive examination and refinement of school culture, teachers’ perspectives and practices and student learning through multi-year collaboration.”⁴ The Learning Showcase also highlights participants’ experiences with the inquiry process and provides a place for sharing learning across the county.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are groups of faculty and other school staff members within a school that engage in ongoing site-based, facilitated collaboration by using a variety of processes or protocols designed to promote the values of reflective practice, shared leadership, authentic pedagogy, democracy, and equity in opportunity and achievement. 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.*⁴

To foster PLCs in elementary schools, the Lastinger Center and the Miami-Dade County Public Schools train principals and teacher leaders in the PLC model including the use of protocols to guide meetings. Training for teacher leaders is critical because the Lastinger Center model relies on them to organize, plan, and lead PLCs at their schools. Training in how to implement PLCs is provided through Ready School University courses, including its job-embedded master’s program (described earlier in this section), meetings of the Facilitator Learning Community, and an external Lastinger Learning Facilitator.

- **Ready Schools Miami University: Facilitating Professional Learning Communities Course** is a 3-day course on facilitating PLCs in schools. Schools can send two or more of their teacher leaders to learn how to use structured protocols for examining teacher and student work, analyzing school culture, and engaging in professional literature.
- **The Facilitator Learning Community** is a program for teacher leaders who have already been trained to facilitate PLCs and are doing so at their respective schools. Each of the five regions of the district has its own Facilitator Learning Community that meets about six times a year. Meetings of the Facilitator Learning Community are intended to provide ongoing support for teacher leaders and be an open setting for participants to share the successes and challenges of their PLCs, learn new protocols, reflect on their experience, and learn from one another. Teacher leaders receive a stipend for this work.
- **Lastinger Learning Facilitators** are Lastinger Center staff members who offer individualized support to the principals and teacher leaders who are leading PLCs in the 25 partner Ready Schools. Lastinger Learning Facilitators provide icebreakers for PLC meetings, model protocols for teacher leaders, offer ideas for leading meetings, distribute articles for discussion, and support the interpretation and use of data.

Teachers at all six schools SRI visited in September 2010 participated in PLCs, although to varying degrees. At three schools, administrators encouraged and supported the participation of all teachers in PLCs. At these schools, meetings primarily took place twice a month during mandatory faculty meetings at times that the principal allocated for PLC use. PLC meeting times

varied across the three other schools. For example, at one school, some teachers used a portion of their grade-level planning time to meet as a PLC. At another school, teachers typically met after school weekly for 8-week sessions.

The topics covered in PLCs varied but generally reflected teachers' and schools' needs and interests. For example, at one school particular issues would rise out of leadership or grade-level meetings that teachers would then make the topic of a PLC. Some of the topics discussed across schools included encouraging parental involvement, lesson planning, classroom management and organization, reading strategies, student assessment, and using technology in the classroom.

The **Teacher Fellows Program** is another course offered as part of Ready Schools University that is available to the 25 partner schools. In this program, teachers are guided by a teacher leader and a Lastinger Learning Facilitator in an inquiry experience regarding a data-driven question that is relevant to teacher practice and student learning. The teacher leaders who co-facilitate these programs are either graduates or current students in the University of Florida's job-embedded master's program and thus are knowledgeable about inquiry. After completion of the program, participants are expected to share what they learned from their inquiry project with fellow teachers across the district at the Learning Showcase. Both the Teacher Fellows and the teacher leader who facilitates the program receive a stipend for this work.



The **Learning Showcase** is a 1-day conference held in the spring that provides an opportunity for teachers participating in the Teacher Fellows Program to deliver presentations on their efforts to improve practices through inquiry. Other attendees include principals and other school administrators who participate in the Principal Fellows Program, early care and education teachers who participate in the Teacher Fellows Program and the job-embedded master's program, and Community Involvement Specialists who participate in the Community Fellows Program.

Benefits of the Inquiry Process

School staff members participating in PLCs appreciated the opportunity that they provide for them to share challenges and solve problems with their colleagues. PLCs also have a general impact on communication and collaboration within a school. As one teacher described,

At school, we interact with each other but do not really get to know each other. Through our PLC, we have really bonded. We are a family. We have collaborated with each other. We have stepped out of our comfort zones.

In addition, PLCs were an opportunity for students in the master's degree program to share what they learn with others at their schools, as well as just generally spread best practices.

In addition to participating in PLCs, many teachers attended classes to learn how to facilitate them. In fact, 103 teacher leaders participated in the Ready Schools University course on how to facilitate PLCs in 2009–10, and 107 teachers are enrolled in that course for the 2010–11 school year.



The Lastinger Learning Facilitators were often a big part of the success of PLCs and other Ready Schools school-based activities. The schools SRI visited had overwhelmingly positive feedback about their Lastinger Learning Facilitators. The extent of the facilitators' role varied in each school, but overall the support they provided had a significant and positive impact on PLCs, the application of the master's degree program and Teacher Fellows Program content to classroom practice, and the school's use of data (described later in this section under "Using Data to Support Schools"). One elementary teacher described her school's facilitator "as a big part of what we have accomplished here."

The Facilitator Learning Community enabled 144 teachers in 2009–10 to meet to sharpen their skills at facilitating teacher learning communities such as PLCs and the Teacher Fellows Program and to share best practices.

The Teacher Fellows Program was extremely successful and has generated considerable interest among teachers who have not yet participated. In 2009–10, 164 teachers participated in the Teacher Fellows Program, including teachers at five of the six schools visited in September 2010. The number of teachers who participated in each school visited ranged from 10 to 20.⁵ According to teachers and principals interviewed, participants in the Teacher Fellows Program increased their reflection on teaching practice and their professional confidence. One teacher noted that because of the experience, she now continually evaluates what she does to make her practice better.

In addition, in most of the schools visited, teachers participating in the Teacher Fellows Program had opportunities to share what they learned with teachers who had not participated through school-based mini-showcases. As one teacher stated,

The benefits were huge.... Hearing from teachers at your very own school that a program works makes you believe you can do it, too. It's better to learn from your peers.

At the other schools, teachers shared their inquiry projects with other teachers through in-house professional development or during grade-level and faculty meetings. In one school, sharing of inquiry findings led to the gradewide implementation of a particular reading strategy.

The Learning Showcase provided teachers and other participants with new instructional ideas, validated their work, and increased their professional confidence.

The Learning Showcase provided teachers and other participants with new instructional ideas, validated their work, and increased their professional confidence. More than 400 teachers attended the 125 presentations, interactive sessions, and facilitated conversations. According to one teacher, "I got to witness what other teachers were doing and learn from others. I left with an array of ideas and was very motivated." Surveys collected by Ready Schools staff at the Learning Showcase indicated that participants felt the showcase greatly strengthened their understanding of the following: building collaborative school cultures, improving instructional practices, and enhancing student learning. Participants also reported the showcase intensified their interest in collaborating with others in their schools and in their future work as educators.

The Inquiry Process: Looking Forward

All the current inquiry-based projects will continue to be implemented in 2010–11. At a couple of schools, teachers actively involved in Ready Schools suggested that PLCs could have an even greater effect if they had more support from school leadership. They thought that PLC participation would increase if school leaders more actively encouraged teacher participation and if all of them allocated time (e.g., some of the mandatory faculty meetings) for PLCs. Allowing teachers to earn points toward their district professional development requirement has been successful at one school and might stimulate participation at other schools.



