RUNNING HEAD: POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND LEADERSHIP

**Policies, Practices, and Leadership to Create Aligned and Integrated P-12**

**Learning Systems in Two States and Ontario**

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Learning Systems in Two States and Ontario

In 2011, approximately 1.2 million students in the United States failed to graduate high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). Research has linked graduation failure to increases in crime and poverty, increased use of social services (e.g., public assistance, public health, etc.), and decreased earning and potential. While those with a high school diploma can expect to earn 55 percent less than what an individual with a bachelor's degree earns, an individual who fails to complete high school can expect to earn almost half (41 percent) of what an individual with a high school diploma earns (NCES, 2009). For the 1.2 million students that did not graduate high school in 2011, this produced a loss of lifetime earnings for the 2011 class alone of $154 billion. In addition to this individual impact, there are larger societal costs that include losses in tax revenue and increases in the demand of public assistance. Levin, Belfield, Muennig & Rouse (2007) found that each new high school graduate provided a public benefit of over $200,000 in higher government revenues and lower government spending (e.g., welfare, corrections, etc.).

More disturbing than these statistics is the early prediction of who is least likely to graduate high school. Research by Karoly, Greenwood, Everingham, Hoube, Kilburn, Rydell, Sanders, and Chiesa (1998) found that children not reading at grade level by 3rd grade faced a 90 percent chance of dropping out of school and a high probability of being unemployed, underemployed or unemployable. The ability to predict early what a child’s life path may be has caused policymakers and educators to pay close attention to early intervention strategies such as early childhood opportunities for high risk students.

The link between strong early learning experiences and long-term success are proven. Short-term benefits in elementary school include higher achievement test scores, reduced need for special education services, and lower grade retention rates (Administration for Children and Families, 2006; Horton, 2007; Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Robertson, Mersky, Topitzes, & Niles, 2007; The Committee for Economic Development, 2006; Wat 2007). According to Reynolds, A., Magnuson, K., & Ou, S (2006) children that do not participate in any PreK-3 programs are three times more likely than children who participated in some PreK-3 programs to have been held back or placed into special education. The Perry, Abecedarian, and Child-Parent Centers showed an economic return of $6.11 per dollar invested at the early childhood level because of reduced need of special education services in later grade levels and reduced criminal activity as young adults. Long-term outcomes include those related to school success and educational attainment, such as higher rates of high school completion and college degree attainment while other long-term outcomes have been found with social and health outcomes, including a more stable employment history, significantly lower incarceration rates, and increased chances of attending college compared to other low-income children not enrolled in preschool programs (Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002; Horton, 2007; Reynolds et al, 2011; Reynolds et al., 2007).

Another significant finding in the early childhood research is the impact that early childhood programs may have on social-emotional skills. According to the Center on the Developing Child (2007), the ages of 3-5 are the period of development in which young children develop complex social behaviors, emotional capacities, and problem-solving abilities. The basic foundation for social and emotional skills is laid during the PreK years; children learn how to regulate their own behavior, delay gratification, and focus on the task at hand (Guernsey & Mead, 2010). While research is clear on the short-term and long-term benefits of early learning ages for children birth to age 5, an increasing focus has set parameters around the span of learning from birth to age 8 as a prime area of development for children (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and U.S. Department of Education have gone so far as to design their policy and programmatic supports around the birth to age 8 span.

Although the research spans a learning and development period from birth to age 8, this span is inconsistent with the structures and governance of our formal schooling system. As a result, research shows that the investment in early childhood can be lost if high quality early childhood experiences are not coupled and aligned with consistent experiences in elementary school. A review of the research on ‘fade out’ effects of children who attended Head Start programs noted the independent contribution that the quality of subsequent elementary education experience for disadvantaged children has on retaining their cognitive development and learning success (Barnett, 2002; Lee and Loeb, 1995). Some of the loss in learning or ‘fade out’ can be attributed to low quality classrooms in elementary schools, of which a larger proportion of these low quality classrooms are in schools in more impoverished areas that have the least qualified teachers and fewer resources (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network [NICHD ECCRN], 2002, 2004; Lee and Loeb, 1995; Stuhlman & Pianta, 2009). The fade out can also be attributed to the different philosophies and pedagogical approaches between early childhood and elementary schools in which the child becomes confused or lost during the transition. This is due to the different governing structures of programs (federal oversight for Head Start programs versus state and local oversight for school and state-based early learning programs) as well as differences in pedagogical approaches between early childhood and elementary education.

**What is PreK-3?**

Bogard and Takanishi (2005) states that PreK-3 “proposes aligning standards, curriculum, and assessment practices across the early grades into a coherent plan that takes into account the developmental characteristics and abilities of children in this age span...Schools should be structured in such a way that all children have learning experiences that build on those in previous years and connect closely with those to come” (p. 3). More traditionally thought to encompass preschool (i.e., programs aimed for 3- and 4-year old children) through grade 3, many PreK-3 initiatives have expanded to include the birth through grade 3 age span. They are designed to provide high quality learning and developmental experiences during the important early years of development that set the foundation for success and stability, most notably setting third grade as a key benchmark to predictive success in school and life based on the research by Karoly, et al.,1998).

At a programmatic level, the PreK-3 literature identifies common features of PreK-3 programs:

* *Continuity through consistency and time in learning environments* byproviding for smooth transitions to reduce the negative effects of mobility;
* *Vertical and horizontal integration and coordination of curriculum and teaching practices* as curriculum and instruction progress in an orderly and logical manner across developmental levels and grades;
* *Structural features to increase intensity, length, and quality of programs* supported by leadership, coordination, and evidenced-based practices; and,
* *Comprehensive family support services* through integrated family services to promote changes in family behavior and build social capital,
* *Shared goals and assessment* of student readiness and proficiency as learning progresses; and,
* *Communication and coordination among caregivers, educators, and families* to support student learning (Grantmakers for Education, 2007; Graves, 2006; Kaurez, 2008; Reynolds, 2006).

In practice, an effective learning continuum is dependent on the continuity of experiences, which are subsequently dependent upon the nature and structure of the collaborative process (Kaurez, 2008). Continuity requires sequential access to coordinated programs and predictable experiences that support learning and development. To create this sequential experience, Kaurez (2008) asserts that early childhood and K-12 systems need to integrate both push-down and push-up efforts. Push-down refers to policies and practices in the K-12 system that the early learning community may learn and adapt for use within its classrooms. Similarly, push-up includes policies and practices from the early learning community that the K-12 system may adapt.

**Chicago Child Parent Centers**

In practice, one of the first programs to create a PreK-3 system aligning early learning to grade 3 was the Chicago Child Parent Centers (CPC). After Head Start, CPCs are the second oldest federally funded preschool programs in the United States, with the oldest extended early childhood intervention program (Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS), 2011). In 1967, the CPCs were established in Chicago through the use of Title I funding as an effort to improve student attendance and achievement in the Chicago Public Schools (CLS, 2011). CPCs, which offer comprehensive educational and family-support services to economically disadvantaged children from preschool to early elementary school, contain five features, including early intervention, parent involvement, structured language/basic skills learning approach, health and social services, and program continuity between the preschool years and early elementary years (Reynolds, 2010) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Child-Parent Center Program (Foundation for Child Development, 2006)



Research on the effectiveness of PreK-3 initiatives shows evidence that when done right as a sustained early intervention model the short and long-term benefits outweigh the costs. Through the results of the Chicago Longitudinal Study on the Child Parent Center program that analyzed the long-term outcomes for children who participated in CPCs as children, Reynolds, Temple, White, and Ou (2011) found that the economic gains of “extended service programs” (PreK-3) showed a societal return of $8.24 (18% annual return) for every $1 spent based on increased earnings and tax revenues and decreased funding to the criminal justice system.

