

## School Readiness Indicators

### *A Tool to Advocate for the Whole Child*

For some time now, educators and public policymakers have known that some children start kindergarten with the odds against their succeeding in school. These children are already burdened with physical, social, emotional, and learning problems that could have been minimized or eliminated if only we took action to intervene early and effectively. Today, we know more than ever before about how young children develop and about how best to support early child development. Yet, public investments for infants and young children remain inadequate to ensure that all children have the health care, early education, and family and community environments that they need to be ready for school.

State policymakers play a critical role in allocating resources to support young children's development and readiness for school. A comprehensive set of school readiness indicators gives policymakers and advocates the tools they need to track progress in meeting the needs of young children, beginning at birth and continuing through the early school years. The regular tracking of school readiness indicators enables policymakers and community

leaders to identify areas most in need of intervention, monitor trends over time and track the results of investments. This information can then be used to help sustain current investments in the most effective programs for children and to make the case for increased investments in order to improve outcomes.

*School Readiness Indicators: Making Progress for Young Children* was a multi-state initiative that used 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 central premise behind this initiative was that top-notch school readiness indicator systems at the state and local levels can be used to build support for early childhood investments. The task of the 17 participating states was to develop a comprehensive set of school readiness indicators from birth through third grade. Research shows that children who are not performing proficiently in reading by the end of third grade are at very high risk of poor long-term outcomes, such as dropping out of school, teen pregnancy and juvenile crime.

### THE NATIONAL SCHOOL READINESS INDICATORS INITIATIVE

The attention to tracking state level outcomes for the youngest children was a unique focus of the initiative's work. The 17 states involved in the initiative assembled teams comprised of government leaders, child advocates, and researchers to accomplish the following objectives:

- 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.

## School Readiness Indicators: A 17 State Partnership

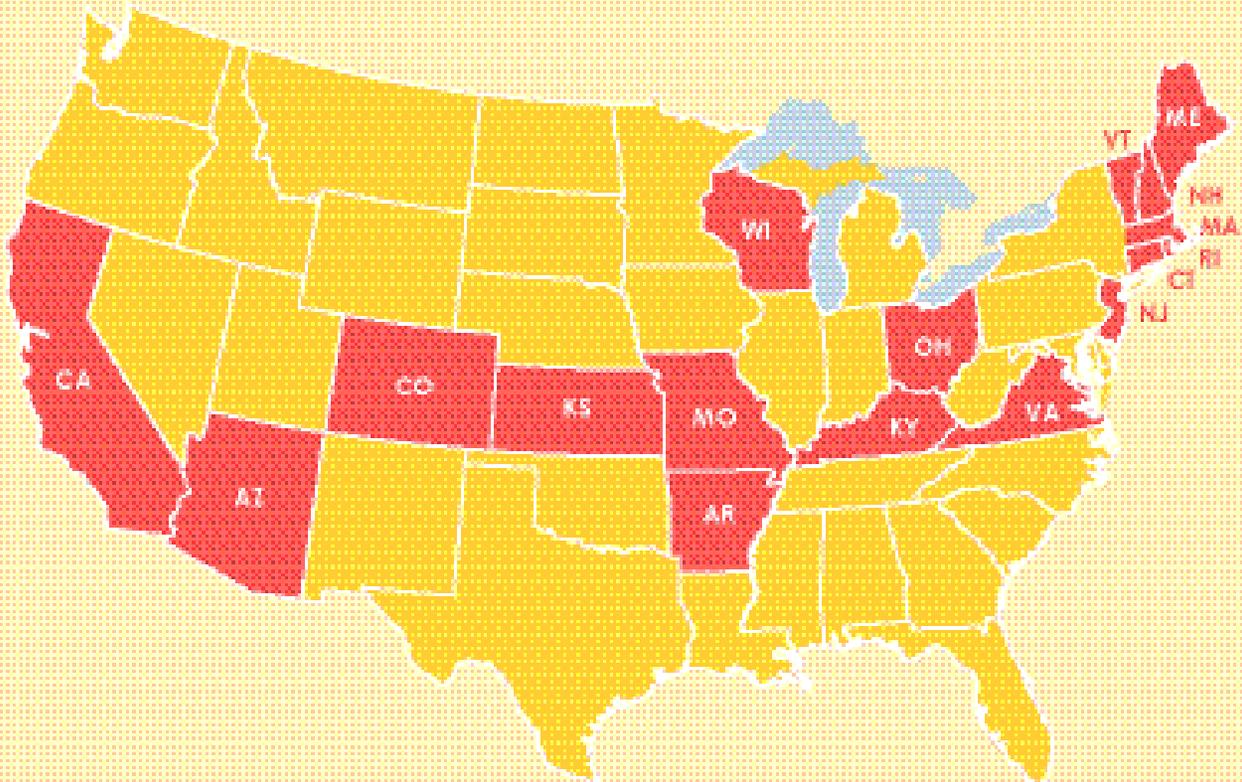
The 17 states that participated in the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative were Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The experiences and outcomes from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative hold many important lessons for advocates working on a range of children’s issues and their state partners interested in furthering a statewide children’s policy agenda. This paper discusses how states