Maximizing Administrative Leadership Through Principal Professional Development

Because the successful implementation of school reform efforts often depends on administrators' effective leadership, Ready Schools provides two primary professional development strategies geared specifically to elementary school principals: The Principal Best Practice Symposium and the Principal Fellows Program. Some courses offered through Ready Schools University also support the leadership development of principals.

The quarterly **Principal Best Practice Symposium** is open to all principals in the district and is an opportunity for them to meet with state and national experts to examine best practices in enhancing student achievement, principal leadership, and teacher practice. The symposium exposes principals to proven practices that enhance school effectiveness, encourages engagement in learning conversations among colleagues, and informs and connects principals to the efforts of Ready Schools Miami.

The **Principal Fellows Program** is open to principals at the 25 Ready Schools partner schools and is designed to engage them in topics important to effective school leadership and administration, such as effective leadership to improve student achievement, strategies to build a powerful faculty, using data to guide decisions, and teacher inquiry. Principal Fellows also participated in four statewide institutes—one in Gainesville, one in St. Petersburg, one in Miami, and one in Naples—with principals from other districts using the Lastinger Center school reform model to share common issues and best practices. Finally, principals who participate in the Principal Fellows Program are expected to share their experiences and learning at the Learning Showcase. In return, principals receive Master Plan Points.

Benefits of Principal Professional Development

Participation in the Principal Best Practice Symposium has increased over time from 45 principals in 2008–09 to 116 in 2010–11. Principals from all 25 partner schools participated in the Principal Fellows Program during 2009–10, as did all principals from the partner schools in the preceding year.

In interviews, principals said that they found the symposium meetings useful for learning about effective practices and sharing ideas with other principals. They also reported implementing ideas learned in the Principal Fellows Program, such as using protocols to support



a teacher discussion of the district's Instructional Performance Evaluation and Growth System and engaging staff in defining a "master teacher." One principal reported that participation in the Principal Fellows Program provided her with tools to be a better administrator and helped her to shift her leadership style from a top-down one to one that fosters collaboration and encourages more teacher leadership. Also, making connections with principals and district administrators at the statewide institutes provided participants with support and ideas on how to motivate teachers to participate in PLCs and be leaders in their own schools.

Principal Professional Development: Looking Forward

As part of the district's Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund grant, principals in 25 Title I schools will participate in the Principal Fellows Program. Through this program, they will be able to develop their leadership skills through interaction with colleagues from other schools in Miami-Dade and from other districts across the state.

Lastinger Learning Facilitators help principals and teachers to analyze, discuss, and create action steps for instructional and school improvement based on data.

Using Data to Support Schools

As embodied in the inquiry process in general, a key practice supported by the Lastinger Center school reform model is using data to inform practice. The Lastinger Center supplements the academic data from standardized and teacher-developed assessments generally available to partner elementary schools with two surveys—the **School Culture Survey** and **Instructional Practices Inventory**. The School Culture Survey, conducted online annually, measures the collaborative culture among the staff members within a school. The Instructional Practices Inventory is an annual observational assessment of instructional practices aimed at elevating student engagement in learning (e.g., higher order thinking, learning conversations, and inquiry-based approaches). Two courses offered through Ready Schools University train teachers to effectively interpret and use data collected via these surveys to improve instruction and school culture.

Lastinger Learning Facilitators help principals and teachers to analyze, discuss, and create action steps for instructional and school improvement based on the data collected via the School Culture and Instructional Practice surveys. Support is sometimes provided individually at schools during PLCs or other meetings. The summer 2010 session of the **Leadership Institute**, a summer professional development session for the 25 Ready School partner school teams, focused specifically on interpreting the Instructional Practices Inventory and School Culture Survey data and creating school-specific action plans based on the findings. School teams were typically composed of the principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, teacher leader, other teachers, and the Community Involvement Specialist. Prior Leadership Institutes have also focused on building PLCs in the schools.



Benefits of Using Data

School Culture Surveys and Instructional Practice Inventories were conducted at all 25 partner schools. Principals and teachers have been trained in Ready Schools Miami University courses to interpret and apply these data to guide school improvement efforts. As of fall 2010, a total of 50 teachers had completed the course on the Instructional Practices Inventory and 37 had completed the course on the School Culture Survey. In addition, 120 school staff participated in the summer 2010 Leadership Institute, which included discussions of survey and inventory data. The Leadership Institute enabled faculty to delineate each school's focus for the upcoming school year and create action plans based on the interpretation of survey data and broader discussion of school concerns. Participants also used the Leadership Institute as a forum to learn about the practices and experiences of other schools in addressing such topics as using student data, protocols for PLC meetings, discipline, and improving school culture.

In interviews, school staff members described the benefits and use of survey data. In general, the data from these surveys indicated areas for improvement in ways that were easily translated into future action steps. For example, at one school, the School Culture Survey results highlighted the need for teachers to have more time to observe each other's teaching. In response to this finding, the principal attempted to ensure time for all teachers to observe their colleagues at work. Another school used the results of the Instructional Practices Inventory as a reflective tool during a PLC and gave teachers a chart to evaluate their own practice as a way to make them more aware of how much time they spend using each type of teaching strategy.

Using Data: Looking Forward

To institutionalize the collecting and analyzing of data, the Lastinger Center is interested in training school staff in conducting the Instructional Practices Inventory. The plan is to have at least one person at each model school who knows how to reliably use the instrument so that schools need not rely on Lastinger Center staff to obtain these informative data. Instead, staff members from one school could conduct the inventory at other schools. Not only will this strategy provide schools with the data they need to inform their instructional practices, but it will also result in more opportunities for cross-school observations. It will also reduce the cost of collecting these data.

The Lastinger Center Professional Development Model seeks to improve not just individual teacher practice, but also whole schools by creating a community of learners committed to improving practice in the service of student learning.

Conclusion for Elementary School Section

Overall, participants in Lastinger Center-sponsored training spoke highly of the professional development opportunities offered and their impact, particularly on their individual instructional practices and self-confidence. One teacher summarized the impact:

Ready Schools has...allowed for a positive impact on student learning.... It has allowed us to become better teachers, better co-workers, and better community builders...because we are all working collaboratively toward the same goal... student improvement and student achievement.... [Ready Schools] empowered us to be better teachers, to strive for that high quality teaching.

The Lastinger Center Model seeks to improve not just individual teacher practice, but also whole schools by creating a community of learners committed to improving practice in the service of student learning. Among the schools visited, the strongest effects of Lastinger remained with those directly participating in the professional development activities. However, the model has also begun to affect whole schools—engendering a culture focused on high-quality teachers and improving teaching practice and greater professional community.



V. Other Essential Services



Ready Schools aims to address the full spectrum of children's needs, and has developed innovative approaches to improving children's health. Earlier sections of this report have described Ready Schools' efforts to improve learning in early care and education programs as well as elementary schools. This section describes the efforts of Ready Schools partners to address children's other needs: access to health care, early identification of and intervention for special needs, and family engagement.

Improving Access to Health Care

The Ready Schools vision is that all children have access to high-quality care to address their physical, dental, and mental health 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 in collaboration with the Miami-Dade County Health Department and Miami-Dade County Public Schools. HealthConnect provides services in the region through three central programs: HealthConnect In The Early Years, HealthConnect In Our Schools, and HealthConnect In Our Community. These programs work together to reach families and children where they are, whether in the home, school, or broader community.