Although there is much data to evidence that the CPC model works, to date there are 10 CPCs in operation in CPS, scaled back from the 25 CPCs in place in the district 1975. Cuts in CPC sites can be attributed to shifting priorities in funding and changing demographics of the neighborhoods served by CPCs. Since CPCs were funded with Title 1 funds, the program was structured to be available to any family in a Title I district. With changing neighborhood demographics, middle income families were also enrolling their children in CPCs. Children enrolled in CPCs were transferred to other early childhood programs in the district when the CPCs were closed; however, that eliminated their access to the articulated services and academic support from PreK-grade 3 offered by the CPCs. Beginning in January 2012, the University of Minnesota was awarded an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to expand the CPC model in Chicago (15 additional sites) and to five additional districts (Evanston*/*SkokieSchool District65*,* McLean County 5 School District, Milwaukee Public Schools, Saint Paul Public Schools, and Virginia Minnesota Public Schools) in three states (Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin).

Private funders, such as the McCormick Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, and Foundation for Child Development, have also dedicated resources to support research and implementation to PreK-3 initiatives at the state and local levels. Two examples of local PreK-3 type initiatives funded by private funders are the Birth to Eight Project at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute and Ounce of Prevention Fund (EDUCARE) and Erikson Institute New Schools Initiative. Another notable example includes the Kellogg-funded SPARK program.

Through the Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) program, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation funded eight states (Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and the District of Columbia) to pilot partnerships of selected communities, schools, state agencies and families to collaboratively work to address to assure that children served through the partnership are not only ready for school but also that they do not experience the fade out effects once enrolled in school. Funding for the SPARK initiative was directed to the interplay between local and state policy reform with local sites serving as demonstration sites for testing PreK-3 innovation and the identification of state policy levers to implement lessons learned on a statewide scale. While the SPARK initiative placed an increased emphasis on several factors common to PreK-3 initiatives (i.e., parent involvement, community involvement, integration of services), there was a high focus on engaging communities in systems level change. SPARK sites were charged with building partnerships and coalitions to motivate and implement change in early learning environments.

Research on the SPARK initiative showed that children who participated in the SPARK program were more ready for school than children who had not participated in a SPARK program. Children enrolled in SPARK had more improvement over the kindergarten school year than those not enrolled. Children enrolled in SPARK also out preformed non-SPARK kids in reading and math (Kagan, Karhati, Friedlander, & Tarrant, 2010). “Seven of eight SPARK grantees provided credible evidence that SPARK children were more ready for kindergarten than a comparison group of their peers” (Walter R. McDonald & Associates 2009). By 1st grade, some SPARK sites continued to show strong evaluation results, and at least three sites report sustained gains into 3rd grade. SPARK children exceeded non-SPARK counterparts in school behavior and social skills as well as in their approaches to learning. In addition, some sites report that SPARK kids excelled in reading and math” (Berkley 2010).

At the federal level, for four decades, efforts have occurred to prevent fade out with at-risk children in the early elementary grades. Passed into law in 1967, the purpose of Project Follow Through was to help eliminate the alleged fade-out effects of Head Start by implementing a continuing intervention for Head Start graduates from kindergarten through third grade (Doernberger & Zigler, 1995). The original concept was to replicate the Head Start model in early elementary with comprehensive program services (health, nutrition, social) and parent involvement. However, the large-scale implementation of Project Follow Through resulted in a diffused model with a variety of program features and little to no alignment with Head Start programs.

In response to the inability of Project Follow Through to meet its original intent, in 1974, 15 Head Start grantees were funded to participate in Project Developmental Continuity (Zigler & Styfco, 1993). The purpose of the Project Developmental Continuity was to align programs and services to children and families from Head Start into public schools up to grade three. However, barriers to partnerships between Head Start centers and the public schools made the implementation of this continuity challenging and the program was discontinued after five years (Zigler & Styfco, 1993).

Once again, in 1990, the U. S. Congress authorized $20 million in grants for a program to extend comprehensive, Head Start-like supports through the first four years of elementary school (Kennedy, 1993). The funding was to support at least one demonstration site in each state for three years. The Head Start Transition Project incorporated the goals and services initially intended for Project Follow Through – 1) strong parental involvement and program empowerment; 2) educational enhancement; 3) family social support services; and 4) health and nutrition services - with a stronger emphasis on transition (Zigler & Styfco, 1993). The program overall showed evidence that community partnerships were strengthened and that multiple transition supports were enacted to promote the early school adjustment of disadvantaged children (S. Ramey, C. Ramey, Phillips, Lanzi, Brezausek, Katholi, & Snyder, 2000). However, like Project Follow Through and Project Developmental Continuity, the program was not sustained. Currently, the Head Start Readiness Act of 2007 brought about new requirements in order for all Head Start and Early Head Start programs to maintain funding, including mandated transition programs into kindergarten for all Head Start sites and improved partnerships with schools. One such activity that Head Start programs will have to complete is an alignment of the standards between Pre-K programs and elementary schools (Head Start Act of 2007). It will be interesting to observe how Head Start programs work to navigate through the challenges to articulation and coordination previously experienced through Head Start transition projects.

Despite that PreK-3 shows both individual and societal gains, the alignment of two separate education systems, as well as the alignment of education and health and human service systems, requires more than bringing together multiple organizations through collaboration. Clear examples of this can be seen through the Head Start and Child Parent Center model, in which system challenges presented insurmountable barriers to sustaining collaborative efforts. Absent from these PreK-3 initiatives also was clear attention to developing and supporting school leaders, including early childhood directors and principals, with providing a vision and support to bridging the systems. For many of Chicago’s CPCs, the early elementary supports (K-3) have been transitioned to the elementary schools and have been dissolved due to funding cuts, and to a larger focus on testing and accountability. While studies show that high quality PreK-3 initiatives lead to children who perform at or above standards, some principals may not make this link and choose not to spend time and resources on certain PreK-3 activities such as joint professional development and curriculum development between early childhood and elementary teachers (Hood, Hunt, Okezie-Phillips, 2009).

Another clear gap with previous efforts to align the systems is attention to integrating the governance, funding, and accountability systems that support each of the separate sectors (and in the case of early learning, multiple agencies – education, health and welfare). Different governance and funding streams between Head Start and schools have been a major barrier to the alignment and coordination of their work. Leadership and governance are but two of the topics that were fully explored in our study to examine effective practices to enact sustainable programs that align early learning to K-12 education systems.

**Methods**

The lack of sustained PreK-3 programs, despite the evidence of their success, led to the purpose of our study, which was to identify long-standing PreK-3 initiatives and learn from them on what features were present to make their initiatives successful and sustainable. Through this research we were also interested in the state/local interplay in which state or federal policies can help support and sustain local practices. Lastly, we had an additional focus on the role of leadership in facilitating and sustaining PreK-3 efforts.

For this research, we used a case study research design to examine three cases of P-12 [[1]](#footnote-1) state-level initiatives with the three goals in mind: 1) identify and describe effective practices in P-12 alignment, 2) define the role of early learning and school leaders in facilitating and sustaining the alignment, and 3) recommend policies and practices to help early learning and school leaders develop and foster a P-12 learning continuum.

*Research Questions:*

 The research presented in this paper was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the context and nature of the linkages and partnerships between early learning providers and elementary schools involved in the collaboration? What are the promising alignment and coordination practices currently implemented?
2. What are the most current issues and barriers to creating a seamless learning continuum?
3. What actions do practitioners recommend that would facilitate their efforts to develop and sustain a P-12 learning continuum? What federal, state, and local policies would eliminate current barriers to an effective P-12 continuum?

