

MAKING A Difference

10 Essential Steps to Building a PreK-3 System



Linda Sullivan-Dudzic
Donna K. Gearns
Kelli Leavell
Foreword by Ruby Takanishi

Thank you

FOR YOUR
INTEREST IN
CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from
*Making a Difference: 10 Essential Steps to Building a
PreK-3 System.*

LEARN MORE about this title!

- Divide the responsibilities and encourage members to serve on local boards and agencies that are making a difference for children and families. Possibilities include: hospital boards, mental health boards, Head Start Advisory, Developmental Disabilities Board, United Way, Regional Head Start, and State Principals Association.

Financing Your Goals Through a Flexible Use of Resources Around a Central Target

As part of your plan to build sustainability, be strategic about financing your goals. One way to do this without additional funding is to share your goals with other departments within and outside the organization. Your job is to find other departments that are working on similar efforts and may have resources to share. Student achievement, early intervention, prevention, support for children and families, extended learning, math, and literacy are all central themes or potential initiatives that may enable you to combine efforts and pool resources. For example, many states now have a math initiative that extends to preschool. Resources may include professional development, materials, and family outreach. Another way to gain financing is to actively share your positive results and seek funding from private corporations, nonprofit organizations, and community members interested in furthering your efforts. In these current economic times, it is much easier to attract funding when a project is specific about its charge (goals) and has the outcome data to prove that it's successful.

Align Your Federal Funding to Support and Further Your PreK–3 Goals

As many of you know, the gift of federal funding comes tightly wrapped with ribbons attached to rules and regulations. Funding is accompanied by accountability. Bring together all the federal program coordinators and locate all federal grants aimed at helping children (students) and families, from birth to age eight. Make a list of all federal mandates or requirements that accompany these programs and locate common requirements. Many times, school districts have a mandate associated with a specific program or grant. For example, Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant Head Start, and Tribal Head Start all have similar mandates that are found in our K–12 federal programs. Parent engagement and transition are two requirements in all Head Start and Title I programs. However, to do an adequate job, one that will make a measurable difference rather than produce a few sprinkled activities, it requires working together to focus your combined resources on one plan

that supports and furthers your PreK–3 goals. Start by looking at federal mandates. For example, parent engagement, transitions, professional development, and demonstrating child outcomes are federally nonnegotiable, with a requirement to demonstrate expenditures in these categories by the end of the year. Providing children with quality instruction as a form of prevention is an expectation in all programs. However, you have the flexibility to choose how to target your resources, provided you use research-based practices focused on the needs of children and have measurable outcomes to demonstrate effectiveness. This gives your leadership group substantial flexibility to target resources where they are needed the most. Most recently, special education has allowed funding for early intervention or prevention under the federal guidelines for Response to Intervention (RTI). This opens the door for children to receive additional practice opportunities that are targeted to what they need prior to being identified as needing special education. Listed below are alignment requirements that will help support your PreK–3 efforts.

An examination of following requirements will help you align *federal* funding with your PreK–3 goals:

- Raise student achievement and measure outcomes in the areas of reading and math: Title I, all federal Head Start programs, Special Education, and Title III all have requirements to demonstrate successful child outcomes using local and state assessment data. Connect your Head Start assessment person with your local school district assessment person.
- Professional development focused on research-based instructional practices: This includes the funding of literacy and math coaches in both preschool and K–12 (Title I, Head Start, Special Education, Title III, Title II).
- Transition from preschool to kindergarten (All federal Head Start programs, Title I): Each program is required to have a plan in place and available for federal review that demonstrates teachers working together to provide a smooth transition for children and their families.
- Purchase instructional supplies and materials to increase student achievement: All federal Head Start programs have this requirement. The Title I, Title III, and Special Education requirement is for supplemental materials that support core instruction.
- Family engagement: All federal Head Start programs, Title I, and Special Education have a requirement to support and involve families in the education of their children.

Align State Funding to Support and Further Your PreK–3 Goals

Examination of following requirements will help you align *state* funding with your PreK–3 goals:

- Raise student achievement and measure outcomes in the areas of reading and math. Every state has funding programs that target the needs of low-income students. These state grants are allocated based on your district's or preschool's poverty index (free- and reduced-lunch count). These programs are designed to provide a variety of interventions and preventions aimed at increasing student achievement in reading and math. In Washington state, it's called the Learning Assistance Program (LAP). Many states have early childhood programs that are separate or are part of the public education system. In Washington state, this is the Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), designed to provide children with quality preschool instruction. State special education funding and state funding for English language development often target low-income populations and have similar requirements to federal programs to raise student achievement.

- Professional development focused on research-based instructional practices: This includes the funding of literacy and math coaches in both preschool and K–12 (Same as federal programs mentioned above).

- Transition from preschool to kindergarten: All state-funded early childhood programs and K–12 state-funded public education initiatives to increase achievement include transition requirements due to the significant impact this has on children. Look at your state's K–12 Web site and take note of what they recommend as the best practices in transition. Look for schools highlighted for their successful transition plans and contact them to determine what funding sources they are accessing.

- Purchase instructional supplies and materials to increase student achievement: All state-funded early childhood programs and state programs that target children who qualify for free and reduced-cost lunch have this requirement.

- Family engagement: This is a major component of every school district and preschool's plan. Contact your school district and state early childhood department to inquire about family engagement and possible funding sources.

Align and Share Local Resources to Support and Further Your PreK–3 Goals

Many local agencies are working on similar goals or are looking for ways to focus their resources and volunteer time to make a difference for children. You might consider the following:

- **Local Faith-Based Organizations:** In our community, one of our local churches raised funds to support our collective efforts. It was the first time in our careers that a private school approached a public school board and donated funds for books and materials to reach more children and families prior to kindergarten.
- **Local Businesses:** It is helpful if your leadership group is able to articulate exactly which parts of your PreK–3 efforts need support. For example, if you are looking for literacy center kits to support preschool and kindergarten efforts, a local business may purchase specific items that it can afford rather than hand over a large quantity of money.
- **Local Organizations:** Have members of your leadership group and school district join your local organizations. This develops relationships and extends your community support. Volunteer to present the exciting things you are doing together. Be sure to share accurate outcome data, making it easier for these groups to support your efforts. Kiwanis clubs, Rotary clubs, Lions Clubs, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and the United Way are a few possibilities.

So far, you have not added additional funding; you have simply aligned, prioritized, and reallocated your federal, state, and local resources around current requirements, mandates, and community goals. By eliminating any duplication, and focusing your efforts, you have gained funding in the areas that make the most difference for your children. Once you have seen the first glimpse of positive child outcome data that proves your combined efforts make a difference for children, share it with your local, state, and national organizations, businesses, and private funders. Many private funders have pulled out of projects because of a lack of effectiveness data. Shepard Barbash, in his article “Pre-K Can Work” (Barbash, 2008), highlighted Bremerton School District and its work with community preschools to provide “rigorous, *data-driven* preschool programs for poor children” as one of two quality programs in the United States that benefit children. This is another reason to prioritize your goals and measure your results the very first year; it provides baseline data that is essential to measure your progress. You can never go back and obtain this baseline data again.