HealthConnect In The Early Years is a voluntary program that provides pregnant teens and first-time mothers with in-home visits to improve maternal health and pregnancy outcomes as well as child health and development. The program offers health education and prevention services in such areas as nutrition, breastfeeding support, health and development, discipline, and safety, and information on available community services.

The HealthConnect initiative has increased children's and families' access to important health and mental health services.

HealthConnect In Our Schools is a program that places health suites in schools. The health suites are staffed by a team of a nurse or nurse practitioner, a social worker, and one health aide to provide basic services and appropriate referrals to community care. Health suites provide students with immediate treatment and first aid; immunizations; vision, hearing, and dental screenings; eyeglasses; home visits; general health care; behavioral health care; health presentations on topics such as hand-washing, dental hygiene, and lice prevention; and connection to medical homes and insurance. To support children receiving scheduled vaccinations and immunizations, nurses affiliated with HealthConnect have been trained by the health department to administer them. HealthConnect nurses and social workers also make referrals for more comprehensive medical care or psychosocial services, and a growing emphasis of the program is on expanding access to mental health services for students in the coming years by having closer collaboration with mental health units including guidance counselors, psychologists, and truant officers.



Through **HealthConnect In Our Community**, neighborhood-based community health workers in local clinics link families with health insurance, help them identify health needs, and refer them to appropriate health care providers. In 2010, as part of its community-based work outside Ready Schools, The Children's Trust became involved in a tri-county (Palm Beach–Dade–Brower) collaboration to pilot universal enrollment platforms (e-App) as an efficient way to enroll families in health insurance and other social service programs. Using the e-App process, families complete one application form that is then used to determine their eligibility for and enroll them in multiple social service programs at one time, thus significantly reducing barriers to access to health insurance, food stamps, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, and other social service programs. If the pilot is successful, The Children's Trust hopes to use e-App in all its HealthConnect programs in coming years.

Benefits of HealthConnect

The HealthConnect initiative has increased children's and families' access to important health and mental health services through home visiting, school-based health suites, health insurance enrollment, electronic medical files, and soon through virtual clinics. Since initiation of the **HealthConnect in the Early Years** in 2007, a total of 7,539 women have received voluntary home visits.⁶ On average, women receive 4 prenatal and 11 postnatal home visits.⁷



HealthConnect In Our Schools has developed health suites in a large portion of Miami-Dade's most needy schools. In the 2009–10 school year, it provided services for approximately 97,000 students, 47% of whom were in elementary schools. Although budget reductions resulted in a decrease in the number of schools participating in HealthConnect In Our Schools, from 165 in 2008–09 to 131 in 2009–10, the total number of children served increased by nearly 11,000 between the years,⁸ suggesting that staff in existing health suites provided substantially more services in the past year than in previous years. In 2009–10, more than 500,000 interventions were provided in schools with health suites, the most common services being health evaluations and first aid and consultations with parents, school staff, or doctors.⁹ In addition, nurses through HealthConnect provided more than 12,000 H1N1 immunizations in 2009–10.¹⁰ The program will strive to immunize 70,000 students against the seasonal flu and H1N1 during the 2010–11 school year.

Students also received many mental health services and referrals through HealthConnect In Our Schools. In 2009–10, the primary reason students were referred for psychosocial services was a concern for safety, accounting for almost 26,000 referrals. Additional common reasons for referrals were academic issues (4,600 referrals), family issues (2,300 referrals), bullying and harassment (2,100 referrals), peer issues (1,500 referrals), and disruptive behaviors (1,500 referrals).¹¹ Between 800 and 1,000 referrals were made for each of the following issues: stress management, economic concerns, anger management, and aggression or violence.¹² In addition, approximately 5,600 individual social work counseling sessions were provided during the school year.¹³



Teachers and administrators credited HealthConnect with decreasing absenteeism and increasing instructional time.

Staff members at schools with a HealthConnect suite told interviewers about the positive effects the program has had on their school and students by providing access to physical and mental health care services that would otherwise not typically be available to the students. Interviewees reported that nurses and health aids met students' basic health needs through eye exams, treatments for allergies, and basic first aid and that they often communicated with parents about ways to prevent illness. Teachers also appreciated being able to refer students to, or confer directly with, social workers and psychologists for concerns about students' mental health or conditions at home that they suspected were interfering with students' success in school. Teachers and administrators credited HealthConnect with decreasing 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. In 2009–10, 85% of students who visited a health suite during the school day were able to return to class.¹⁴

In 2009–10, **HealthConnect In Our Community** staff partnered with 83 schools and 92 child care centers to identify children and families most in need of health insurance and support in accessing health care services. By the end of 2009–10, this program had served 125,236 children and parents.¹⁵ In 2009–10, 6,093 children who were eligible for KidCare and 2,439 adults who were eligible to apply for Medicaid were successfully approved for enrollment or renewal.¹⁶

HealthConnect: Looking Forward

To improve the effectiveness of HealthConnect In Our Schools in reaching and serving those students with the highest needs, HealthConnect is continually working to enhance the quality of data it collects and to make reporting easier for staff members. In 2009–10, it developed and piloted in schools a new data system (CHEER: Childhood Health and Education Easy Reporting). This new system gives health suite staff electronic access to children's health records. The executive director of Childhood Health & Development at The Children's Trust is also working with a variety of partners to explore expansion of the CHEER data system so that it links more fully across the health and education spectrum and includes information from early childhood and education data systems such as Quality Counts' WELS data system.

HealthConnect In Our Schools plans to open a virtual clinic in every school as an innovative and affordable way to expand health care access across all schools in the district.

HealthConnect In Our Schools plans to open a virtual clinic in every school as an innovative and affordable way to expand health care access across all schools in the district. Virtual clinics will use a telemedicine system via broadband servers to provide on-site services for children and information for families. The plan is for each school to have a telehealth pod through which HealthConnect staff members could enter a student's health information, current vital signs, and



a picture of his or her affliction and send it electronically to one of several health specialists located throughout the country.

As mentioned, The Children's Trust also hopes to aggressively build the use of e-App into all its HealthConnect programs in coming years to enroll even more families into affordable health insurance and other important programs.

Increasing Early Identification and Intervention

Ready Schools seeks to ensure that children with special 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 early care and education programs and Quality Counts.

The **Miami-Dade County Division of Child Development Services**, with funding from the Early Learning Coalition, conducts annual assessments of 3- and 4-year-old children throughout the county who receive state-subsidized child care services (excluding Head Start). Teachers conduct the Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and with parental permission give children considered at risk a more in-depth screening. Voluntary Prekindergarten children also receive assessments of their cognitive, language, and social-emotional skills (i.e., the Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic [LAP-D] Assessment and the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment [DECA]). To better conduct assessments, manage the assessment data collected, and provide follow-up services, the Early Learning Coalition now contracts with three different institutions to carry out each of these tasks. The County Division of Child Development Services conducts the ASQ assessments, Florida International University is providing data management services, and Citrus Health provides inclusion resources, support, and technical assistance to child care providers who care for children with special needs.