*Research Methods and Data Sources*

 *Sampling and recruitment procedures*

We used several criteria for selecting states, and then selecting sites within the state to conduct a site visit. First, at the state and local levels, the learning continuum should be involved in a formalized system (e.g., statewide initiatives, county or local level initiatives). Second, we considered geographical diversity (e.g., large urban, mid-sized urban, and rural), as well as the demographic diversity of the population. Third, the longevity of the initiative was a factor, with two years or more of implementation being the standard. We assumed that an initiative in their first year of implementation is generally either in a planning phase or has yet to work through its start-up challenges. Fourth, we took recommendations from fellow researchers and colleagues who are studying PreK-3 initiatives, as well as considered initiatives that had received some external recognition for their PreK-3 work. Finally, we considered those states and sites who were engaging in several learning continuum strategies such as a common vision and set of goals for the continuum; alignment of standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments; family and community involvement; workforce development; and others.

***Data collection techniques and sources***

To conduct this study, we conducted in-person interviews with primary partners in the PreK-3 initiatives at both the state and local levels. These interviews were with program coordinators, teachers, school leaders, state education agency representatives, advisors to state agency directors, and members of community-based organizations. In addition to these interviews, we used secondary data sources by collecting information about the sites from websites, newspapers, and other electronic print sources, as well as documents shared with us during our site visits (e.g., data reports, annual reports, external evaluation reports, and logic models).

***Data analysis***

Using qualitative analysis techniques, the information from the interviews, focus groups, and document analysis were compared and contrasted to look for convergent and divergent themes within and across groups of respondents (Miles & Huberman, 1995). The data underwent several analyses, first in the aggregate and then in cross-case comparisons by state/province and local sites. To begin, the data were organized categorically; the participants’ responses were coded and analyzed thematically using coding and categorization methods outlined by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). The data were reviewed and notes were written on preliminary codes and categories that emerge from the interview and focus group responses. After this initial scan of the data, the researchers reviewed their notes and developed a coding scheme to guide further analysis. The analysis began at a descriptive level, identifying the common characteristics that describe the data within the codes, but then transitioned to more holistic level as themes were connected across questions to provide critical interpretations of the interdependent issues and challenges stakeholders encountered in their P-12 alignment experiences. The same analytic strategies were used for the cross-case comparisons to determine if the stakeholders from the different states and localities had similar and/or different experiences and to try to describe how and why these similarities and differences might exist.

**Case Studies**

***Hawaii***

 Hawaii has a controversial history with tensions between the colonizing nation that brings in its culture, values and traditions to largely replace the culture and traditions of the native peoples who inhabit the land. This history continues to impact the educational system of Hawaii today as the native Hawaiian population seeks to reclaim their traditions and values and create a system in which native Hawaiian children learn these traditions within a culturally-based system that implements traditional Hawaiian learning strategies and content.

In addition to the historical contexts of the Hawaiian education system, there are a few current and unique characteristics of Hawaii’s education system that are important to know that impact their Prek-3 work. First, Hawaii has one school district—the Hawaii State Department of Education (DOE) that oversees 288 public schools with approximately 178,000 students (Hawaii State Department of Education, nd). Therefore, the state superintendent is the superintendent for all schools. At the local level, the school system is organized into complexes, which function much like local school districts in many states. These complexes consist of one high school and the middle and elementary schools that feed into it. Complexes that have been clustered together are called Complex Areas. Thus, complex areas have complex area superintendents, much like a district superintendent in many other states. The second characteristic of note is that Hawaii does not have any state funded preschool programs. For the most part, preschools are private-funded and/or tuition-based programs, and Hawaii also has federally funded Head Start programs. The State Department of Education (DOE) does not have an early childhood division like many other states. However, there is an early childhood specialist on staff at the DOE, and the state has been making a concerted effort toward improving preschool access and program quality for young children in Hawaii since the late 1990s with the creation of the Good Beginnings Alliance in recognition that children were coming into schools with very different levels of readiness. Private funders, such as the Castle Foundation and Kamehameha Schools, have provided operating funds and grants to support initiatives to improve access to high quality early childhood education for Hawaii’s children.

 Finally, compared to the national averages, Hawaii has a high non-Caucasian population: 38.6% of the population in Hawaii stated they were of Asian descent compared to 4.8% of the United States population; 10% of the population stated they were native Hawaiian or a Pacific Islander descent compared to the national average of 0.2%; 23.6% of the population stated they are of two more races compared to the national average of 2.9%; and 8.9% of the residents in Hawaii indicated they were from Hispanic or Latino origin. Of children 5 years and older, 74.5% spoke English only in their home and 21.8% spoke only Asian or Pacific Islander languages in their home. These unique characteristics present challenges and unique opportunities to provide quality programming for Hawaiian children and their families.

In 2001, Feeney, Grace and Brant conducted a study of Hawaii children’s readiness for kindergarten. This report began the school readiness discussion for policymakers and practitioners across the state. Consequently, the Interdepartmental Council on Children and Families (IDC) established a School Readiness Task Force facilitated by the Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA), an intermediary organization that is focused exclusively on the development and care of young children. Task force members included representatives from the legislature, human service agencies, public and private education agencies, Head Start, INPEACE (a community-based organization), and the University of Hawaii. Task force members used the state’s definition of school readiness as its foundation. This definition states:

Children are ready to have successful learning experiences in school when there is a positive interaction of the child’s developmental characteristics, school practices, and family and community support.

As a result of this task force, members produced the following: the *Hawaii State Preschool Content Standards, Family/Community Guidelines,* a *Transition Toolkit,* and the *Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment.* The first phase of this work ended in 2004, whereby it entered a pilot implementation phase in a few communities. The work culminated with statewide implementation of the school readiness initiatives.

At the local level, in 2002, Hawaii received a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation called SPARK-HI (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) in which each community developed and implemented a plan of strategies that would bolster kids and families’ readiness for kindergarten. The Kellogg Foundation had five objectives for this work that all grantees had to incorporate that involved strengthening the connection between children, families, early childhood providers and schools; as well as raise the quality of early learning programs and developing policies and community supports for young children and their families. Stakeholders involved in the SPARK initiative were instrumental in developing the standards, guidelines, toolkit, and assessments that came out of the School Readiness Task Force. In addition, the Good Beginnings Alliance and CEO of INPEACE advocated for the passage of Act 14 Keiki First Steps legislation in 2008 which established the state’s Early Learning Council and a statewide early learning system. However, due to significant questions about funding and governing system, Hawaii’s statewide system did not get off the ground.

***Current Alignment Initiatives***

While the School Readiness Task Force was convened, Hawaii also established its P-20 Partnerships for Education in 2002 (hereafter referred to as Hawaii P-20) which is focused on strengthening the state’s education pipeline beginning with early childhood through higher education. The Partnership is led by Good Beginnings Alliance, Hawaii State Department of Education, and the University of Hawaii system. To improve the state’s early learning system, Hawaii is implementing a P-3[[2]](#footnote-2) initiative: *Capturing the Momentum: Hawaii P-3 Initiative* funded primarily by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation since 2006. The P-3 initiative is under the purview of Hawaii P-20 and is administered by the Early Learning Council. Key partners in the project are: Good Beginnings Alliance, University of Hawaii, and the Hawaii Department of Education. The primary goal of this project (and Hawaii P-20) is that all children are reading at grade level by third grade.

This P-3 Initiative is a state level grant funded by the Kellogg Foundation and an extension of the SPARK program. In addition to Hawaii, Kellogg funds three other states (Florida, Washington, and Mississippi) to establish demonstration sites that will serve as a pilot for implementing P-3 alignment activities that could inform the development of statewide P-3 policies and practices. In 2009 Hawaii designed a P-3 framework and issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for demonstration sites to pilot the new framework. The Farrington and Nanakuli-Wai’anae (N-W) complexes (i.e., districts) were the first two sites to receive grants to establish P-3 programs in their communities. The N-W site was a previous SPARK site. The N-W site is led by the CEO of the Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE), Keiki O Ka’Aina early childhood programs, Keiki Steps, and DOE elementary schools in the N-W complex. The Farrington Complex is led by an early childhood specialist at the Hawaii Department of Education and includes a partnership of Kindergarten Children Aid Association (KCAA) preschools, Parents and Children Together (PACT), Honolulu Community Action Program (HCAP) and the DOE elementary schools. The P-3 HI initiative has identified three more sites to serve as demonstration sites: Honoka’a, Ka’u-kea’au-pahoa, and Windward complexes. For this study, we visited the N-W and Farrington Complex sites. The following sections highlight the effective practices that we saw during our visit.

