



Ready, Set **GROW**

**Investing in
Quality Early Care
and Education for
a Thriving New
Hampshire**

Children's Alliance of New Hampshire

In collaboration with

**The New Hampshire School Readiness
Indicators Initiative State Team**



Spring 2004

Ready for School

Ready for Success

The ideal of quality public education for all children is as American as apple pie. Voters, regardless of party affiliation, say public education is a priority. Business leaders cite the need for quality public education to ensure workforce preparedness. Political and civic leaders say public education is a key to citizen engagement. This consensus offers real opportunity -- and nowhere is the consensus broader or the return on investment higher than in the area of school readiness.

School readiness means children entering school ready for success. School readiness involves schools and communities as well as families and children. School readiness is a 5 year old able to follow instructions, build friendships, and embrace new educational challenges. School readiness is a community committed to healthy child and family development. School readiness is a school able to identify and meet the unique needs of every student.

Researchers and educators agree that quality early education provides an invaluable foundation for later school and work success. Whether with parents, relatives or center-based care, young children need age-appropriate stimulation and nurturing to support appropriate physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language development.

Research further demonstrates that investments in early care and learning are cost-effective. Children with a strong start are more likely to succeed in school, graduate from high school, attend college, and begin

careers that will support themselves and their families. Children with healthy early childhood development are less likely to need expensive special education services, become teen parents, or commit crimes. The best investments in our workforce begin with school readiness.

How then can we best move toward ensuring quality early education for all children? One important step lies in measuring the current school readiness of our children, families, schools and communities. By collecting and tracking data at the local and state levels, we



can better measure individual and community readiness and effectiveness of existing public policies. Using the data we can meet the needs of each child across New Hampshire. Ready for school. Ready for success. Truly the right thing for our children and a strategic investment for our state.

Sincerely,

Children's Alliance of New Hampshire

The Early Years Matter

Research demonstrates that the first years of life are critical to lifelong learning and development. From birth to age 5, the brain grows at a rapid rate. The brains of children are "wired to learn," two times more active than those of adults.ⁱ

During this remarkable period, young children are highly influenced by their environment. Positive nurturing environments are necessary for emotional, physical, and intellectual development. Extensive research shows children thrive when there is an abundance of age-appropriate stimulation, including singing, talking, language, playing, self-exploration, and interacting with peers and adults. A supportive environment with nurturing relationships is a key factor in whether or not a child will develop fully.ⁱⁱ

Conversely, dangerous environments can have detrimental life-long effects on children's opportunities and skills. Maternal stress and inadequate nutrition, two risk factors commonly associated with poverty, threaten healthy growth.ⁱⁱⁱ Exposure to drugs, alcohol, smoking, lead and disease also jeopardizes healthy brain development. From the moment of conception throughout the first five years of life, children's development can be threatened or nurtured by the surrounding physical and social environment.

We Know What Works

Research not only proves the importance of the early years, it identifies best-practice approaches to early learning.

Researchers and educators have identified **five domains** critical to early learning and school readiness: social and emotional development, cognitive development, literacy and language development, physical health and well-being, and approaches to learning.

Social and Emotional Development refers to children's capacity to experience and self-monitor emotions, create healthy relationships with peers, and adjust to ever-changing environments at home, school, and other settings.^{iv} Young children who struggle with social and emotional problems are more likely to fail in school, drop out, and become involved with the juvenile justice system.^v

Cognitive Development addresses children's understanding of the world around them as the brain grows and creates connections and associations. Young children form letter and numerical awareness, as well as begin to understand shapes and spatial references. Children's interactions with their environment and support-



In New Hampshire, children living in the poorest communities are more likely to be identified with emotional disturbances, developmental delay, mental retardation, and speech and/or language impairments than are children in the wealthiest communities.

Kids Count New Hampshire 2003

ive relationships with peers and caregivers, enable them to begin making associations and decipher differences.^{vi}

Literacy and Language Development refers to skills necessary for children's reading and communication.^{vii} Exposure to reading, conversation, varied vocabulary, and books is essential to early literacy skills.