Ready Schools partners also connect early care and education programs with community resources that screen, assess, and provide early interventions for young children. One of these community resources is **Early Steps**, which offers free developmental assessments for children in Miami-Dade between birth and age 3 who a doctor, parent, or caregiver suspects have a developmental delay or disability. Early Steps has two locations in Miami-Dade: the University of Miami Mailman Center for Child Development Early Steps in north Miami-Dade and Miami Children's Hospital Early Steps in south Miami-Dade. This program is often referred to as the Infant and Toddler Early Intervention Program or Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Early Steps is monitored by Children's Medical Services of the Florida Department of Health.

Another community resource is the **Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System**. It arranges for free evaluations of children ages 3 to 5 who a doctor, parent, or caregiver suspects have a developmental delay or disability. The system 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 the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System is mandated under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Students already enrolled in a Miami-Dade County Public Schools program are evaluated in their school or in their region.



Benefits of Early Identification and Referral Services

More than 18,000 children ages 3 and 4 throughout Miami-Dade County received ASQ developmental screenings in the past year, and the same number are expected to receive an ASQ screening this coming year. In addition, a sample of 450 Voluntary Prekindergarten children received DECA and LAP-D assessments. All six early care and education centers and homes visited reported the use of screenings to identify children at risk of developmental delays and disabilities. Further, they reported that the screening process successfully identified children in need of further assessments and services. All children were assessed by teaching staff at program entry and then rescreened annually. Staff reported that if the ASQ identifies any issues or red flags, someone from the County Division of Child Development Services is sent to the center to conduct a more in-depth assessment and to connect the child to further assessments and services if needed. The County Child Development Services assessor lets the center or home director know if he or she needs to advise the parents to seek additional assessment or services from Early Steps or Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System. Therapists are provided for children based on assessments conducted by professionals at these resource centers or are arranged for by the parents. If a disability is identified, the center receives an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) within 3 months.

Early Identification and Referral Services: Looking Forward

Teachers use paper forms to conduct the ASQ, and centers usually need to score the screening assessments themselves. The current plan is to upgrade to the ASQ-4, which includes a web-based version of the ASQ that offers online data management and questionnaire completion.

Historically, some children referred for further assessments have experienced long waits (up to 9 months) before receiving those assessments and coordination across agencies conducting assessments has been difficult. Ready Schools partners are continuing to work with one of the larger providers of assessments and services for children with disabilities to decrease wait times. To support better coordination and sharing of information across assessment agencies, Ready Schools partners are working on technological solutions and hope that the new contract with Florida International University for data management services will accelerate this work.

To improve the effectiveness of family engagement programs, Ready Schools partners are offering professional development and new resources to Community Involvement Specialists who work with families in more than 300 Title I schools.

Increasing Family Engagement

Ready Schools also has the goal of family engagement. This includes providing families with more opportunities to be involved in their children's early care and education programs and elementary schools, encouraging them to continue their children's learning at home, and supporting them in developing the skills needed to more fully engage in these ways.



To improve the effectiveness of family engagement programs in Miami-Dade County, Ready Schools partners are offering professional development and new resources to **Community Involvement Specialists** who work with families in more than 300 Title I schools in the county. The role of the Community Involvement Specialist traditionally has been to connect families with community health, social, and educational resources. They also offer workshops based on parent interests as identified through parent surveys and target some workshops to families of Voluntary Prekindergarten children. Past workshops have covered such topics as how to communicate with teachers, the importance of reading, and how to work with one's child on academic tasks.



The district Title I office oversees all the Community Involvement Specialists in the district. It has partnered with the Lastinger Center for Learning to provide all the specialists with professional development. Quarterly regional workshops are offered that are co-facilitated by Ready Schools staff and two Community Involvement Specialist facilitators who were selected on the basis of their history of success with families. The Community Involvement Specialist facilitators received extensive training on the peer facilitation and the community of practice approach used by the Lastinger Center. These facilitators also participated in the Ready Schools Learning Showcase.

The **Community Involvement Specialist workshops and regional meetings** have four goals: (1) enhance the ability of Community Involvement Specialists to cultivate relationships that support children; (2) improve the visibility and collaboration of the Community Involvement Specialists with school staff and faculty; (3) help the Community Involvement Specialists learn more about the communities they serve, becoming more aware of their needs and how to adapt to meet those needs; and (4) promote the use of strategies that encourage parent participation and increase access to community resources.

Ready Schools partners are also conducting **family engagement efforts** with families of children in early care and education programs. One effort is to teach parents about the importance of selecting high-quality early care and education programs and to give them the tools to do so. The Early Learning Coalition sent materials about how to choose high-quality programs to 10,000 parents. Another effort is related to improving family literacy. To engage more families of young children to read to their children, the Early Learning Coalition implemented a book distribution and family education program with a \$125,000 grant from Reading is Fundamental, Inc., the nation's largest literacy organization.

Benefits of Family Engagement Services

Ready Schools partners have improved family engagement efforts across many Miami-Dade elementary schools. Thus far, more than 90 Community Involvement Specialists have received training through Ready Schools' community of learners approach. Further, Ready Schools trained 15 Community Involvement Specialists to facilitate learning communities with their peers.



Staff members at the district reported that Ready Schools is changing the work of the Community Involvement Specialists. Because of Ready Schools training, Community Involvement Specialists have improved their skills in listening to and communicating with parents, have had greater success in getting more parents to attend events (as well as in reaching the types of parents who had been less likely to attend), and feel more confident in their work at the schools and in their interactions with administrators. Parents' satisfaction with their schools' Community Involvement Specialist, according to a district survey, also has increased and is very high. In interviews, principals also reported that Ready Schools training increased the visibility of the Community Involvement Specialists in their schools and that the specialists have become more professional and focused in their work. The district changed some of its protocols in response to these improvements from the Ready Schools training. In particular, because Community Involvement Specialists are more successful in getting parents into the schools, the district decreased the number of home visits that Community Involvement Specialists were required to make to reach parents.

Ready Schools partners also raised engagement among the parents of young children. In 2009–10, The Reading Is Fundamental program distributed 80,000 books to children in more than 385 early care and education programs, including many subsidized school readiness programs. Families were invited 3 times a year to hear authors and community leaders read books, and each child had the opportunity to select three books to build his or her own personal library. As mentioned, new materials educating parents about how to select high-quality early care and education programs were distributed to 10,000 parents.

Family Engagement Services: Looking Forward

As work with the Community Involvement Specialists continues, Ready Schools staff members are developing new materials and trainings to expand the capacity of specialists to engage families, to teach parents how to support learning at home and advocate for their children in school, and to connect families with community resources. Further, one Ready Schools partner, The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, has contracted with the Human Services Coalition to hire five AmeriCorps interns and a supervisor from the Public Allies Program to provide school-based support for Community Involvement Specialists in each region of the district.

Nonetheless, Ready Schools partners recognized a need for additional parent engagement strategies beyond working with the Community Involvement Specialists. Therefore, they formed a cross-agency work group to develop ways to engage families in the early years of their children's learning that can be used across agencies. A logic model, developed by the work group, identified 25 potential strategies to engage parents. The group is refining the list to a smaller number of strategies and hopes to turn its initial outline for parent engagement into a full work plan in 2011.

Finally, the district is piloting a new online parenting education program called College Bound and is looking at how to integrate it into the district's Parent Academy offerings. College Bound, available in both Spanish and English, combines simple video-based lessons with online coaching to help parents become effective partners in their children's academic success. The program is being piloted with parents of children in kindergarten through second grade.