participating in this ground-breaking initiative understood the importance of addressing the comprehensive nature of school readiness. It also provides examples of the many ways states have used their school readiness indicators to change policy on behalf of young children and their families.

*A full report on the findings of the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative is available on the initiative website at [www.GettingReady.org](http://www.GettingReady.org).*

### NATIONAL SCHOOL READINESS INDICATORS INITIATIVE PARTICIPANTS



Arizona • Arkansas • California • Colorado • Connecticut • Kansas  
 Kentucky • Maine • Massachusetts • Missouri • New Hampshire • New Jersey  
 Ohio • Rhode Island • Vermont • Virginia • Wisconsin

## A Comprehensive Approach to Early Childhood Policy

Children’s readiness for school is made up of multiple components and shaped by numerous factors. Improving school readiness, therefore, must address children’s development of skills and behaviors as well as the environments in which they spend their time. The School Readiness Indicators Initiative used a comprehensive view of school readiness as the foundation for its work and created the “Ready Child Equation” to describe the range of components that influence children’s ability to be

ready for school.

Through the three-year School Readiness Indicators Initiative, 17 states now have the capacity to track a comprehensive set of measures for young children from birth through age eight. This is significant because state level data are not often available from federal statistical systems, and states often do not organize available state level data to look specifically at the needs of infants, young children and their families.

### READY CHILD EQUATION

Ready Families

+

Ready  
Communities

+

Ready Services

+

Ready Schools

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Ready Children

**Ready Families**

Describes children’s family context and home environment.

**Ready Communities**

Describes the resources and supports available to families with young children.

**Ready Services**

Describes the availability, quality and affordability of proven programs that influence child development and school readiness.

**Ready Schools**

Describes critical elements of schools that influence child development and school success.

**Ready Children**

Describes what children know and can do in each of the domains of child development including physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development and literacy, and cognition and general knowledge.

## A Road Map for Developing School Readiness Indicators

A core set of school readiness indicators can guide state and national policy action for young children.

The School Readiness Indicators Initiative emphasizes the importance of linking indicators to potential state policies that can positively impact child outcomes. Indicators were selected based on the child development research and the public policy issues of most importance to the states. This was accomplished by consulting experts on key child development issues, such as social-emotional development, language and literacy, and the unique needs of infants and toddlers. This provided a common base of early child development knowledge among the members of the state teams who played a variety of roles (advocates, Governor’s office staff, child welfare, health and human services policy and data staff) and had a broad range of academic and experiential training (mental health, child welfare, education, early education, etc.)

The indicators selected by each state reflect the current political and economic climate in their states and what they identified to be the most pressing needs of children.

Each state selected measures that encompassed the multiple dimensions of child development that influence a child’s readiness for school, including health, language and literacy, social-emotional development, cognition, general knowledge and approaches to learning.

Once states finalized their list of high priority school readiness indicators, it was clear that there were many indicators that were common across the states. In addition, states identified a set of emerging indicators that are critically important to the school readiness of young children but are currently difficult to measure and track at the state level. The states ultimately agreed on a common set of “core indicators” that are crucial and quantifiable signs of whether young children are on the road to achievement or failure. These core indicators provide a road map for what families, schools, communities, and states can do to make a difference in the lives of young children.

### USING SCHOOL READINESS INDICATORS TO DRIVE A CHANGE AGENDA

States can use school readiness indicators to develop a policy road map that sets baseline measures and tracks progress over time. Only when the indicators are used as a guide for policy action can they ultimately ensure that young children have what they need to arrive at school ready to learn. The following series of steps can help states select and use school readiness indicators to influence public policy:

Use existing data to describe the current status of young children (statewide as well as by city/town or county and by race/ethnicity).