Physical Health and Well-Being influences developmental outcomes for all children, particularly during early childhood. Young children who suffer from poor physical health are at a disadvantage because so much of learning occurs through physical exploration and "active engagement."^{viii}

Approaches to Learning refers to children's enthusiasm and curiosity when faced with challenging tasks. A child's approach to learning includes the tendency to be attentive, independent, and flexible. Children who exhibit such characteristics in kindergarten are more likely to learn.^{ix}



"Interests in books and well-developed oral language are key indicators of later success in reading and writing. The quality of early education programs are solid predictors of later literacy skills."

*Helen Schotanus, Education Consultant
School Improvement/Reading,
New Hampshire Department of Education*

Quality Early Care and Education

supports child development across all five domains during early childhood.

Longitudinal studies connect academic and personal health and success with quality early care and education. These studies also demonstrate that children who benefit from high-quality programs are less likely to become teen parents, become involved in crime, drugs, and alcohol, or depend on state economic supports.^x

Although programs with the flexibility to meet the unique needs of children and families won't be identical, most high-quality programs contain some key components:^{xi}

- Well-educated, trained staff that pays equal attention to all domains of school readiness
 - Staff that nurtures children and respects needs of families
 - Low staff turnover, encouraging trusting relationships between staff and children
 - Staff support that includes regular supervision and ongoing training and professional development
- Systemic approach to child development, including goals and objectives that are attainable and flexible to individual children's needs, strengths, and differences
 - Low adult-child ratios, to provide the attention necessary for healthy development
 - Monitoring and evaluation of children's progress^{xii}

A Smart Public Investment...

Across New Hampshire, young children start school without fundamental cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills. Poor children are less ready to start school than are their wealthier peers, attend schools with fewer resources, and face an uphill battle to catch up. Preventing disparities early by providing quality early care and education programs for all children minimizes differences as children progress through school.

■ In a longitudinal study of low-income families, adults who received quality early childhood education earned close to twice the amount of those who did not attend early childhood education.^{xiii}

■ Studies confirm that quality early education provides a significant return on investment, with more than \$7 saved in welfare, special education, health care, and criminal justice costs for every dollar invested in quality early childhood care and education.^{xiv}

■ The National Institute for Early Childhood Education Research estimates an average, long-term state savings of \$25,000 per child enrolled in a half-day preschool program at age 3 and 4. This is substantially higher than the estimated cost of half-day preschool for one year (\$8,703) or two years (\$17,406).^{xv}

The Time Is Now

Changes in family and work structure have increased the need for a quality early learning system. The majority of primary caregivers for young children in New Hampshire work. For many of these working parents, quality care and education is

either unaffordable or unavailable the most needed times of the day.

■ In 60% of families in New Hampshire with two parents and children under age 6 in 2000, both parents worked.

■ Of single-parent families in New Hampshire with children under age 6 in 2000, 90% of single fathers and 72% of single mothers were in the workforce.^{xvi} For these families, quality child care is an issue not only of child development but also of work productivity.

■ A recent New Hampshire study found that working parents missed an average of a half-day of work three times every year because of child care-related absences, at an annual cost of \$12 to \$24 million.^{xvii}



Nationwide, the U.S. Department of Education's Early Longitudinal Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) study shows significant educational disparities in this country as early as first grade. First graders in the study from the highest socioeconomic group had 60% higher average test scores than children from the lowest socioeconomic group.

*Valerie E. Lee and David T. Burkam
(2002) Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social
Background Differences in Achievement as
Children Begin School. Washington, DC:
The Economic Policy Institute*

The Next Step

The best investments are strategic, based upon sound research and information. Data can help policy-makers, parents, and teachers make wise, efficient investments in early care and education policies and programs. Across the nation, indicators of child-well being have proven to be invaluable in measuring successful programs and policies for kids. These indicators provide:

- Increased understanding of children's unique social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs.

- Economic information on the relative costs and benefits of early childhood development programs.

- Greater accountability by tracking outcomes through appropriate measures.

Every community has unique strengths, weaknesses, and differences that can be measured by universal child indicators. Communities can help drive the development of a statewide system of care for young children by tracking those indicators on a local level, using them to identify and address disparities in school readiness and make wise investments.

The New Hampshire School Readiness Indicators Initiative has worked to identify what information is most important to sound decision-making and public planning. The indicator chart in this brochure provides a starting point for communities, schools, and

policymakers committed to improving school readiness. Tracking these indicators is a crucial first step toward identifying the needs of young children, increasing support for investments in quality early learning, and ensuring accountability so that all children start school ready for school and ready for success.