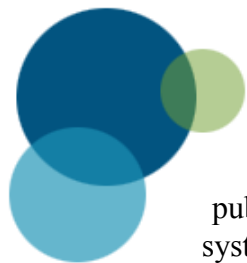
Ready Schools partners are creating a system of care in Miami-Dade County that supports children's health, development, and family outcomes, as well as their academic outcomes.

Conclusion for Other Essential Services Section

In summary, Ready Schools partners are creating a system of care in Miami-Dade County that supports children's health, development, and family outcomes, as well as their academic outcomes. The HealthConnect programs are enhancing children's and families' access to health care. Developmental screenings in early care and education programs are identifying children at risk of learning delays or other disabilities and connecting them to services that can remediate or prevent learning problems before children enter elementary school. In addition, Ready Schools is strengthening the capacity of Miami-Dade's elementary schools to engage parents in their children's learning. Finally, Ready Schools partners are providing parents with information and resources to support the extremely important parent practices of regularly reading with their children and selecting high-quality early care and education programs for them to attend.



VI. Changing Systems to Support Children



Ready Schools is a complex and comprehensive reform effort aimed at improving the well-being and educational attainment of children at risk of academic, health, and social difficulties. By fostering collaborations among Florida’s social service agencies, community organizations, health centers, early childhood education organizations, public school systems, and universities, Ready Schools is creating a visionary system that 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.

Ready Schools is creating a visionary system that reflects the understanding that organizations working together, rather than in isolation, will provide children and their families with the holistic support needed to improve their outcomes.

This section highlights the systems-level outcomes achieved, documents how partner organizations are doing business differently, and describes the ways policies and practices are improving to better support children’s developmental and learning outcomes.

The core systems change strategies of Ready Schools are the following:

- Collaborating on strategic planning
- Partnering to create strong and comprehensive programs
- Promoting racial equity through leadership, data analysis, and program refinement
- Generating, connecting, and leveraging resources
- Generating and sustaining public support for children’s learning and development
- Expanding Ready Schools work beyond Miami.

Collaborating on Strategic Planning

The promise of Ready Schools rests with the strength of the collaborations among the partner agencies. Since the inception of Ready Schools, the diverse partner organizations have come together to successfully collaborate, plan, develop, and provide a comprehensive array of programs. The effectiveness of the partnership can be attributed to three factors: alignment of organizational priorities and commitment to Ready Schools, ongoing communication, and formal cross-organizational associations.



Alignment of Organizational Priorities and Commitment to Ready Schools

When Ready Schools was launched in 2007, the leaders of the partner organizations noted that the vision and mission of Ready Schools fit comfortably with their own organization's priorities. As the head of one partner organization said at that time,

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.

Three years later, organizational leaders still recognize their shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and the priority that they place on the Ready Schools vision. As one leader said,

It's wonderful to be able to share resources and to have the commitment and professionalism from the university level to The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, to The Children's Trust.... We know each other and we all have a common goal.... It's just a good overall feeling of being able to work together toward a common goal and a common agenda.

Organizational leaders recognize their shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and the priority that they place on the Ready Schools vision.

Another leader described how the shared vision of Ready Schools partners enabled them to work toward a common goal:

We developed a clear vision and then everyone saw what they could bring. Having a clear vision and clear plan and what everyone could bring to it made it work.

With such strong alignment and commitment, the overarching goal of Ready Schools has become the driving factor across partner organizations, supporting collaboration and strengthening the joint work.

Ongoing Communication

Collaboration across partners was also facilitated by ongoing communication, both formal and informal. Since the start of Ready Schools and continuing through today, partners meet regularly to discuss programs and strategies, inform each other of progress made or challenges faced, and strategize about future directions. In the first year of Ready Schools, partners created formal structures for joint planning that facilitated connections among them. Because all partners met at least monthly, Ready Schools became part of their regularly scheduled work, not an add-on. In addition to dedicated Ready Schools meetings, Ready Schools partners attended each other's meetings. For example, the school district sent a representative to Early Learning Coalition board meetings and to the meetings of the other Ready Schools partners.

In addition to formal meetings, informal and impromptu meetings were facilitated by the proximity of the organizations. Several of the key partners, including The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation 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 Early Learning Coalition, 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 Early Learning Coalition so it can "fly the flag that they are here." The United Way building also has conference facilities that are used by all the partners, including the school district.

Three years into Ready Schools, ongoing communication has remained an important part of the partners' collaborative work. As one leader said,

*When we meet it's as if it's one big happy family.
You feel it in the air. This is what we are going to do.
What are we going to plan for? We have agendas, it's organized, we have formal
and informal conversations.*



One leader recognized that sometimes it might be easier to move forward without convening all the partners and that something as basic as setting up meetings can be a challenge because of the extra effort and planning needed to make sure everyone is invited. Maintaining communication across all partners is a priority, however, because it keeps them linked, helps them each determine what they can contribute to their shared mission, and sustains their feeling of ownership for the broader work of Ready Schools.

Formal Cross-Organizational Associations

Further, connections among partners were and continue to be supported by formal cross-organizational associations, with a member of one organization having a formal role in another. The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation President, David Lawrence Jr., is the former chair of The Children's Trust board and sits on the Early Learning Coalition and 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 County Public Schools, Alberto Carvalho, sits on The Children's Trust and the United Way boards. Harve Mogul, president of the United Way, Modesto Abety, President of the Children's Trust, and Magaly Abrahante, Assistant Superintendent of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools also sit on the Early Learning Coalition's board. Evelio Torres, President of the Early Learning Coalition, has a seat on The Children's Trust board and Miami Dade College's Early Childhood Advisory Board.

These formal cross-organizational associations contribute to the successful collaboration of Ready Schools partners. As one leader described,

*You couldn't have a board meeting here and say [our organization] got
\$10 million to do something without everyone knowing.*



Not only do these linkages enable the sharing of information, but sitting on each other's boards also allows the organizational leaders to influence the work of their partners and promote their shared priorities.

Partnering to Create Strong and Comprehensive Programs

With a strong partnership in place, Ready Schools partners are able to build on each other's knowledge and skills to create a comprehensive and coherent initiative. They do so by creating linkages across programs, spreading best practices, and joining together to create programs.

Using the Lastinger Center peer facilitation model across programs has led to coherence in how everyone in Ready Schools approaches professional development and program refinement.

Creating Program Linkages

Initially, Ready Schools partners were focused on creating discrete programs and services, such as Quality Counts, the Early Childhood Program Administrator's Institute, and HealthConnect. However, as is depicted in the Ready Schools logic model, there was always the intention to create a coherent initiative, not just a menu of discrete programs. Consequently, Ready Schools is working to ensure that early care and education programs and elementary schools receive the comprehensive set of services its partners provide.

One example of cross-strategy coordination is in early childhood. Although Quality Counts and the Early Childhood Program Administrator's Institute were developed independently of one another, Ready Schools partners are working to integrate them. Specifically, administrators from Quality Counts centers will receive priority for admission into the administrator's institute. Further, partners are considering making the administrator's institute a prerequisite for participating in Quality Counts. Other examples of cross-strategy coordination are giving Quality Counts technical assistants priority to participate in the Curriculum Learning Communities to support their work with centers on curriculum, and inviting Quality Counts technical assistants to participate in the job-embedded graduate program to increase their knowledge and skills related to early learning.