Examine policy solutions that have been proven to bring about positive change for young children.

Craft an indicator (or set of indicators) that measures whether the state is succeeding in improving that condition for kids or falling further behind.

Choose indicators that can be easily communicated to and understood by policy makers and the public.

## An Early Childhood Policy Agenda

The only way we can successfully ensure that many more children enter school ready to learn is to consider the family and community context in which they live, the schools they attend and the services that are available to support their healthy growth and development.

— *Getting Ready: Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative*

We have always known that children do better in school when they have strong families and communities behind them. But now there’s an emerging consensus, based on real-world experience in 17 states, about the ways we can measure – and improve – the conditions that contribute to children’s success in school. There are many ways that state and federal policies and investments make a difference in the lives of young children and strengthen the families and communities in which they grow up.

When used by state level policymakers and local community leaders to inform decision making, child outcome indicators are a critical tool for public policy change. Experiences in states and communities across the nation have proven that indicators of child well-being can be an

important tool for bringing government and community leaders together to make strategic investments in children and families. Increasingly, indicators are being used at the local community level to promote a change agenda aimed at improving the quality of life for children and families.

The most powerful sets of indicators combine information on child outcomes with systems indicators that monitor the capacity of child and family programs to meet the variable needs that exist across communities. The regular reporting of indicators that describe the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive well-being of children enables state policymakers to identify areas most in need of intervention, track the results of their investments, and monitor trends over time.

### GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative identified a number of factors to indicate whether children have the tools to succeed in school. The indicators are divided into six categories:

#### Ready Children

- Physical well-being and motor development
- Social and emotional development
- Approaches to learning
- Language development
- Cognition and general knowledge

#### Ready Families

- Mother’s educational level
- Births to teenagers
- Child abuse and neglect
- Children in foster care

#### Ready Communities

- Young children in poverty
- Supports for families with infants and toddlers
- Lead poisoning

#### Ready Services – Health

- Health insurance
- Low birth weight infants
- Access to prenatal care
- Immunizations

Source: National School Readiness Indicators Initiative.

#### Ready Services – Early Care and Early Education

- Enrollment in early education programs
- Credentials for early education teachers
- Accredited child care centers
- Accredited family child care homes
- Access to child care subsidies

#### Ready Schools

- Class size
- Reading scores in 4<sup>th</sup> grade

## Communications Strategies ~ Lessons From the States

Indicators are most powerful when there is a plan to use them as a tool to communicate with policymakers and the public.

The work of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative was largely conducted through state teams. Members of each state team were uniquely selected to fit the context of each state, and all 17 teams were comprised of representatives from both the public and private sectors. Teams generally included heads of departments of education, health, social or human services, senior data and policy staff from state departments, child advocacy organizations and researchers. Some state teams included legislators and/or staff from the Governor’s Office. In order to participate in the initiative, each state team needed support from the Governor.

The intention behind forming state teams was to secure ownership of the school readiness indicators at the highest levels of state government and to develop the capacity of the state departments to measure and track school readiness indicators over time. Each state team developed a set of school readiness indicators, policy strategies and communications plan that fit their state’s unique political, social and economic context. The communications plan was meant to facilitate the use of the school readiness indicators by policymakers and community leaders and to ensure that the set of school readiness indicators would be used in an ongoing way to inform public policy decisions affecting young children and their families.

The following section highlights key communications strategies that were used by the states to ensure that the indicators would not “sit on a shelf,” but would be used to inform critical public policy investments for infants and young children.

### Support from the Governor’s Office

**VIRGINIA** The school readiness work in Virginia was a tool to nurture a new set of relationships on early childhood issues between advocates and the Governor’s Office. Throughout the indicator development process, the Virginia team partnered with the Governor’s policy staff to assess needs and determine priorities for school readiness in Virginia. The indicators report was endorsed by Governor Mark Warner and was released at a bipartisan roundtable. Because the Governor had a stake in the release, he took

a great interest in the product. The statewide child advocacy organization, Voices for Virginia’s Children, now tracks 14 school readiness indicators that were endorsed by the Governor and 16 additional indicators.