 ***Identified Practices***

In order to work toward the goal of all children reading by grade level by third grade, the P-3 Initiative framework focuses on seven areas. The table below is taken from the initiative’s annual report that lists each area along with the corresponding objectives.

Table 1. Hawaii Demonstration Project Framework

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Focus Areas | Objectives |
| 1. Leadership for Literacy
 | Administrators provide strategic vision and leadership for literacy instruction |
| 1. Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment
 | Horizontal and vertical alignment to ensure seamless transitions |
| 1. Instruction
 | Quality classroom instruction is developmentally appropriate and grounded in research-based practices |
| 1. Teacher Professional Development
 | Educators trained in research-based developmentally appropriate practices |
| 1. Comprehensive Early Learning Services/Access to 0-5 Opportunities
 | Schools are a community-based hub for resource and referral to comprehensive servicesMore young children participating in quality/effective early learning experiences |
| 1. Family School Partnerships
 | Families and education programs partner to support children’s learning |
| 1. Data
 | Student-level enrollment and assessment data are used to improve curriculum |

During our site visits to the two complexes, we were able to see evidence of several of these areas in practice; descriptions of these practices follow.

*Comprehensive early learning services and improving access to quality 0-5 opportunities*

The P-3 Initiative seeks to continue the work of SPARK to increase Hawaiian children’s access to high quality early learning programs. With no state funding for early childhood programs, most of the support for these programs comes from private funding sources and tuition paid by families. Thus, standards for quality at the state level, the Department of Education are non-existent. Instead, many of the early childhood programs in the complex areas we visited were accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). At the time we visited, there was also a push to institute a Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) for early childhood programs in the state. Because Hawaii has a strong commitment to valuing and integrating Hawaiian culture into its educational programs, there was some question about how QRIS could be implemented to uphold the traditions of Hawaiian culture rather than supersede and devalue the traditions of the culture.

In addition, as part of the P-3 initiative, sites are incorporating the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation tool developed by Hamre and Pianta (2007). This observation tool spans the early childhood through high school continuum, and gives the observer keen insights into the quality of the teacher-child interactions as well as the quality of the learning opportunities in which children have access. Therefore, it is seen as a key lever to push for quality across the early childhood and early elementary grades. At the time of our visit, the CLASS observation tool was in the early stages of its implementation. There had been some challenges in getting CLASS implemented in the elementary schools. Because the P-3 initiative is voluntary, principals in these sites cannot mandate to participate in any of the P-3 activities. Thus, there is still some work to be accomplished to capture principals’ buy-in into the CLASS tool and what the data could tell them about the quality of their classrooms.

Finally, the P-3 initiative continues to assess student’s readiness for school using the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (HSSRA). This is both an individual assessment of the child’s readiness for school, and a group-level aggregated assessment. The kindergarten teacher assesses individual children once they enter kindergarten. Then after all the children have been assessed, the teacher can then aggregate that data which tells the state the percentage of children ready for school and on what indicators. This information is shared with the school community for school improvement and is available to the public. Information about the HSSRA can be found at: <http://arch.k12.hi.us/school/hssra/hssra.html>.

*Partnerships with families*

In the past few decades, Hawaii has made a concerted effort to value and integrate the Hawaiian culture into its educational programs. In the early years of its colonization by western culture, missionaries landed in Hawaii to educate the Hawaiian children according to western culture’s values, norms, and customs that were often in contradiction to Hawaiian culture. For instance, western culture has a strong value for individual effort while Hawaiian culture values collective learning in groups. Thus, Hawaiian children were often accused of cheating when working out problems together rather than by themselves. In addition, western culture has a tradition of less parental involvement in their child’s schooling, but in Hawaiian culture, family (immediate and extended) are children’s first teachers and are central to Hawaiian life. Thus, the P-3 initiative makes a concerted effort to bring caregivers (parents, or other family members who have primary care giving duties) into the early childhood classroom.

One particular 0-5 program that we saw during our site visit is provided by INPEACE and is called Keiki Steps. In this program, a caregiver and the child can come to the Keiki Steps classroom and participate in learning activities together. The classroom is set up in centers like a quality early childhood classroom, is staffed by early childhood professionals, and is held two times a day (morning and afternoon) for 2 ½ hours a day, four days a week. In this program, the child is exposed to high quality learning experiences in math, science, and literacy, as well as other developmental domains such as language (English and Hawaiian), physical, and social emotional learning opportunities. As a result, the child comes into the program and has a valuable learning experience, and the caregiver also has a valuable learning experience as s/he learns how children learn best and can extend these learning opportunities in the home.

This program integrates the Hawaiian culture in another way by including the outdoors as a natural extension of the classroom. In the site we visited, there was a plot of ground that had been cultivated with natural Hawaiian flowers, fruits and vegetables. Children hear and learn traditional Hawaiian stories and songs in the Hawaiian language, and learn the importance that these plants had in sustaining the Hawaiian people. The connection to and sustainability of the land is a value of the culture that has been passed down through the generations, and this is a value that the outdoor classroom continues to pass down.

*Teacher Professional Development*

The P-3 initiative has another special focus on improving the quality of its teachers. It does this in a couple different ways, primarily through tuition assistance for teachers to earn credentials from the Child Development Assistance (CDA) through the Bachelor’s degree. In addition, the N-W site has a special program to help parents who wish to become early childhood teachers earn their credentials. The KCAA is currently in the process of building a new professional development center for their early childhood teachers who will be able to attend workshops at the center to improve their practice. In addition, there will be an early childhood classroom housed in the facility where teachers can observe high quality and developmentally appropriate teaching practices.

In addition, out of the P-3 initiative has grown a P-3 master’s degree program offered by the University of Hawaii. This program is geared toward practicing teachers in one of the participating P-3 demonstration sites. A two-year, 15 credit hour program, teachers receive 100% tuition assistance and take specific courses in:

* Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Ages Three to Eight
* Early Literacy and Language Development: Theory to Practice
* School Curriculum: Early Childhood
* Instructional Psychology: Effective Pedagogy for Diverse Young Children
* Seminar in Early Childhood Education

This coursework can be applied toward a Master’s of Education degree in Curriculum Studies with an emphasis in PK-3.

*Cross-sector collaboration for alignment and data-sharing*

In the N-W sites, early childhood and elementary school teachers were working together to align curriculum and instruction and share data on the students they had in common to create aligned learning opportunities for their students as they move from the early childhood environment into the early elementary grades. At each school in the complex, the teachers had been convened into focus groups each with a focus on an area of particular importance to them. These are some examples of the focus groups topic areas: kindergarten registration, transition to kindergarten, assessments and portfolio exchange system, and revising the curriculum. These groups meet regularly to plan their goals for the group, and then work toward meeting these goals, and monitor their progress. In the group that we observed there was a strong emphasis on curricular and instructional alignment. The early childhood and elementary teachers were scheduling a few days in the semester for joint observations where elementary teachers would attend and observe a few early childhood teachers’ classrooms, and then later in the day or a few days later, the early childhood teachers would observe the elementary teachers. In addition to scheduling the observations, the teachers were also talking about the purpose of the observations, and what they should be looking for. Then, at the next meeting, the teachers would talk about what they saw and what the implications were for learning effective practices from each other, and implications for curricular and instructional alignment across the early childhood and elementary classrooms.