Spreading Best Practices

Ready Schools partners also benefit from their collaboration by learning from one another and using best practices across their programs. Thus, the partnership has led to the broad use of Lastinger Center's model for peer facilitation guided by protocols for planning and professional development. For example, this model of professional development is now being used by early care and education providers participating in the Curriculum Learning Communities project, by teachers as part of PLCs and Teacher Fellows programs in elementary schools, by Community Involvement Specialists, by school teams to review data and create school plans, and by Ready Schools partners to discuss issues about improving racial equity. Using the peer facilitation model across programs has led to coherence in how everyone in Ready Schools approaches professional development and program refinement.

Joining Together to Create Programs

Another way that Ready Schools partners take full advantage of their relationships with one another is to jointly create programs that they otherwise would not have been able to create on their own. Some programs were made possible only because of linkages between Ready Schools partners. For example, in-depth training for Community Involvement Specialists was possible only because the district partnered with the Lastinger Center to provide its train-the-trainer peer-facilitation model. Similarly, Miami Dade College would not have been able to develop its bachelor's degree program in early childhood without technical support from Ready Schools on the content and structure of the program and a grant from The Children's Trust.



Similarly, the successful launch, implementation, and improvement of Quality Counts were possible only because of its many Ready School partners. In particular, Quality Counts is funded by The Children's Trust, the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe, and The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation. Quality Counts programs are implemented by many organizations including the Early Learning Coalition, 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. No one organization could have achieved the level of success and impact that Ready Schools partners are having together.

Ready Schools partners and other community leaders are purposefully and actively putting racial equity at the center of their efforts through leadership, data analysis, and program refinement.

Promoting Racial Equity Through Leadership, Data Analysis, and Program Refinement

Ready Schools partners recognize that they will not meet their goals unless their work is producing opportunity and success for children from *all* demographic and income groups. Ready Schools partners have always focused on the most vulnerable schools and children. However, over time, their work to create racial equity has become more explicit and more intentional. Ready Schools partners and other agency and community leaders are working together to purposefully and actively put racial equity at the center of their efforts through leadership, data analysis, and program refinement.

Leading for Racial Equity

Ready School partners have been encouraging and providing support for the leaders of the social services, education, higher education, and other key sectors to look internally within their organizations and externally to community needs in an ongoing effort to identify and remove structural barriers to racial equity.



To create the foundation for conversations about racial equity, Ready Schools hosted a 3-day retreat in December 2009 for about 40 community leaders. The ultimate goal of the retreat was to determine how to redirect their collective resources to address the racial disparities in the community. During the retreat, participants answered such questions as “How are we meeting the needs of a diverse clientele?” and “How do we look at data around racial inequities?” BAYCES, an organization with expertise in racial equity work, was brought in to facilitate local meetings so that they would produce open and productive conversations.

Demonstrating their commitment to promote racial equity, Ready Schools leaders are beginning to move beyond conversations and taking action to promote racial equity. Their work falls into two areas: examining data and planning new programs or retooling existing programs.

Examining Data Using a Racial Equity Lens

Ready Schools partners are examining disaggregated data to determine how different population subgroups are faring on a variety of outcomes and evaluating their work against these outcomes. The Children’s Trust collects data on more than 100 indicators of child well-being and has been able to contribute statistics and maps to the cross-partner conversations. Ready Schools partners are using these data to create maps to see how Ready Schools components (e.g., early care and education programs in Quality Counts, Ready Schools elementary schools, schools with HealthConnect In Our Schools) are distributed across certain neighborhoods and where certain components might need to be added or linked more closely together. By looking at multiple indicators, they are able to identify specific neighborhoods where children’s outcomes on a number of factors are low or where service gaps exist. Using data disaggregated by race, Ready Schools partners are beginning to adjust and customize their work, as needed, to close gaps for specific populations.

Adjusting Programs to Address Racial Equity

In response to their data analysis and commitment to racial equity, Ready Schools partners have begun to adjust programs to ameliorate the evident disparities. Administrators of Quality Counts, for example, determined that although overall the program showed signs of success, it was not reaching poor neighborhoods to the extent that they wanted. Therefore, as program administrators adjust the program, they are attempting to focus more on vulnerable communities and to provide more targeted and tailored services for programs in those communities.

Other activities have been designed to support elementary schools’ relationships with their diverse parent populations. Specifically, the Lastinger Center has provided the school-based Community Involvement Specialists with training on working with different cultures and strategies for bringing cultural activities into their schools. The purpose of the training was to strengthen the knowledge and broaden the strategies of the Community Involvement Specialists so that they were more successful in welcoming their diverse parent populations and encouraging parent participation in schools.

At the higher education level, Miami Dade College is establishing programs to diversify the teaching staff in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. The Director of the School of Education has been exploring the Call Me MISTER (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) Program as a way to attract black males into the teaching profession. The program would provide scholarships for qualified males to work toward their degrees in early



care and education or K–12 teaching. The director also is working with the Florida Future Educators of America in some of the most underserved areas of Miami to bring middle school students to the campus for college tours. The idea behind this partnership is to take students to a mostly black college campus so that they can see that college is within their reach and to nurture the idea that they can be teachers.

Another example of Ready Schools partners addressing racial equity is the anti-bias, multicultural curriculum being developed for the Primary Learning Center. With a \$25,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the district bought video cameras to capture examples of how to discuss similarities, differences, equity, and fairness with young children. The district hopes to pilot the curriculum at the Primary Learning Center and some of the Ready Schools model elementary schools and later disseminate it more broadly.

Generating, Connecting, and Leveraging Resources

Through its multiple partners, Ready Schools is generating, connecting, and leveraging hundreds of millions of dollars in support for an early learning system serving children from birth through the end of elementary school. Thus, Ready Schools partners have been able to grow and sustain the investments they received so that each program they developed became self-sustaining. Many of the programs described in this report started from a \$4 million Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids™ (SPARK) grant for improving preschool through third grade learning received in 2006 from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the subsequent \$10 million Ready Schools grant. The programs are now funded by the organizations that run them and are no longer reliant on the seed money provided by the foundation. The reauthorization of The Children's Trust, made possible by Ready Schools partners, provides over \$100 million a year in support of children. By mobilizing existing resources, maintaining funding even during times of economic decline, institutionalizing funding for programs into operating budgets, and generating new funding sources, Ready Schools partners are ensuring that their systems change efforts can be sustainable over time.

Ready Schools partners have been able to grow and sustain the investments they received so that each program they developed became self-sustaining.

Mobilizing Existing Resources

As a systems change effort, Ready Schools works to mobilize resources that already exist in the community; it does not rely solely on garnering new resources. As the head of one partner organization said,

[Ready Schools is about] how we, as funders and policymakers, better utilize and leverage each other's resources to improve the efficiency and maximize each other's resources.

Each Ready Schools partner has committed funding from their operating budgets in support of Ready Schools goals. The Early Learning Coalition manages \$170 million a year, with almost 95% of those funds dedicated to children's access to programs and 5% to program quality. The



Children's Trust managed more than \$115 million in 2010, with the goal of allocating half its program funds to children ages 0–5. The United Way of Miami-Dade brought in more than \$59 million in 2009–10, with a portion of that sum aimed at early learning. Additionally, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools' total appropriations for 2008–09 were just over \$4.3 billion. 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.