### School Readiness Boards and Commissions

**ARIZONA** When Janet Napolitano was elected Governor of Arizona, she identified children, education and economic development as her top priorities. To address these goals, the governor instituted a School Readiness Board to build a high-quality early childhood education system that supports the learning and development of Arizona’s youngest children. The 38-member school readiness board developed recommendations which were adopted by the governor and is now in the first year of implementing the plan. Through the work of the Arizona School Readiness Team, coordinated by the Children’s Action Alliance, the state’s school readiness indicators have been adopted as the outcomes framework for the Arizona School Readiness Board.

**COLORADO** In 2002, the Colorado School Readiness Task Force partnered with the Colorado Child Care Commission to develop a comprehensive statewide plan for the early childhood system. The co-authored report, *Colorado’s Blueprint for an Early Childhood Care & Education System*, contains broad goals and specific recommendations for improving school readiness that can be applied at the state and local levels. Through the work of the Colorado School Readiness Team, which included the Colorado Children’s Campaign and the state departments serving children and families, the school readiness indicators have been adopted as the benchmarks used to track progress in achieving the goals outlined in the *Blueprint*.

### Local and Regional Input

**MASSACHUSETTS** To garner widespread buy-in in Massachusetts, the school readiness team developed a series of community forums across the state. In partnership with the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, they presented a

## Communications Strategies ~ Lessons From the States [ continued ]

draft school readiness indicator list to a variety of stakeholders in six communities to elicit feedback on local school readiness priorities. Local communities used the forums as a starting point for their local school readiness policy work. Each of the meetings was hosted by a Commissioner of a state department with responsibility for children's services.

**COLORADO** The school readiness indicators initiative in Colorado was especially well-timed because there had been significant business investment in early childhood issues, but no mechanism to show progress. The Colorado Children's Campaign, the leader of the state's school readiness team, partnered with the Colorado Department of Health to get broad-based input into the development of the school readiness indicators to ensure that the final product would be used by key stakeholders statewide. Seven forums were held across the state and a statewide summit was held to review the results and provide additional feedback. The final report was released to key policymakers and community leaders. Data on each of the indicators is being updated annually through an agreement with the Department of Health. In addition, the Colorado School Readiness Commission and the city of Denver have both adopted the set of school readiness indicators as their benchmarks for tracking progress.

### State Reports

Over the course of the initiative, state teams worked to increase their capacity to obtain and use data, to develop effective communications strategies and to inform a school readiness policy agenda. The goal of the initiative was achieved when the state teams produced and released state level reports on the set of school readiness indicators they had selected. These individual state reports provide data on the indicators that each state decided to measure and track. Each of the individual state reports is available on the initiative website at [www.gettingready.org](http://www.gettingready.org).

Ultimately each state created a communications strategy to disseminate the publication so that the indicators would be used by decision-makers within their state. The production of the state reports detailing a comprehensive set of school readiness indicators was significant. In many states, this was the first time that state government leaders and

child advocacy organizations had come together to agree on a set of measures to track progress in meeting goals for young children and families.

### Release Events

States used a variety of strategies to ensure that the data in the school readiness indicators report would be covered by the media and used by policymakers and community leaders.

**CONNECTICUT** The focus of *Connecticut's School Readiness Factbook* release event was local application of the data. Individual data sheets were prepared for each of the state's 169 municipalities and disseminated with the *Factbook* to event attendees. The state's mayors and superintendents were invited to a special morning briefing designed to inform them about the school readiness of young children in their communities. A broader mix of local leaders then convened for a day-long conference on applying indicator data to local planning and policymaking. The event and *Factbook* were also used as vehicles to highlight remaining early childhood data needs and to encourage improved data collection.

**MISSOURI** In order to educate the public about school readiness and create buy-in for the school readiness indicators, Missouri launched a 30-day radio campaign. A variety of professionally created spots aired on MissouriNet, a network of 65 stations, during the height of the legislative session. The radio ads discussed the basics of school readiness as well as policy options to support young children and their families.

**NEW HAMPSHIRE** Rather than a single kick-off event, the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire used a rolling release to distribute the school readiness indicators report that had been developed by the New Hampshire School Readiness Indicators team. With staggered release dates across the state, New Hampshire was able to reach a broad constituency while creating a growing buzz about their indicators and policy agenda. The result was sustained interest and momentum throughout the legislative session.

## From Indicators to Policy ~ State Stories

An indicator is a measure, for which we have data, that helps quantify the achievement of a desired result. Indicators help answer the question: "How would we know a result if we achieved it?"