In addition, the sites were making a concerted effort to share data on the children as they moved from the early childhood programs into kindergarten. During the year prior to transitioning into kindergarten, early childhood teachers compile a portfolio for each child with information about the child’s family, and data on the child’s progress in learning and developmental domains, including samples of the child’s work. Prior to the beginning of the kindergarten year, the portfolio is sent to the elementary school where the child will be attending and given to the child’s kindergarten teacher. This allows the kindergarten teacher to get to know his/her children and their families, as well as plan learning opportunities that are aligned with where the children are at on the learning and developmental continuum. There have been some challenges to this practice that relays the importance of informing the elementary school principal and staff about the purpose and importance of these portfolios. It was reported by some of the teachers that they never received the portfolios even though the early childhood teachers said they sent them to the schools as planned. It was found that the school secretaries did not know what the portfolios were or to whom they were supposed to go, and the principals did not know enough to guide the secretaries, so the portfolios were stockpiled in a storeroom. Thus, in the focus group we observed, there was some discussion on how to educate the school staff and principals about these portfolios to make sure that they get to the kindergarten teachers and used for the purpose they were intended.

Finally, the INPEACE organization offers another program to help students transition into kindergarten. Keiki Steps to Kindergarten is a three week program for children who will enter kindergarten in the fall that began with the SPARK initiative. Using funding from Kamehameha schools, the program offers children with little to no preschool experiences the chance to attend classes in a classroom with kindergarten teachers to learn classroom routines, how to interact with other children, and participate in large and small group activities. Furthermore, this program provides activities for parents to help them make the feel more comfortable in school settings and learn how to replicate learning opportunities for their children in the home. Program staff cite research from the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment that has shown that upon entering kindergarten, approximately 40% of entering kindergarten students have had little to no preschool experience; approximately 40% do not possess the habits and attitudes that facilitate learning; about 25% do not have the literacy and math skills needed; about 40% do not have the behaviors and skills relevant to be successful in school settings; and almost 50% of students do not have the social-emotional skills for successful self-regulation and interaction with teachers and their peers (HSSRA, 2011).

While INPEACE staff members coordinate the program and recruit schools into the program, the principals at the schools are responsible for recruiting teachers and students. The initial model calls for 45 contact hours in the three week program period, most often 3.5 hours a day for three weeks. However, due to challenges in recruiting teachers and aides and reconciling schedules due to teacher and family vacations, other school activities, modified school calendars, school construction and so forth, the schools were able to tailor the model that best fit their teachers, families, and students. Thus, for some schools, the program has been offered over two weeks with an extended day (4.5 hours each day) (INPEACE, 2009). Principals whose schools had participated in the program in previous years had an easier time recruiting teachers as they found value in the program and were eager to offer the program again. Kindergarten teachers team-teach this program with an early childhood teacher or a kindergarten with early childhood teaching experience. Teachers receive a two to three hour training on four areas: supporting families and children in their first experiences with a school, transition activities, aligning curriculum and standards, and parental involvement activities. In 2009, almost 500 students and their families attended the Keiki Steps to Kindergarten Program. In the classrooms, students engaged in morning gatherings; large and small group activities; free choice activities; outdoor play; and tours of the school building and grounds, cafeteria and library. Programs also offered weekly parent activities either formal or informal such as a reading activity or hands-on activity in the classroom, or a formal workshop separate from the children’s activities. Pre- and post-assessments of children’s’ and parents’ knowledge before and after this program has found that children are better able to follow classroom rules and routines, have familiarity and appreciation for books, participate in group activities, and experiences less separation anxiety from parents. The majority of parents said that as a result of the program they feel more comfortable in school settings, understand their importance to their child’s learning, and know what is expected of children in kindergarten (INPEACE, 2009).

***Pennsylvania***

Pennsylvania’s public education system was established by the Free School Act of 1834, when state funding was provided to any of the state’s municipalities that choose to establish a school (Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, 2011). Reflecting a widely held belief for local control, Pennsylvania’s education system now includes over 3,000 public schools organized into 500 school districts serving approximately 1.7 million students every year.

Pennsylvania has a long commitment to high quality early learning programs that began with a state study in 2002 on the quality of Pennsylvania’s early childhood programs. Noting the increasing importance of a child’s first five years of life, Governor Mark Schweiker commissioned the Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force to examine the quality of early childhood settings across the state. The study – the Pennsylvania Early Childhood Quality Study – conducted by the task force found a decline in the quality of child care centers between the 1980s and 2000, which significant decreases in quality for community based and family child care centers as well as a drop in qualifications of early childhood staff (Pennsylvania Early Childhood Quality Study, 2002). The 2002 report recommended “the state should focus on improving the quality of existing [child care] programs before considering further expansion of services in the commonwealth” (p. 21). Based on this recommendation, Pennsylvania piloted a voluntary statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) termed in the state as Keystone STARS (Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources and Support). Keystone STARS provides research-based program standards designed to promote quality early learning environments. According to the 2010 Keystone STARS program report, more than 4,200 early learning providers (3,007 center providers, 349 group providers, and 1,064 family providers) participate in the Keystone STARS program with 1,772 early learning providers earning a level 3 or level 4 rating (779 center providers, 50 group providers, and 943 family providers), the highest rating that can be achieved in terms of program quality (Keystone STARS Program Report, 2010).

In 2004, Pennsylvania provided funding the Pre-K Counts, which is a state funded preschool program for children ages 3 and 4 that targets the children most at risk of school failure (defined by (300% of the federal poverty level or a family of four earning $67,050), language (English is not your first language), or special needs issues. In 2010-2011, the state funded the program at $82,784,000 serving 11,359 children. Even in this tough fiscal environment, Pennsylvania has been able to maintain funding for Pre-K Counts.

 In addition to Keystone STARS and the Pre-K Counts programs there are seven other early development programs supported by the state:

1. Child Care Works, which provides financial assistance for childcare costs for eligible families
2. Early Intervention, which provides services to children ages birth to five who have disabilities or developmental delays
3. Head Start, Early Head Start, and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program
4. Nurse Family Partnership Program, which funds registered nurses to work with low-income first-time expectant mothers during their pregnancy and through the baby’s infancy
5. Parent Child Home Program, which provides a home visitor to assist parents of high-need children with developmental activities and building a positive parent/child relationship.
6. Child Care Certification, which licenses all child care centers (family, group, and community-based)
7. Children’s Trust Fund, which gives resources to community-based organizations to provide supportive services to pregnant teens, teen parents, and young parents
8. Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, which will provide home visiting services to approximately 1,850 high need children each year for four years

These programs are all under the oversight of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). OCDEL, which was established in 2007, was created to streamline the policies and rules to which early learning programs have to implement and report. Funded jointly by the Department of Education and the Department of Public Welfare (see figure 2 below), OCDEL operates as a “dual deputate” in order to unify the administration of services directed at young children and has direct lines of reporting to both departments (Pennsylvania Early Learning Challenge application, 2011).