To leverage resources in support of the shared goals, many of the partner organizations collaboratively fund programs, and many 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 United Way Early Care and Education Administrator's Institute is funded jointly by The Children's Trust and The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation. Quality Counts is funded primarily by The Children's Trust, but The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation funded the development of the Web-based Early Learning System database that Quality Counts uses to track applications and progress, and the Early Learning Coalition is helping to fund some database programmatic enhancements to meet specific local needs and Quality Counts grants for materials and some financial incentives for programs and staff. Miami Dade College was able to develop the new bachelor's degree program through a grant from The Children's Trust. By supporting each other and tying their funds together, Ready Schools partners can create better programs and structures in support of children and their families.

Maintaining Funding in Economic Decline

The priority placed on the Ready Schools model was most apparent over the last 2 years when support for Ready Schools was maintained even though overall resources across all the partner organizations were decreasing because of the economic recession. For example, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools budget decreased by \$700 million from 2008–09 to 2009–10, and The Children's Trust budget decreased from \$161 million in 2007–08 to \$140 million in 2008–09 and to \$115 million in 2009–10. Despite these harrowing financial conditions, each organization maintained its commitment to Ready Schools. With a 25% budget reduction, The Children's Trust had to make difficult decisions about where to allocate its dollars. At its strategic planning meeting in December 2008, the board decided to uphold its goal of allocating 50% of the trust's funds for children ages 0–5. Thus, The Children's Trust maintained its current funding levels for early childhood programs while reducing funds elsewhere. Likewise, the Early Learning Coalition sustained its investment in Quality Counts while decreasing investments elsewhere. The fact that these organizations were maintaining funding levels for programs that fall under the Ready Schools umbrella while decreasing funding elsewhere is a testament to the priority that Ready Schools has become for all the partner organizations.

Institutionalizing Funding

During this time of economic decline, several organizations dedicated new dollars to Ready Schools programs. Typically, programs funded with grant money decline or even disappear when the grant money dries up. But Ready Schools is not typical. Even with the grant money from the

W.K. Kellogg Foundation still available, partner organizations are beginning to assume the financial responsibility for sustaining the work. The development of the Web-based Early Learning System database, for example, was funded by The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation. However, The Children's Trust and the Early Learning Coalition are funding additional customization of the database to meet the specific needs of Quality Counts.

The school district, too, has made a commitment to supporting Ready Schools by investing its own funds in Ready Schools program components. For example, through Title I and district funds, the district has included in its budget support for the Lastinger Center's Teacher Leadership for School Improvement job-embedded graduate degree program as a way to improve teacher effectiveness. The district also has committed funding to the training of Community Involvement Specialists to improve their effectiveness in engaging families in their children's education.



Ready Schools partners were essential to the reauthorization of The Children's Trust, which guarantees continued funding of over \$100 million a year for improving children's outcomes.

Generating New Funding

Ready Schools partners continued to generate new funding to support children's learning and development. As described above, Ready Schools partners worked together to successfully support the reauthorization of The Children's Trust in August 2008, ensuring the continuation of a key partner in Ready Schools and guaranteeing continued funding and programming to improve outcomes for children. In 2009, through their support and facilitation of the development of a statewide early childhood framework, Ready Schools partners helped direct \$20 million of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds to the development of an early childhood infrastructure throughout the state that supports Ready Schools' vision. Moreover, Ready Schools partners were one of only 49 applicants out of 1,698 applicants to win a prestigious Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund grant.

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

Ready Schools partners recognize that maintaining a focus on children and sustaining programs that provide children with the services and supports they need require public and political support. Thus, while building a network of services locally, Ready Schools partners simultaneously put a premium on garnering the support needed to sustain and expand their strategies and impact countywide, statewide, and beyond.



Reauthorizing the Children's Trust

Ready Schools partners were essential to the reauthorization of The Children's Trust, which guarantees continued funding of over \$100 million a year for improving children's outcomes. The original authorization of The Children's Trust in 2002 came with a sunset provision requiring that the trust be returned for voter approval. The Children's Trust was up for voter reauthorization in August 2008, and Ready Schools partners worked industriously to ensure its continuation. The vote on August 26, 2008, was clear: 85% 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, and demonstrates a high level of public support for children's development and learning.

Establishing the Children's Movement of Florida

A farther-reaching outgrowth of Ready Schools is The Children's Movement of Florida. Spearheaded by David Lawrence Jr., President of The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, The Children's Movement is a nonpartisan movement to educate political, business, and civic leaders about the need to make the well-being and education of all children the first priority when deciding how the state's resources are expended. More than 110,000 Floridians are now connected with the website for The Children's Movement and hundreds more are joining each week.

In September 2010, The Children's Movement embarked on a Milk Party tour to build awareness about the movement and to mobilize support for a focus on children. Seventeen rallies were held across the state of Florida, with more than 15,000 adults and children in attendance. The Milk Party tour received ample media coverage, featured in more than 100 articles, columns, editorials, and stories.

To create long-term and sustainable change, The Children's Movement, an outgrowth of Ready Schools, is focusing on creating state policies in support of children.

To create long-term and sustainable change, The Children's Movement is focusing on creating state policies in support of children. It developed a legislative agenda to address five issues: (1) high-quality parent skill-building, (2) high-quality mentoring, (3) screening and treatment for children who may have special needs, (4) improving Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten program, and (5) health insurance for all children. The policy platform was cowritten by two Ready Schools leaders and builds on the lessons learned in Miami-Dade County over the past 3 years.

Through political outreach, The Children's Movement is working to make its legislative agenda a reality. Mr. Lawrence has met with high ranking state policymakers including the governor, senate president, house speaker, and other legislators to promote the five focus issues of The Children's Movement. Further, regional coordinators are building political support for the legislative agenda by attending legislative delegation meetings across the state.



Developing a Statewide Early Childhood Framework

To strengthen state policies for early childhood, Ready Schools funded the facilitation of state planning sessions. These sessions included more than 100 experts and stakeholders who represented programs, associations, advocacy groups, and partnerships from every part of the state. This led to the development of a statewide framework for decision-making about early childhood policies and resource allocation. The resulting framework will be used as the initial strategic plan for the Early Childhood Subcommittee of the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet. The framework also guides the work of the State Advisory Committee on Early Childhood Education and Care (mandated by the federal government) and heavily informed how \$20 million of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds is being spent to strengthen the early childhood infrastructure in the state, including the development of a unified data system, a professional development system for early care and education educators, a universal definition of program quality and assessment strategies, and unified system of child screening.

Expanding Ready Schools Work Beyond Miami

Since its inception, a goal of Ready Schools was to create systems change first in Miami and then across the state of Florida and nationally. Ready Schools has expanded its teacher development programs within Miami and across Florida and disseminated program components and ideas to other states.

Expanding Teacher Development Programs

The new Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund grant awarded to the Miami-Dade County Public Schools by the U.S. Department of Education will ensure the expansion of the graduate degree program within Miami. The grant will enable 100 prekindergarten through third grade teachers in the district to participate in the University of Florida job-embedded master's degree program with an early childhood specialization. In addition, up to 375 teachers annually will engage in teacher inquiry through the Teachers Fellow program, and 25 principals will further strengthen their leadership skills in the Principal Fellows Program.

Ready Schools has expanded its teacher development programs within Miami and across Florida and disseminated program components and ideas to other states.