— Mark Friedman, Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, [www.resultsaccountability.org](http://www.resultsaccountability.org)

The following are examples of how states have used their work on the School Readiness Indicators Initiative to make public policy changes and to have a more realistic debate – and more informed decision-making – about how to invest state and federal funds to support the school readiness of our young children.

**ARIZONA** During the 2004 session, Arizona’s legislature was considering drastic cuts to child care subsidy funding that would perpetuate the long waiting lists instituted the year before. Led by the Children’s Action Alliance, a group of advocates presented data on the effects of waiting lists on families and successfully warded off additional funding cuts. In addition, no funding cuts for early care were proposed in the legislature, and the Governor focused on early care in her State of the State address. The school readiness indicators are an important bridge between proponents of early childhood programs and those interested in K-12 reform.

**ARKANSAS** Arkansas used the National Education Goals Panel domains of school readiness as the foundation for its *Kindergarten Readiness Checklist*. The brochure provides parents and early care providers with a list of specific skills and behaviors that children need when they enter kindergarten. The brochure also offers guidance on promoting and encouraging the development of those behaviors. Over 10,000 copies were distributed to pre-kindergarten programs and public schools. A special study urging legislators to invest in pre-kindergarten programs for low-income children was successfully supported by a coalition of organizations.

**COLORADO** The Colorado Department of Human Services, in partnership with Educare Colorado and the Colorado Children’s Campaign, used indicator data to depict the vast achievement gap between schools and communities across the state. The data convinced legislators to target additional funding to early childhood programs that feed into low-performing and unsatisfactory schools.

**CONNECTICUT** Connecticut advocates worked with state agencies to establish a Prevention Council, comprised of the Commissioners of the Department of Children and Families, Department of Education, Department of Health, Department of Mental Retardation and Department of Social Services, in order to focus attention on resources needed for prevention and early intervention services. This led to the Commissioners adopting the Connecticut Early Childhood Indicators Team’s set of indicators as the benchmarks for the Prevention Council’s efforts. In the face of budget cuts, the team is focusing on tracking indicators that will help to maintain previous investments in programs and services.

**KANSAS** The Kansas School Readiness Indicators Team has engaged a variety of state agencies and university partners and has become an important mechanism for the coordination of other early childhood efforts and activities. The team chose indicators with detailed data sets, so that information could be reported at the county level and used in local planning. The Kansas Children’s Campaign, a member of the Kansas School Readiness Indicators Team, promoted legislative support of early education programs, and Smart Start Kansas received a significant increase in funding. Full-day kindergarten enrollment increased and the legislature passed legislation that will enable the state to expand its preschool programs to serve children other than the at-risk 4-year-olds currently eligible.

From Indicators to Policy ~ State Stories [ continued ]

**MAINE** Maine has used the School Readiness Indicators project to consolidate the outcome measures for a variety of projects that require benchmarks, including the state’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems initiative (ECCS). ECCS is funded by the U.S. Maternal and Child Health Bureau in more than 30 states. The new Education Commissioner is interested in developing universal pre-K. This has led to a set of new indicators that measure the availability of early childhood education programs, including the number of schools with public 4-year old programs and the number of licensed child care slots by community.

**MASSACHUSETTS** The Massachusetts School Readiness team held six regional meetings to get feedback on indicators. The meetings were well-attended by local non-profit children’s service providers, state agency regional staff and community members. The state Early Care and Education Council issued a report on reducing fragmentation in the child care system through quality improvement, standards and professional development. State legislators voted in favor of a Board of Early Education and Care. The school readiness indicators in Massachusetts are tracked on a website hosted by the Office of Child Care Services and will be used to inform the work of the new Board of Early Education.

**MISSOURI** The Missouri School Readiness Indicators work helped keep early care on the state agenda and maintain child care funding. State agencies, Head Start and other community and university-based partners participating on the School Readiness Indicators Team reached consensus on a core set of school readiness indicators. The Governor and First Lady released the school readiness team’s publication – *Ready or Not, Here We Grow!* on January 27, 2004 in the Capitol Rotunda on Child Advocacy Day. Each legislator received a copy of the publication along with a personalized letter from the school readiness team. The report received excellent newspaper and radio coverage. A school readiness bill, establishing an ongoing Coordinating Board for Early Childhood, passed the legislature on the last day of the session in 2004. The school readiness indicators are now being used by the Coordinating Board as the framework to monitor progress in improving young children’s access to services.