Figure 2. Organizational Chart for Office of Child Development and Early Learning in Pennsylvania



Source: Pennsylvania Early Learning Challenge Application

In addition to oversight of these programs, OCDEL is involved with policy initiatives, including an early childhood education career lattice, designed to guide higher standards for early childhood preparation and professional development, and early learning standards designed from birth through third grade. Pennsylvania also has a coordinated statewide early learning data system called the Early Learning Network, designed to improve the availability and effectiveness of state early childhood programs and to collect more specific information about teachers and children in the programs (Stedron, 2009). Data is tied to both the state’s public welfare and education data systems and is collected on the child (e.g., family demographics, health information, service referrals, attendance and enrollment information, child outcomes from Work Sampling or Ounce assessments), the program level (teacher qualifications, benefits, turnover rates, program quality rating score) and classroom (staffing information and classroom quality rating score. The system has in place unique child identifiers in which child data is collected and followed as well as a teacher identifier system, similar to the same identifier system for teachers that has been set up for the K-12 system. Although the data system currently does not connect with the K-12 data system, the state is working to merge the Early Learning Network to the K-12 data collection system (Pennsylvania Information Management System-PIMS) through the unique identifier assigned to both children and to teachers. Planning efforts are also occurring around a Kindergarten Early Learning Network, in which data will be collected and focused on child development data at kindergarten entry, kindergarten classroom program quality information, and experience and certification information on kindergarten teachers (Stedron, 2009). This work will be driven by a Keystone Child Outcome Framework, a standards-based reporting framework that will coordinate different assessments spanning birth to grade 3. A key component of this will be the Keystone Kindergarten Inventory – called SELMA, which standards for the four domains in which it represents (Social and Emotional, Language and Literacy, Mathematics, and Approaches to Learning). The purpose of the tool, which uses the statewide learning standards (including the common core standards) as its foundation, is to understand the status of children at kindergarten entry across the four main domains and to track academic gains in kindergarten to allow for teachers and schools to adapt instruction to meet individuals student and group needs and to inform policy.

***District Initiatives***

Pottstown is a small urban town (five square miles) about 35 miles to the northwest of Philadelphia. Pottstown has lost many of its historic manufacturing companies, and now has a largely transient, low-income population. In PEAK publication, they cite statistics that 30% of their students live at or below poverty levels, and 55% qualify for free or reduced lunches. The annual mobility rate for families is 30%. The median household income of families in Pottstown was $35,000 compared to a county median of $68,000. Approximately 30% of Pottstown residents are employed in low wage service occupations such as sales, clerical, food service or janitorial services (PEAK, 2010). In 2006, the assistant superintendent, wanted the school district to begin working with the early childhood programs in the community. During our visit, the assistant superintendent told the story of how he came to value high quality early childhood programs. As the former high school football coach, he noticed that some football players seemed to have a harder time being successful in high school and were at-risk of dropping out. When comparing the characteristics and backgrounds of those successful students with the at-risk students, he began to see a common denominator. The successful students were more likely to have attended a high quality preschool program in their early years than those who were at risk of dropping out. From this observation, the assistant superintendent studied the characteristics and effects of early childhood programs and their effects on school readiness during his doctoral program. He found that students in their district who attended Pre-K Counts, Head Start and other community programs performed better in kindergarten than those who did not attend these programs. From these experiences the PEAK program was born.

As assistant superintendent of the Pottstown School District, in 2006, the Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness (PEAK) program was established as a collaboration of the school district with community early childcare providers, including the Montgomery County Head Start, Montgomery Early Learning Centers, and community based organizations such as the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, the Pottstown Family Center, Freedom Valley YMCA, the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and the YWCA Tri-County Area.

The program began with an initial planning grant from the local United Way. The school district brought these partners together to discuss the issues and challenges associated with providing high quality educational and development programs to children from preschool and the early elementary grades. In order to work through potential tensions, the district brought in facilitators who could focus the discussions and planning on putting the needs of the community and the children first. The PEAK coordinator has inherited the role of facilitator of meetings of the managing partners. The partners developed a governance structure for the PEAK initiative with contracts and Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) that outline partner roles and responsibilities. The managing partners meet each month. In addition to the managing partners, PEAK also has community partners who provide technical assistance to PEAK partners. Unlike managing partners, community partners do not have voting rights in the governance of the initiative.

 The United Way is the primary funder of PEAK, but the program uses funding from other sources such as the PA Pre-K Counts program, and other community private funding sources such as the Pennsylvania Children’s Trust Fund and the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation. Private funding sources have provided additional grants and donations. The PEAK program is staffed by a PEAK coordinator, PEAK Pre-K coach, PEAK family engagement specialist, and PEAK Developmental Specialist. These four staff members are employees of the school district.

The PEAK initiative has four goals around four key components:

* Community Outreach: business leaders, legislators, community policymakers and community representatives who recognize the importance of high quality early learning experiences
* Quality Improvement and Workforce Development: improving the quality of programs in the community through on-site coaching, professional development, increase levels of credentials, and higher teacher retention rates
* Family Engagement: adopting a framework to support families as children’s “first teachers”
* Health and Wellness: provide comprehensive services to improve health, safety, nutrition and behavioral health policies and practices (PEAK Annual Report, 2010-2011).

The effective strategies that we saw evidence of during our site visit are described in the following sections.

*Improving Program Quality and Workforce Development*

For this strategy, PEAK has the impact goal that “every three and four-year-old child has access to high quality child care, early childhood education, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten” (PEAK brochure, 2010). To reach this goal, PEAK staff provide many opportunities for teachers in community programs and the early elementary grades to attend professional development activities together. PEAK staff coordinates monthly meetings between early childhood directors in the community, as well as monthly teacher meetings. The PEAK program also believes in building the capacity of leaders through a series of classes in collaboration with the Institute for Family Professionals. In these meetings, educators learn new concepts, knowledge and skills related to P-3 such as curricular alignment, assessments and using data to improve instruction, and using developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom. As a result of this work, one of the elementary school principals and a kindergarten teacher talked about how PreK Counts classrooms and kindergarten classrooms are beginning to look the same through the use of very similar practices such as centers and a more child-centered learning curriculum.

PEAK also has a commitment to increasing the level of credentials of its early childhood teachers to improve the quality of early childhood programs. With PEAK tuition support, early childhood teachers are able to attend classes at the local community college to increase the numbers of teachers with a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA), and an Associate’s degree (AA). Between 2007 and 2010, the percentage of teachers with a CDA rose from 54% to 88%, and the percentage of teachers who earned an AA rose from 22% to 57%. Teachers have other opportunities to raise their credentials through a Bachelor’s degree (BS) program through Eastern University. To improve the retention rate of teachers, PEAK offers on-site coaching, teacher mini-grants (e.g., action research grants), and an induction plan for new teachers. In 2011, PEAK reported a retention rate of teachers in partner programs at 90%.

One of the core strategies that we repeatedly heard during interviews and read in various reports is the extensive use of data to drive instruction and PEAK activities. One of the reasons the PEAK initiative was started was because of the number of children who performed poorly on DIBELs assessments at the beginning of their kindergarten year. In the 2006-2007 school year, 45% of students began kindergarten rated at “benchmark”. The elementary school principal talked about “Data Days” in Pottstown when PreK and early elementary teachers spend the day sharing data on students from one grade level to the next. When rosters are drawn up for the upcoming year, teachers receive transition sheets with student data that help the teachers learn their students’ achievement levels when they enter the classroom, and the teachers can be prepared to meet the students where they are. The district continues to use DIBELs and progress monitoring data collected as part of Response to Intervention (RtI) to continuously assess students’ progress throughout the school year, and use these data to improve instruction as part of each teacher’s Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) plan. By 2011, that number of kindergarteners who have reached “benchmark” ratings has risen to 55%. At the time of the site visit, district administrators were confident that 90% of kindergarten students would meet the 90% benchmark on Pennsylvania’s state test.

*Family Engagement*

In regards to the family engagement strategy, PEAK has an impact goal that “Every parent of young children has access to the high quality skill building and resources needed to prepare them to be their child’s first ‘teacher’ and to prepare their children for success in school” (PEAK brochure, 2010). With this program, the community has access to the Pottstown Family Center which gives community providers access to full-time family engagement services. In addition, the PEAK Family Engagement Specialist provides resources, referrals and resources to families to meet their holistic needs (e.g., academic support for children, resources for basic needs such as housing and food). PEAK has adopted the *Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education* model developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. This framework provides a system of strategies to support families and reduce child neglect and abuse. The framework is composed of “protective factors” that include: parental resilience, social connections, parenting knowledge and child development, support in times of need, and health social and emotional development. Each month the PEAK Family Engagement specialist provides opportunities for informal social networking at the Pottstown Family Center such as PEAK Parent Breakfast Clubs during which families receive snacks and can meet to discuss current issues about their children. Families may also participate in workshops and classroom activities that teach parents about their child’s development. The PEAK Health Specialist also takes this opportunity to offer free blood pressure checks. Parents can also learn more about child development and help their children learn by engaging in the activities provided in given PEAK Family Activity Bags. These bags typically include a children’s book, activity guide, games and activities that parents and child can do together as a joint learning activity. Parents are asked to serve in the classroom as readers or in other volunteer roles. In 2011, PEAK reported a 216% increase in family participation in PEAK workshops.