“Agreeing on indicators to develop common data sets for child well-being and school readiness will allow state and local policy makers to allocate and align scarce resources to improve outcomes for all youth.”

*Joe Perry, Administrator
Children’s Mental Health Services,
Division of Mental Health, New Hampshire
Department of Health & Human Services*

Ready...Set...GROW!

The following chart identifies key measures of the “readiness” of New Hampshire’s children, families, schools and communities. These indicators were selected by the New Hampshire School Readiness Team based upon a strong correlation between each indicator and future academic success.

Desired Outcome	Examples of Sound Indicators	Importance of Indicator	New Hampshire Data
Ready Children	% Births to women who received late or no prenatal care	Strong predictor of physical health and well-being. Timely and comprehensive prenatal care results in fewer complications at birth and reduces health care costs.	1.7% ¹
	Immunizations rates at age 2	Age-appropriate immunizations protect the health of developing infants	84% ²
Ready Early Learning Systems	% Child care centers accredited by NAEYC % Family child care homes accredited by NFCCA	High quality child care programs provide safe, nurturing, and effective early learning environments for infants and children	6.2% of child care centers serving young children are accredited by the NAEYC Less than 1% of family providers are accredited by the NFCCA ³
	% Early educators with early childhood credentials serving children birth to school entry	Educators with early childhood credentials have training in the most effective methods, curricula and child development.	5% ⁴
	# School districts offering public kindergarten	Children who attend quality kindergarten programs demonstrate improved achievement on a range of educational and social outcomes.	In 2003-2004, Public kindergarten was not available in 19 school districts. ⁵
	% School districts screening for phonological awareness in kindergarten or first grade	Phonological awareness is a key indication of a child’s readiness to read.	No statewide baseline available. Potential assessment tools include PALS or DIBELS. ⁶
	% Children at or above basic level in reading and math by end of grade three.	Achievement at or above grade level reflects the success of early childhood and school supports. Achievement below grade level is a frequent predictor of subsequent academic challenge.	Language Arts: 76% ⁷ Math: 79%
Ready Families	Rate of substantiated abuse or neglect	Abuse and/or neglect harms children’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Abuse has been linked to increases in dropout rates, emotional disturbance, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, running away, criminal behavior, and suicide.	4.6 per 1,000 assessments of children under 18 ⁸
Ready Communities	% School districts offering before and after-school programs	Students who spend time in extracurricular activities are less likely to drop out of school, be arrested, and/or smoke cigarettes or use drugs. They are more likely to earn higher grades, have more positive relationships with their peers, and have higher self-esteem.	No statewide baseline currently available
	% Children under 6 without health insurance	Children who do not have insurance coverage are less likely to receive preventative medical care or timely sick care.	5% of children under 18. ⁹
	% Children under age 6 below federal poverty level.	Children growing up in poverty are more likely to experience physical, social and emotional problems, as well as academic difficulties.	9.1% ¹⁰

¹2001 New Hampshire birth data. Data tables available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004 Right Start Kids Count data at www.aecf.org/kidscount/rightstart/

²2002 National Immunization Survey, Infants aged 19-35 months. Available from the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/nis/datafiles.htm.

³Accredited program count from National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org) & National Association for Family Child Care (<http://www.nafccc.org/>). Total count of NH programs provided by Child Development Bureau of Child Care Licensing, NH Department of Health and Human Services.

⁴Child Development Bureau, NH Department of Health and Human Services.

⁵Two school districts have recently voted to add public kindergarten within the next two academic years.

⁶When deciding on kindergarten screenings, schools receiving Reading First grants from NH Dept. of Education choose between PALS (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening from the University of Virginia) and DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators for Early Literacy Skills, Sixth Edition, University of Oregon).

⁷2002/2003 3rd Grade NHEIAP Test Scores, NH Dept. of Education. Available on-line at <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/Assessment/results03.htm>.

⁸2000/2001 Division for Children, Youth and Families, NH Department of Health and Human Services.

⁹2001 Health Insurance Survey, NH Department of Health and Human Services. Specific insurance estimates for children under 6 are not currently available.

¹⁰2000 U.S. Census. Data tables available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation at www.aecf.org/kidscount/census/

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Endnotes

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Two Greenwood Avenue Concord NH 03301 • (603) 225-2264 • www.ChildrenNH.org