**NEW HAMPSHIRE** The Children’s Alliance of New Hampshire, in collaboration with the New Hampshire School Readiness Indicators Initiative State Team, released their school readiness report at a major legislative caucus. The release event at the Legislative Office Building drew a bipartisan crowd of legislators, community leaders, early childhood experts and advocates. The New Hampshire Children’s Alliance used a rolling release to continue to develop a buzz around their report, especially related to the need to include kindergarten as a statewide education mandate. The Director of Education quoted their publication at a statewide education reform conference.

**NEW JERSEY** The Governor’s proposed budget expanded preschool funding by \$15 million despite pressure to spend money on mandated child welfare reform. The Association for Children of New Jersey, the lead agency for the School Readiness Indicators Initiative, used the initiative to rebuild relationships between public schools and child care providers. Those relationships had been strained when the Abbott decision mandated that pre-K resources be used only in public schools. The school readiness indicators are also being used as measures within the BUILD initiative, a multi-state effort to create a more streamlined and effective early learning system.

**OHIO** The Ohio School Readiness Indicators Team held several well-attended county forums to get input on indicators and found significant consensus among the regions. The Ohio school readiness team is part of the Governor’s Ohio Family and Children First initiative, a partnership of government agencies and community organizations committed to improving the well-being of children and families. The Ohio School Readiness Indicators report was released by the Governor’s Office, and the state is using the indicators as benchmarks for progress on early childhood issues. The school readiness work led to a renewed partnership with the Families First Council which is designed to raise awareness at the community level of key policy decisions affecting children and to engage community stakeholders in dialogue about priorities.

## From Indicators to Policy ~ State Stories [ continued ]

**RHODE ISLAND** Rhode Island has been successful in preventing rollbacks in funding for child care and health care by regularly tracking improvement in school readiness indicators over time, keeping the trends visible through press opportunities and convening of key leaders, and stressing the link to health and education outcomes for children. The attention to school readiness by all of the agencies represented on the Governor's Children's Cabinet has led to increased investments in health care, child care and full-day kindergarten. Work is being done to increase access to pre-kindergarten programs, building on current investments in child care and Head Start. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT regularly presents indicator data statewide and in local communities to draw attention to the full range of early childhood investments that are needed to ensure that all children enter school ready to learn. The focus is on closing the gaps between poor children and their peers and between different racial and ethnic groups.

**VERMONT** Vermont developed an online resource that includes all indicators down to the school district level. In addition, the state consolidated services and developed a Children's Cabinet and a Division of Child Development within the Department of Children and Families. Vermont built on a successful track record of kindergarten assessment by adding a parent component to its *Ready Schools Questionnaires* for principals and teachers. *The Ready Schools: Parent Questionnaire* asks about child skills and behaviors, the transition to kindergarten, and parent involvement. When combined with the information provided by teachers and principals, the survey provides a complete picture of Vermont's kindergartners and their readiness for school. Policymakers and community leaders (especially school boards) use the data from the surveys to inform state policy decisions and local investments.

**VIRGINIA** While the Virginia School Readiness Indicators Team's overarching success has been using the school readiness indicators process to support early childhood system development work, other successes include increased funding for health care, child care and mental health. The interagency work of the state team, coordinated by Voices for Virginia's Children, resulted in new relationships across state agencies responsible for children's services. This has led to better cross-agency coordination of early childhood programs. The analysis of available data sets and identification of unavailable data at the state level provided new understanding of what is known about school readiness in Virginia and what is still needed. The publication, *No Time to Waste*, compiled data on young children and their families and programs at the state and local level in a comprehensive way that had not been done before. Voices for Virginia's Children held a bipartisan roundtable that included the Governor and Republican leadership. Having a research-based context for talking about school readiness and data on the indicators at the local level provided a springboard for discussion and strategic planning.

**WISCONSIN** The lead agency in Wisconsin's effort, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, created new relationships between advocates and state agency partners that enabled the organization to successfully influence the Governor's children's agenda. The advocates regularly presented project progress to the Governor's staff, cabinet secretaries, and the Governor's Task Force on Education Excellence. The Governor ultimately adopted a "Kids First" agenda with an emphasis on early care and created a partnership with the Superintendent of Education. State early childhood advocates and coalitions are working to develop a joint agenda on early childhood and a joint response to the Governor's Kids First agenda.

## Lessons Learned

School readiness indicators enable states to show baseline measures and track progress or declines in key issue areas at the state or local level. Indicators are only useful when they measure something for which there is a constituency of people willing to take action.