*Health and Wellness/Comprehensive Services*

For its health and wellness services, PEAK has the impact goal that “every child has access to health and wellness services to ensure that they are prepared to maximize their potential in school” (PEAK brochure, 2010). PEAK staff implement various initiatives to promote health children and families. The PEAK Health Initiative receives funding from the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation to provide the following services:

* PEAK Early Childhood Health Specialist who coordinates the health initiative, provides technical assistance, resources and professional development activities related to educating teachers and families on health, nutrition and safety issues such as common childhood illnesses, childhood obesity, and first aid.
* PEAK provides health screenings for children such as hearing and vision screenings.
* PEAK partner programs have adopted the Preschool PATHS/ social emotional curriculum as a framework for improving the social emotional development of children in which children learn problem-solving strategies, cooperation, and verbalizing emotions.
* The PEAK Health Initiative collaborates with several community organizations such as a local nursing program to give nursing students experience working in a community health setting, local medical offices and centers to provide educational resources for children and their families on nutrition and health.

In 2011, PEAK reported a 272% increase in the amount of class time devoted to nutrition, and a 10.5% increase in children’s overall fitness.

**Ontario, Canada**

Recognizing the early years as a critical period for development, the Ontario government, established *The Early Years Study - Reversing the Real Brain Drain* in the spring of 1998 with the following purpose:

The Study will provide options and recommendations with respect to the best ways of preparing all of Ontario's young children - including those at risk or with special needs - for scholastic, career and social success. The development of the whole child, giving consideration to a comprehensive model of seamless supports and early interventions, is of paramount importance. Further, the Study will clarify roles and responsibilities and recommend options for collaborative service models for early learning for children, including local and provincial-level initiatives based on best practices (p. 1).

The result of the work that has occurred in Ontario over the last fifteen years has been to strategically integrate services and systems that serve children and families in Ontario. The integration service model transforms the way that services are delivered with coordinated planning and delivery of services and joint ownership and accountability among the multiple organizations involved with the improved outcomes for the children served. Ontario sees this work as a systems or ecologies approach in which all independent actors are dependent on the system as a whole.

Two different approaches to integrated services were piloted from the Early Years Study recommendations. One approach was the implementation of Early Learning Centers that now occur in over 100 sites throughout Ontario and are funded by the province. The Early Learning Centers included the integration of education, human, and health services for children age birth to five and their families. Primary programs and services include: early learning and literacy programs to parents and children; early child development programs and services; programs on pregnancy and parenting, links to other early years programs in the community; and outreach activities to encourage more parental involvement. Incentives were recommended to encourage school boards to integrate Early Learning Centers into schools. Our site visit included visits to Early Learning Centers in the Peel School District and Halton Region, both located in school boards (equivalent to school districts).

Another approach to the integrated service model was adapted in Toronto. Following the recommendation of the Early Years Study, in 1999, the City of Toronto, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, and the Toronto District School Board with support from the province and participating community agencies, established the Toronto First Duty initiative. Named after a famous quote from 19th century British social reformer John Ruskin who stated the “first duty of the state is to see that every child born therein shall be well housed, clothed, fed and educated till it attain years of discretion” (Corter, Bertrand, Griffin, Endler, Pelletier, McKay, 2002, p. 2), Toronto First Duty sites focused on integrating early learning, care, and parenting services for young children in Toronto up to age 6. Like Early Learning Centers, Toronto First Duty sites were required to demonstrate how early learning and family support programs could be integrated into a single, seamless system of system. Unlike Early Learning Centers, though, Toronto First Duty sites also included full day kindergarten programs for children ages 4 and 5.

 In 2004, the Ontario government introduced its Best Start Plan, which included a comprehensive early learning and care strategy for the province and local municipalities to work with parents, service providers, and different ministries to support healthy child development and early learning. Similar to Early Learning Centers, Best Start Centers include the following features: 1) common core functions including information services, referrals, quality childcare and parent literacy supports; 2) easy to recognize access points that connect families to other programs and services; 3) shared outcomes among service providers; 4) consistent quality and services; 5) located within a hub. While Early Learning and Best Start Centers has been a good structures for coordinating and aligning services; different governance and funding structures and legislative mandates prevented real significant improvement from occurring.

Like Head Start transition programs, Ontario went through multiple renditions of integrated service models, each neglecting the challenge the system’s approach to the governance, structural, and funding pieces that really impacted the success for true service integration. The 2009 report, “With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario” addressed recommendations for more systemic efforts to fundamentally change the approach of delivering and structuring service integration.

As a first step of action, province-wide, Ontario has a phased in plan to implement an integrated approach to full day kindergartens for four and five year olds that “combines kindergarten, child care and parenting supports into a seamless full-day integrated model for young children and their families” (Janmohamed, Pelletier, Corter, 2011). This is accomplished through the blended expertise of two professions – early childhood and elementary education. In Ontario, early childhood educators complete a two-year diploma program at a community college, though many go on to complete a four-year degree in early childhood education. Kindergarten teachers generally complete a four-year undergraduate degree that includes a year in teacher education (Janmohamed, Pelletier, Corter, 2011). As a result, early childhood teachers generally have more direct training in “child development” while kindergarten teachers have a stronger background in the Ministry of Education’s Kindergarten curriculum, assessment, and learning expectations (Janmohamed, Pelletier, Corter, 2011). The program model for the full day kindergarten using as emergent learning focus that integrates both the Ministry of Education’s Kindergarten Program and the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) curriculum. In an effort to blend two different learning philosophies (whole child and content based), Ontario blends instruction through teachers from two different professions. Whether or not this is a sustainable model; however, is unclear. One of the recommendations of the *With Our Best Future in Mind* report was the creation of a specialty degree program for professionals working with children from birth to age 8, which might build capacity at the province-level for educators with both a content and whole child focus.

As a strategy of systems integration, at the province-level, the division of early childhood was brought into the Ministry of Education, which represented a paradigm shift with bringing early childhood into the K-12 system. This resulted in the recommendation in the *With Our Best Future in Mind* report for the creation of a “new Early Years Division within the Ontario Ministry of Education to lead policy, funding, and accountability for programming for children from birth to age 8”. Through this structural change, the Minister of Education now has oversight of Early Learning and Child Care Policy and Programs; Early Learning Implementation; and Child Care Quality Assurance & Licensing.

As a last model of system integration, Ontario is working to fold all models (e.g., Early Learning Centers, Toronto First Duty, etc.) into the domain of School Boards. On a site visit to Ontario, we were able to visit Peel School Board and observe for ourselves how each of these models – Early Learning Centres, Best Start Centres, and full-day kindergarten – under the oversight of the Peel School Board. At an elementary school, in which the early learning centre was located in an elementary school, the principal reported greater parental involvement among families familiar with the early learning services whose children had matriculated into the school.

Our site visit to the Halton Region Our Kids initiative is an example of a sustained, region-wide effort of an integrated service model serving children birth to age 18. The Halton Our Kids initiative has been in existence since 1996 when the Early Years Committee was established as a result of the Early Years Study report. Recognizing the need in Halton Region to better integrate services for young children, the work in Halton started with a focus on prenatal to age 6. Since then, the focus has been expanded to prenatal to age 18 years.

