

Bridges to Success Initiative - Ready Schools

The vision of the Bridges to Success Ready Schools Initiative is that all children in San Mateo County will receive aligned, high-quality early learning experiences from PreK-3rd grade that enable them to be proficient in reading and math at the end of third grade, and to develop the social, emotional and intellectual skills that will support their future success in school and in life.

This aligned system will value and celebrate the diversity of its families, emphasize developmentally appropriate education for children from PreK-3rd grade, foster communication among teachers within and between grade levels and meet the needs of English Language Learners and children with special needs.

A Ready School...

- Provides an inviting atmosphere
- Values and respects all children and families
- Is a place where all children succeed
- Is committed to high quality in all domains of learning and teaching
- Has deep connections with parents and the community
- Prepares children for success in work and life in the 21st century

First 5 San Mateo County, Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the San Mateo County Office of Education are supporting partnerships in 9 communities¹ in San Mateo County to develop district-wide plans to improve the transition to kindergarten and PreK-3rd grade alignment.

The purpose of Ready Schools Teams is to foster partnerships among school districts, elementary schools, early childhood educators, community organizations, and families to move the Ready Schools vision towards reality and to hold individuals and organizations accountable for their pieces of the puzzle.

Key steps to success for Ready Schools Teams

1. Engage key leaders, stakeholders and constituents
2. Create a vision for Ready Schools in the community
3. Conduct an inventory of community and district assets, resources and needs
4. Develop an action plan based on data and input
5. Begin to implement the plan
6. Use a variety of tools to measure progress and update the plan to meet current needs

Examples of effective practices for school districts, schools, early learning programs and community based organizations to foster smooth PreK-K transitions and PreK-3rd grade alignment

School districts, elementary schools, early learning programs and community based organizations are all key players in the development and implementation of a well-aligned PreK-3rd grade system. Following are a few examples of effective practices for each set of stakeholders. Ready Schools Teams are not limited to these activities, rather they are meant as a starting point for a dialog.

¹ The nine communities are: Daly City, East Palo Alto, east Menlo Park, Half Moon Bay, Pacifica, Pescadero, Redwood City, San Mateo and South San Francisco

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Effective Practices for School Districts

- Develop, adopt and implement a district-wide transition and alignment plan
- Align standards, curriculum, and instructional strategies to provide seamless early learning experiences for children from PreK through third grade
- Ensure that transition activities are effective and consistent throughout the district
- Develop and communicate well-defined, developmentally appropriate school readiness expectations district-wide to parents and caregivers of children 0-5 throughout the community
- Distribute school readiness and transition materials, including the “Are You Ready for Kindergarten?” guide and DVD to families and early learning providers
- Ensure that district-run preschools implement teaching strategies designed to meet the district’s developmentally appropriate readiness expectations
- Adopt a PreK-K transition record and support information-sharing between PreK and kindergarten teachers
- Conduct consistent assessments of incoming kindergarteners district-wide and use the results to inform curriculum and communication between PreK-K teachers
- Track and aggressively seek to eliminate chronic absenteeism among young children. Greater absenteeism among low income children in kindergarten has been associated with lower achievement in reading, math, and general knowledge at the end of first grade. The relationship is especially strong for Latino children, *National Center for Children in Poverty, 2008*
- Host meetings of preschool and kindergarten teachers to promote mutual understanding of best practices for developmentally appropriate approaches to school readiness and transition
- Provide joint professional development opportunities for PreK-3rd grade teachers that encourage aligned and articulated approaches to teaching and learning
- Ensure that adopted curricula foster active engagement and full participation of children in hands-on learning that inspires creativity, problem solving and team work.
- Use new Title I funds to expand access to quality PreK
- Participate actively in the Ready Schools Team
- Support and house a Transition Coordinator
- Distribute Ready Schools Assessment to elementary schools and use findings to inform district plan.

“Learning and development are like climbing a ladder... High-quality preschool and full-day kindergarten give children a boost to successfully climb the first few rungs on the ladder of learning. If the rungs stop after kindergarten and there is a long gap of unsupported space until the top of the ladder, children will have more difficulty—and need more assistance—to reach the top. Education should be structured in such a way that all children have learning experiences that build on those in previous years and connect with those to come, creating a smooth and predictable climb to the top.” *Ladders of Learning: Fighting Fade-Out by Advancing PreK3*, Kristie Kauerz, New America Foundation 2006

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Effective Practices for Schools

- Invite early childhood educators to visit kindergarten classrooms
- Provide release time for kindergarten teachers to visit preschool classrooms
- Provide planning time for PreK-3rd teachers to meet together across and between grade levels, share expectations and learn from each other
- Host getting-to-know you events for local preschools and school personnel
- Host orientations and summer events for incoming kindergarten children and families to get to know their new school and teachers
- Provide teachers the opportunity to make home-visits with incoming kindergarteners to welcome the children and build trust with families
- Make time for teachers to review child assessment data and support its use in the development of curriculum
- Provide meaningful opportunities for parent engagement that are relevant to all families
- Participate actively in the Ready Schools Team
- Complete the Ready Schools Assessment and use results to inform school and district plans

Effective Practices for Early Learning Programs and Community Based Organizations

- Participate actively in the Ready Schools Team and ensure that community-based preschool providers have a place at the Ready Schools table
- Distribute school readiness and transition materials to families (through libraries, Parks and Recreation, Child Care Coordinating Council, etc.)
- Complete the district's transition form for each entering kindergartener in your program, provide the information to the schools and meet with K teachers if requested
- Adopt the California Preschool Learning Foundations and Curriculum Frameworks that are intentionally aligned with the state's Kindergarten Standards
- Work with libraries to provide a list of books that will be helpful in preparing children for kindergarten and arrange a community volunteer to come and read books from this list to children in preschool and child care settings
- Reach out to local elementary school principals to initiate communication and collaboration. Be responsive if the school reaches out to you