**T**he most powerful indicators work in states was done when there was an “inside/outside” team. The most effective states were those that had full buy-in from the Governor’s office, and where key state department directors and a professional, well-respected children’s advocacy organization were doing this work together. This was the first time many of the stakeholders in the participating states had collaborated in this way, and most indicated that they liked this new way of working. State government staff appreciated the communications skills of the child advocacy organizations, as well as the experience advocates had at setting a specific agenda for kids that was measurable by indicators. They knew that state government agencies would find it difficult to “package” the indicators in a way that would get any traction from the press or the rest of the outside world.

**The strategic communication of messages about public policy investments affecting early childhood development is critical to gaining public support, engaging opinion leaders and getting policymakers to act on the behalf of young children.** Keeping the comprehensive set of early childhood issues in the press enables them to become an ongoing part of the dialogue at the state level and in local communities. Dialogue most often leads to action when issues are visible, the size and scope of the problem is widely understood, and goals and a plan for making progress are clearly articulated. School readiness indicators provide much of this information and are an important tool in developing a change agenda.

In some states, the statewide child advocacy organization was a member of a School Readiness Team which was coordinated by a state agency. In other states, the child advocacy organization played the coordinating role.

However, in all states it was required that state agencies be involved in the indicator development process and the setting of policy priorities for school readiness. **Although child advocacy leaders participating in this initiative indicated that it was at first strange (and in some cases uncomfortable) to cede over control of the School Readiness Initiative and become involved with state agencies as working partners, what they learned and gained from these efforts was invaluable.** For instance, having state agencies lead the initiative often gave them unprecedented access and buy-in from the governor. They also found that the state’s school readiness indicators were more likely to directly inform state policy because the state leaders and decision-makers were involved in crafting the indicators. Additionally, because the leaders from state agencies were members of the School Readiness Indicators Teams, teams often had access to data from state departments that was previously unattainable.

**The success of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative is evidence that unique skills, resources and assets of government leaders and child advocacy organizations can be powerfully combined to improve the lives of children.** One of the greatest benefits of the “inside/outside” collaboration was that, in some states, the school readiness indicators became the foundation for the state’s children’s policy agenda much more quickly than if a coalition of outside groups had to develop the indicators, and then had to get all the state departments and governor to embrace them. In addition, the work of the initiative often brought together a range of advocacy groups to reach consensus on key public policy issues affecting children and to agree on a set of measures to track their collective progress as advocates for young children.

## Conclusion

School readiness indicators can improve outcomes for children when they are used effectively to stimulate action and policy changes. To have an impact, indicators must be developed with the policy context and a communications strategy in mind. A wide variety of policy responses are possible when indicators are used to monitor progress over time and are regularly reported to policy-makers and citizens. School readiness indicator data must be analyzed to show baseline measures and track progress or declines in key issue areas at the state and local level. Monitoring trends that are moving in the wrong direction

and celebrating progress when trends are moving in the right direction is critical in order to maintain public investment.

States are encouraged to regularly monitor a comprehensive set of school readiness indicators that address all of the domains of child development. If states and communities are to ensure that many more children enter school ready to learn, it is important to monitor indicators that reflect the family and community context in which children live, the schools they attend, and the services that are available to support their healthy growth and development.

### SELECTED SCHOOL READINESS POLICY OPTIONS

The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative identified a core set of school readiness indicators to track progress in the areas of ready children, ready families, ready communities, ready services and ready schools. The core indicators point to a variety of state and federal policy investments that can be used to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

#### Policy Options for Ready Children

- Kindergarten Assessment (that includes all domains of child development)
- Developmental Assessment as a Routine Part of Health Care

#### Policy Options for Ready Families

- Intensive Family Support for Infants and Toddlers (e.g. Early Head Start)
- Adult Literacy, Adult Education and English as a Second Language Programs

#### Policy Options for Ready Communities

- Income Support Programs
- Lead Paint Inspection and Abatement
- Affordable Housing

#### Policy Options for Ready Health Services

- Health Insurance
- Access to Health Care

#### Policy Options for Ready Early Care and Education

- Highly-Qualified Early Education Providers
- Affordable, Accredited Child Care and Preschool Education

#### Policy Options for Ready Schools

- Transition to Kindergarten
- Small Class Size
- Early and Appropriate Intervention for Children with Special Needs

*School Readiness Indicators:  
A Tool to Advocate for the Whole Child*

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