

# Building a Strong Foundation for Children

*“The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child: it is whether we can afford not to. If we do not stand for children we do not stand for much.”*

Marian Wright Edelman



## What is School Readiness?

The United Nations Children’s Fund defines school readiness as “a good start in life, in a nurturing and safe environment that enables children to survive and be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent and able to learn.” A child’s readiness for school is influenced by the opportunities and experiences they have had within the family, preschool settings and in their communities. A communal framework of promoting school readiness, and student success in kindergarten and beyond, will ensure that readiness is achieved.

- *Ready children* enter school prepared socially, personally, physically and intellectually.
- *Ready families* take responsibility for their child’s school readiness through direct, frequent and positive involvement and interest in their child.
- *Ready early learning environments* recognize, reinforce and extend children’s strengths; promote the child’s physical, cognitive, social and emotional development; and, foster and support smooth transition into kindergarten.
- *Ready communities* play a crucial part in supporting families as the first and most influential teachers of young children.

## The Facts

Major factors impacting school readiness:

- Teen births
- Maternal educational level
- Level of prenatal care
- Children living in poverty
- Child abuse or neglect

Major benefits of high-quality early childhood programs supporting school readiness:

- ✓ Learning
- ✓ Acquisition of academic competencies
- ✓ School completion
- ✓ Later skill development
- ✓ Non-academic success

*“Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.”*

Nelson Mandela

## Why is School Readiness Important?



Children’s preparedness for school is often dependent upon the opportunities and experiences they have had in the first five years of life. School readiness provides a powerful framework for improving education and learning outcomes, especially for marginalized children. The threats to early development are greatest among children living in the poorest households.

Children living below or near the Federal Poverty Level are less likely to receive support for early learning at home and up to 10 times less likely to attend quality early childhood education programs.

A universal focus on kindergarten readiness provides every child a strong foundational start. Research shows a community’s return on investments in building a strong foundation for young children can be significant. A strong early childhood system focused on school readiness can result in a reduction in education costs, increased social equity, improvement in workforce development and increased economic development. Most importantly, children who enter kindergarten ready to learn are more likely to succeed in school, stay in school and graduate on time, and ultimately experience success in adulthood.

**A ready child** is prepared socially, personally, physically, and intellectually.

**A ready family** has adults who understand they are the most important people in the child’s life and takes responsibility for positive, supportive relationships with the child.

**A ready early learning environment** assures the success of every child physically, socially, personally and intellectually.

**A ready community** supports families and schools by providing affordable access to information, services, quality childcare and early learning

## Community Action Required



1. Understand the key early childhood experiences linked to kindergarten readiness, school success and life-long health and well-being.
2. Take a snapshot of current health and well-being of Hampton and Newport News families and children.
3. Identify local services and document the strengths and weaknesses of the local service provider network.
4. Agree on the most critical areas to address, which will advance the goal of providing a solid foundation for childhood success.
5. Identify evidence-based best practice approaches to ensuring kindergarten readiness for every child.
6. Recommend a community approach and structure to support collective impact...common agenda, aligned efforts and common measure of success

# The Challenge

We have a collective responsibility to ensure all children have a healthy start in life, the opportunity to engage in quality early childhood experiences, and arrive at kindergarten ready and able to succeed. Children entering school socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively prepared have the greatest chance of success; entering school not ready can have lifelong negative effects for children, families and society. Our collective responsibility includes ensuring:



The first five years have so much to do with how the next 80 turn out.” - Bill Gates

- All children have **access** to quality care and positive early childhood experiences which give the best chance of success in school and life;
- The **public policies** we create and the **practices** we use benefit children and families, and when they do not, we work together to change those policies; and
- **Advocacy efforts** build sustainability for effective strategies, address rules and regulations impacting access, resolve program problems, and promote interagency collaboration efforts between public and private sector agencies.

*“All children have the right to be raised in a family and to have access to quality health care, good nutrition, education, play and protection from harm, abuse and discrimination. Children have the right to growing up in an environment in which they are enabled to reach their full potential. It is the duty of parents, other caregivers and family members, communities and government to ensure these rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.”*

World Health Organization and UNICEF, Unite for Children, *Facts for Life*

## Our Local Report Card

### Indicators linked to Kindergarten Readiness

#### Good News

1. Teen pregnancy and births decreasing
2. Births to women with less than a high school degree decreasing
3. Child abuse and neglect decreasing
4. Children in foster care decreasing
5. Women reporting prenatal care in the first trimester increasing
6. Children in quality preschool increasing
7. Children scoring passing grades on PALS testing increasing



***93% of all Hampton and Newport News kindergartners are entering school with a passing literacy readiness score.***

#### Bad News

1. Almost 50% of all babies are born to unmarried females 15-44 years old.
2. Babies born at a low birth weight increasing
3. Babies dying before their first birth day (infant mortality) unchanged
4. Young children living in families with income below the Federal Poverty Level increasing
5. Families continue to be on waiting lists for child care subsidies
6. Licensed child care providers decreasing



***25% of all Hampton and Newport News children under six live in families with income below the Federal Poverty Level.***