

SCHOOL READINESS INDICATORS: MAKING PROGRESS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

*An initiative of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation,
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www.GettingReady.org*

Too many children enter kindergarten with physical, social, emotional and cognitive limitations that could have been minimized or eliminated through early attention to child and family needs. Ongoing research confirms that children's readiness for school is multi-faceted, encompassing the whole range of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills that children need to thrive. Top-notch school readiness indicator systems at the state and local level are necessary to sustain current investments in the most effective programs for children and to make the case for increased investments to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

School Readiness Indicators: Making Progress for Young Children is a multi-state initiative that will use child well-being indicators to build a change agenda in states and local communities in order to improve school readiness and ensure early school success. The task of participating states will be to develop a set of child outcome and systems indicators for children from birth through the fourth-grade reading test, an important red flag for children most at-risk for poor long-term outcomes, such as dropping out of school, teen pregnancy, and juvenile crime.

Objective 1: To create a set of measurable indicators related to and defining school readiness that can be tracked regularly over time at the state and local levels.

Objective 2: To have states and local governments adopt this indicators-based definition of school readiness, fill in the gaps in data availability, track data over time, and report findings to their citizens.

Objective 3: To stimulate policy, program, and other actions to improve the ability of all children to read at grade level by the end of third grade.

The school readiness indicators that are developed will be comprehensive and practical. Indicators will be tracked at the state level and in local communities in order to monitor the capacity of child and family programs to meet the variable needs that exist across communities. Indicators will reflect state investments in programs and policies for young children and families as well as child outcomes. The indicators will be broad enough to present a picture of the whole child, including children's health status, what children know and can do, children's mental and emotional health, and children's economic well-being. Indicators will be developed to fill the gap in knowledge between the child's status at birth and their status at school entry.

STATE TEAMS

The *School Readiness Indicators Initiative: Making Progress for Young Children* involves 17 states, including Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Over the course of the initiative, the 17 state teams will work individually and as a group to develop a comprehensive set of measures to monitor school readiness and service system outcomes for children and families. This is envisioned as a "menu" of indicators that reflect the full range of child outcomes and systems outcomes critical to the well-being of young children and families across the nation.

The initiative will engage the highest levels of state government, including the Governor's office and key state agencies serving children. States will work in individual state teams and across states to conceptualize relevant indicators, to increase each state's capacity to obtain and use data, and to develop effective communications strategies. Each state will create a multi-agency state team of senior policy and data staff who will work together to develop and use indicators to measure progress for young children. Each state will develop an initial work plan for indicator development that supports a policy agenda designed to improve school readiness and improve outcomes for children from birth through the beginning of fourth grade.

PROJECT STRATEGIES

A *peer-to-peer learning network* of the 17 state teams will be created and facilitated by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Because states are at different stages of skills and experience in developing and using indicators for policy change, they can provide valuable technical assistance to their peers. The state teams will use collaborative decision making to guide the development of forums for learning, sharing, and achieving state and cross-state goals for developing and strategically using indicators to make change for young children. The forums that are planned include:

- **National meetings** in which representatives from state teams meet to provide peer-to-peer support on indicator development and conceptual issues, data and technology issues, and communications strategies.
- **A Website** for the Initiative (www.GettingReady.org) that will be designed to share information on best practices in policies and programs for young children, to share measurement and indicator tools, to enable each state to post relevant materials and provide updates on progress, and to link to print and organizational resources.
- **A listserv** that will provide a vehicle for problem-solving and for the interactive sharing of ideas and resources.

Residency roundtables will be convened two to four times a year to tackle tough conceptual issues in a focused way. During these roundtables, 15 to 30 state leaders and field experts will work together to make accelerated progress in priority areas, such as children's mental health indicators and best practices in kindergarten assessment. Formal written reports and conclusions from the meeting will be provided to the 17 states and posted on the Web site for widespread dissemination.

Expert consultants with selected skills and experience will be engaged as needed to support the work of the initiative. The primary role of the consultants will be to provide assistance to the network of states as a whole or to groups of states with common issues. The consultations will take a variety of formats, including commissioned papers on priority issues and participation at convening meetings and residency roundtables. On a selective basis, expert consultants will provide on-site consultation to individual states in order to advance their indicator agendas. States receiving individual consultation will share progress and lessons learned as part of the peer-to-peer learning network.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, a multi-issue children's policy organization, is the lead agency for this national initiative. In partnership with other key agencies, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will provide project leadership and work closely with the participating states to meet project goals, to develop credible indicators, and to inform local, state, and national policy change.

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