To support teacher professional development and teaching quality statewide, the Lastinger Center expanded both its comprehensive school reform model and the Teacher Leadership for School Improvement graduate program throughout Florida. The Lastinger Center is working with districts and schools across the state to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and leadership and to help turn around schools in need of improvement in three of Florida's largest districts besides Miami-Dade (Duval, Collier, Alachua) using its professional learning communities model. Districts are investing their own resources to adopt the Lastinger model to improve their lowest performing schools.



Both the Florida Department of Education and the Florida legislature support the Teacher Leadership for School Improvement graduate program. The Florida Department of Education recommended that districts spend their Title I and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds for teacher professional development on this program. At a time when state funds are being cut, the Florida legislature made a recurring appropriation of \$1.2 million for the University of Florida to expand and evaluate the job-embedded graduate degree program. This will enable the Lastinger Center to expand the program to more schools, as well as to develop additional degree programs for middle and high school math and science and early learning.

Disseminating Ideas to Other States

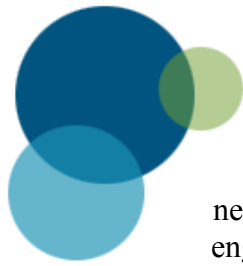
In addition to its influence on early childhood at the local and state levels, Ready Schools is beginning to extend its reach beyond the state border. It is sharing the Web-based Early Learning System that it uses for Quality Counts with other states. For example, New York State is field-testing the Web-based Early Learning System database for supporting its early childhood quality improvement efforts. In addition, the Lastinger Center has been supporting other W.K Kellogg Foundation communities in the learning labs, facilitating work similar to Ready Schools in Hawai'i, Mississippi, and Washington State.

Conclusion for Changing Systems to Support Children Section

Ready Schools partners have built strong connections with each other that allow for authentic collaboration. They are maximizing the effect they can have on children and families by coordinating and linking their programs. They are using data to identify how they can improve racial equity and better serve underserved populations. They are developing new programs and stronger linkages between programs to address some of the identified gaps. They have leveraged their partnership and connections to generate support and resources for children's learning and development in Miami-Dade and, more recently, across the state and country.



VII. Conclusion



In only 3 years, Ready Schools partners have made significant progress in creating a coordinated and integrated system of supports to increase the probability that children will attain academic and life success in Miami-Dade. Ready Schools partners have launched and expanded strategic program components that comprehensively address the needs of children for high-quality early care, education, health, and family engagement. They have built strong connections with each other that allow for authentic collaboration. They have successfully leveraged existing funds and generated new funds to make their shared mission a reality. They have gained public support and political will to sustain this work. In addition, the partners have successfully scaled their programs throughout Miami-Dade and have begun to export them throughout the state and beyond. With their focus on racial equity, Ready Schools partners are working to ensure that *all* children benefit from the innovative system they have developed.

With their focus on racial equity, Ready Schools partners are working to ensure that *all* children benefit from the innovative system they have developed.

This comprehensive and integrated system is what makes José's future promising. Ready Schools serves as a proof point that even in poor communities, the quality of early care and education can be lifted through appropriate resources, support, and training and higher education. Elementary schools can improve teaching and learning through inquiry-based and collaborative school cultures, higher education opportunities, leadership training, and availability of data. Health care can improve when services are brought to children. Children with developmental delays can be provided appropriate supports if they are screened early and a network of appropriate organizations exists to which they can be referred. And parents and families can be engaged in their children's education when authentic connections are made between them and their schools.

The system is not complete; there is still work to be done. Throughout this report, we have identified the many changes already planned for various Ready Schools programs. It is this reflective nature of the initiative partners that will keep Ready Schools going. Ready Schools has been set up not as a static program but as a living system that grows, learns from successes and failures, adjusts as necessary, and seeks out the next steps to improve outcomes for children.

Ready Schools Miami, through authentic partnerships that promote communitywide strategic planning, leveraging of resources for innovative and comprehensive program components, and defining and tracking of shared outcomes, has built a solid foundation for a system that supports children's early learning and well-being. This foundation has provided the necessary infrastructure to continue expanding the reach of Ready Schools throughout Miami-Dade and the state of Florida.



During the 3-year evaluation of Ready Schools, SRI International used four primary methods to collect data: a systems-level case study, elementary school case studies, early care and education case studies, and a compilation of community indicators.

System-Level Case Study

During each year of the study, SRI researchers interviewed individuals representing seven Ready Schools partner organizations to understand the systems change efforts under way. The interviews addressed 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. A total of 37 interviews were conducted with representatives from Ready Schools: 14 in February 2008, 10 in March 2009, 5 in September 2009, and 8 in September 2010.

SRI also interviewed administrators from the Miami-Dade County Public Schools district each year, 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. A total of 12 interviews were conducted with district staff: 5 in February 2008, 3 in March 2009, and 4 in September 2010.

Elementary School Case Studies

SRI conducted site visits to five elementary schools during the first year of the evaluation (April 2008) and six elementary schools during the third year of the evaluation (September 2010). During the site visits, SRI researchers interviewed the principal and a sample of three 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 and staff's participation in Ready Schools activities, connections with early care and education 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. During site visits in the first year of the evaluation, SRI 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 represented the range of schools participating in Ready Schools, as well as different geographical regions and student populations of Miami-Dade County.



Early Care and Education Center Case Studies

SRI also collected data in site visits to 10 early care and education centers during the first year of the evaluation (April 2008) and 6 centers during the third year of the evaluation (September 2010). SRI researchers interviewed the program director and a sample of one to three teachers at each center 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. The 10 programs visited represented the variety of programs involved in Ready Schools as well as different geographical regions and student populations of Miami-Dade County.

Community Indicators

To support Ready Schools partners in their development of a results-based accountability system to evaluate and track progress in the areas of early and elementary education, child health, child development, and family functioning, SRI compiled a set of child and family indicators from multiple Miami-Dade County sources. Indicators were chosen on the basis of their alignment with the Ready Schools logic model and their contribution to informing Ready Schools work. They were intended to help Ready Schools partners identify gaps in accessibility, use of services, and child and family well-being among specific subpopulations and indicate whether gaps are widening or narrowing. The indicators were presented in SRI's year 2 evaluation report.



¹ See, for example:

The Children's Trust. (2008). *Putting the Pieces Together for Our Children: A Child Well-Being Report of Community Indicators in Miami-Dade County 2008*. Miami, FL: Author.

Golan, S., Wechsler, M., Campbell, A., Park, C. J., Petersen, D., and Huang, T. (2010). *Ready Schools Miami: Year 2 Evaluation Findings*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

² Early Learning Coalition of Miami/Dade-Monroe, <http://www.elcmdm.org/dashboard/performanceasures.aspx>.

³ The Children's Trust Budget Briefing Papers, 2010-11: http://thechildrenstrust.org/images/stories/inside_trust/about_us/financials/The_Trust_Budget_Briefing_Papers_FY2010-11-090810.pdf, p. 44.

⁴ Lastinger website, <http://education.ufl.edu/centers/Lastinger/transforming.html>.

⁵ Range includes only the four schools where SRI collected information on total number of participants.

⁶ The Children's Trust Budget Briefing Papers, 2010-11, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Data submitted by The Children's Trust.

¹⁶ The Children's Trust Budget Briefing Papers, 2010-11, *op. cit.*, p.21.