

# MAKING A Difference

## 10 Essential Steps to Building a PreK-3 System



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*Making a Difference: 10 Essential Steps to Building a  
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record your work along the way. We have found it helpful to ask the group to commit to documenting what is working (quality instruction) for children so that all can modify or replicate the efforts. This will allow your team to move forward, celebrate, and publicize what is working so your organization can continue to expand and improve your instruction.

## Quality Preschool

One of the many ongoing topics of discussion at your leadership group as you develop a common language will be your definition of a *quality preschool*. What does quality look like in your community? What will be your standard of excellence and commitment to the families that choose your preschool? These questions go far beyond early reading and are ones that your leadership group needs to address. The following sources may be helpful for your discussions regarding what quality looks like in your community:

- “From Rhetoric to Reality: The Case for Compensation for Prekindergarten Education” (Neuman, 2003)
- *Nurturing Knowledge: Building a Foundation for School Success by Linking Early Literacy to Math, Science, Art, and Social Studies* (Neuman, Roskos, Wright, & Lenhart, 2007)
- “Changing the Odds” (Neuman, 2007)

Try reading the article “From Rhetoric to Reality” using a jigsaw method with your leadership group and preschool teachers. Divide into four groups to read about and define what “high-quality compensatory (prekindergarten) programs should include: sufficient time, precise targeting, thoughtful focus, and accountability for results.” Under each of the four components, list characteristics that you’d like to see if you walked into one of your community partner preschool classrooms. (See Figure 3.1.) Have the group members agree on four descriptors under each category that would describe the highest-quality preschool, one suitable for their own child’s participation. Record your agreements and create a two-page document with your leadership group’s name on the top.

Use this document for walk-throughs to share with classroom visitors and families. Walk-throughs are also known as *learning walks* or *instructional rounds*. This form of professional development includes teachers and administrators setting personal goals and observing classrooms. This is another part of what we call our “friendly accountability system.” This important component to creating a PreK–3 system continues to move your efforts forward and responds to the needs of your community.

**Figure 3.1** Look Fors in Early Childhood Centers of Excellence Walk-Throughs

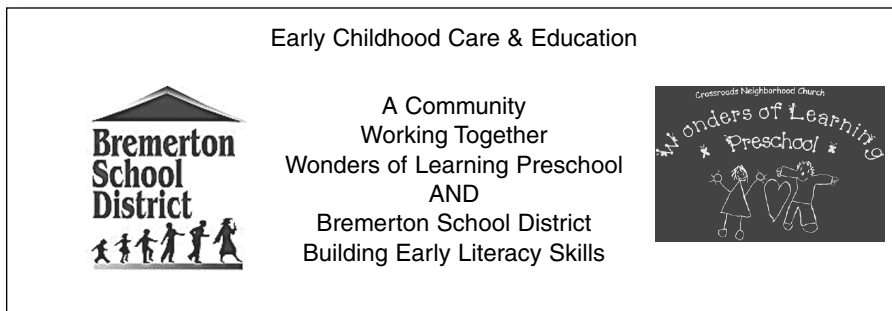
<p><b>Sufficient Time</b> <i>(for learning)</i></p>	<p><b>Thoughtful Focus on Learning</b>  <i>Powerful learning opportunities/activities planned by experienced team of professionals</i></p>
<p>1. 2. 3. 4.</p>	<p>1. 2. 3. 4.</p>
<p><b>Precise Targeting</b>  <i>Services and supports targeted for children who are struggling and children who need to be challenged</i></p>	<p><b>Accountability</b>  <i>Professionals know what each child’s abilities and needs are using multiple classroom observations and assessment. This information is used to assist and guide each child to the next level.</i></p>
<p>1. 2. 3. 4.</p>	<p>1. 2. 3. 4.</p>
<p><b>Comments:</b></p>	

Another simple way of confirming your group’s commitment to quality is by creating a “Best Places” logo for your community partners. Bremerton School District and their community preschools created a window display illustrated in Figure 3.2. Bremerton community preschools display their Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) logo with pride. Many families in that community look for the logo

when selecting a quality preschool. In order for community preschools to display it in their window, they must commit to the following:

1. A school district and community preschool partnership
2. Using the community-selected preschool curriculum
3. The preschool director, coordinator, or head teacher participating in the leadership group
4. The teaching staff participating in monthly professional development
5. Participating in the “assessment loop,” a respectful review of data on the children they sent to kindergarten
6. Celebrating and adjusting their programs and instruction

Figure 3.2



## Gather Assessment Information and Revise Instruction

Your leadership group will decide how to measure the success of your efforts and the growth made by your children. In Step 1, we talked about the use of assessment to gather local data on children entering kindergarten to establish your community needs. We will talk more about what we call the *assessment loop* and *friendly accountability* in Step 5. Ask your leadership group to examine its goals and determine what measurements you will use to gauge its progress.

For the first question, How are your preschool partners progressing toward your established goal? it is important that you foster a climate of inquiry, with respectful examination of kindergarten entrance data that puts the needs of children at the center of the conversation. Using Step 1, you have already gathered baseline data from the previous year on your PreK–3 or K–3 children. If your community’s data