As the foundation to their work, the Halton Our Kids initiative is modeled on ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977). See figure 3 below.His theory asserts the multiple stakeholders (including children, families, schools, neighborhoods, community services providers, and the community in general) make up interdependent players in an environmental whole.

Figure 3. Bronfenbrenner (1977) Ecological Systems Theory



The governance structure of the Halton Our Kids initiative is made up of eight organizations who form the foundation of the network. These include: the Halton Children’s Aid Society; the Regional Municipality of Halton; Halton Regional Police Services; Halton District School Board; Halton Catholic District School Board; ROCK Reach Out Centre for Kids; Halton Multicultural Council; and Erinoak Kids Centre for Treatment and Development. These organizations, known as the ‘Protocol Partners’, provide financial support, infrastructure, guidance and human resources to the Network. They have all signed a “Protocol Agreement” which formalizes their commitment to the vision and mission of Our Kids Network. Some of the tasks that they are involved with, include: providing direction to the initiative, ensuring resources acquisition, approving the budget per their financial policies and procedures, approving policies, providing strategic direction for evaluation, advocating for the initiative, acting as the arbitrating body for issues unresolved at the Joint Steering Committee, ensuring the identification of indicators that will measure the degree to which the Our Kids initiatives are ensuring service integration and value to the activities in the Pilot communities, and periodically sponsor and champion special events (e.g., conference). To be a protocol partner, each organization must have contributed at least $1000, though many contribute more as well as much in-kind support. The Our Kids initiative is divided into several committees made up of the varied representation of organizations throughout the region that contribute to the different services offered.

Through a coordinated model for planning and delivery of services with Halton’s Our Kids initiative, the Developmental Assets framework developed by the Search Institute has been used to shape and assess its integrated service model. Grounded in research on youth development, resiliency, and prevention, the 40 Developmental Assets are predictive assets that children need to develop in order to be less likely to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors. Joint ownership and accountability to this work is monitored through a report card, based on the 40 Developmental Assets, that serves as a tool for community-wide discussion and monitoring how children birth through age 18 are doing in Halton Region. According to project staff for Our Kids, the report card is helpful to sharing how the vision of the Halton Our Kids initiative fits within the scope of their work. “Data collection was especially important with helping the protocol organizations evidence that by advancing the outcomes of this initiatives they were also advancing the outcomes of their work, even if they were just one small slice of it”, said the Project Coordinator. As a result, the report card is used not only by schools and community agencies to monitor their own progress within the community, but also by Halton police and other unlikely agencies.

 To measure how well they are proceeding through the process, Halton Our Kids Initiative uses the Results Based Accountability (RBA) model developed by the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute to measure progress attached to programs and services within a collaborative process. Under the RBA framework, Halton’s Our Kids Network identified seven population results and three performance results included in Table 2.

Table 2. Halton Our Kids Results Based Accountability Measures

|  |
| --- |
| **Population Results (known as the Halton 7):** |
| 1. Children are healthy
2. Children are learning
3. Children are positively connected
4. Children are safe
5. Families are strong and stable
6. Schools are connected to the community
7. Neighbourhoods are where we live, work and play
 |
| **Performance Results:** |
| 1. Building towards service integration
2. Supporting children, youth, and families through neighbourhood Hubs
3. Turning research into action
 |

An example of the integrated services approach was witnessed by us when we were able to visit a hub at one of the Halton region’s public catholic schools serving children junior kindergarten through grade 8. The hub was a classroom in the school that was converted into the hub and partners with over 100 community agencies to provide services. To do this, they put in an exterior door (to prevent too much traffic from going into the school) but also had the interior door of the classroom open to allow for open traffic between the school staff, school children and hub staff. The hub, which has been there for 5 years, offers a variety of on-site and off-site programs and services in collaboration with a variety of social service organizations serving a clientele from ages prenatal to age 18. While we were there, we observed a guided activity for parents that was also open and attended by home-based childcare providers with the children that they watch. Staff associated with the hub also do support services and counseling and the hub coordinator informed that that the principal often invites her to sit in on conferences with parents if appropriate so that she can provide information and resources. According to the hub coordinator many of the services offered are organic and grow from the needs of the community as well as to the expertise of the staff offering in-kind support to the hub. According to her, “things stem from tiny ideas and grow but that is the point”.

 Through a site visit as a public Canadian school, we were able to visit a full-day kindergarten classroom and observed a truly integrated classroom based on the curriculum philosophy of the ELECT curriculum using emergent learning. Emergent learning, as described by the principal and the teachers, was defined as child directed learning that comes from the child’s interest. Through our observation, it was evident that the early childhood educator was an equal partner to the kindergarten teacher in the teaching and learning. Through the documentation, evidence was collected regularly on how and what children were learning. In a discussion with the principal afterwards, she offered some insight. According to the principal, who has a background not only in early childhood, but also in adult learning, the role of the principal in building an integrated system includes: having a strong developmental understanding of curriculum and developmentally appropriate practices; understands how to effectively staff the classrooms; thinks outside the box with finding ways to free up time for the early childhood educator and kindergarten teacher to have joint planning time together; commits and supports staff through the transition to the full day kindergarten model, including participating with the joint planning meetings for the first couple of weeks to set a standards for what she wanted the time to look at and what should result from it; and supports and encourages continuous documentation to show evidence of learning.

Cross-Case Analysis

One of the criteria for our site selection for this study was the identification of PreK-3 initiatives that have a history of sustainability. As such, sustainability is a primary focus on the replication of sustainable practices and policies around collaborative work between early learning and K-12 education. The themes of the cross-case analysis of the sites focuses on the research questions of the study.

*Promising alignment and coordination practices*

Several alignment and coordination practices were evident in the sites, including:

* *Comprehensive early learning services and improving access to quality 0-5 opportunities –* In all sites, we saw a comprehensive focus on early learning education, care, and services for children birth to age 5 with the intent to expand comprehensive services into the elementary school experience.
* *Partnerships with families-* Through the use of hubs, Ontario brings together families with community resources. In both Ontario and Hawaii, early childhood experiences for the parent and child are offered. The classroom is set up in centers like a quality early childhood classroom, is staffed by early childhood professionals. In this program, the child is exposed to high quality learning experiences (early literacy and math) and physical, and social emotional learning opportunities. As a result, the child comes into the program and has a valuable learning experience, and the caregiver also has a valuable learning experience as s/he learns how children learn best and can extend these learning opportunities in the home.
* *Cross-sector collaboration for alignment and data-sharing-* Although in Pennsylvania, the data system currently does not connect with the K-12 data system, the state is working to merge the Early Learning Network to the K-12 data collection system (Pennsylvania Information Management System -PIMS) through the unique identifier assigned to both children and to teachers. Planning efforts are also occurring around a Kindergarten Early Learning Network, in which data will be collected and focused on child development data at kindergarten entry, kindergarten classroom program quality information, and experience and certification information on kindergarten teachers (Stedron, 2009). The Halton Our Kids initiative provides perhaps the best example of a coordinated model for planning and delivery of services using data with the use of the Developmental Assets framework to shape and assess its integrated service model. Joint ownership and accountability to this work is monitored through a report card, based on the 40 Developmental Assets, that serves as a tool for community-wide discussion and monitoring how children birth through age 18 are doing in Halton Region.
* *Joint professional development –* The best examples of joint professional development were seen at the Nanakuli-Wai’anae site in Hawaii, early childhood and elementary school teachers were working together to align curriculum and instruction and share data on the students they had in common to create aligned learning opportunities for their students as they move from the early childhood environment into the early elementary grades. Another example of embedded professional development was observed in Ontario, through joint planning sessions between the early childhood and kindergarten teachers involved with the full-day kindergartens. The principal of the elementary school that we visited in Halton noted that she attended the first few planning meetings between the kindergarten and early childhood teacher to model expectations for what was to occur during the planning sessions.
* *Workforce development –* Pennsylvania’s early childhood work started first with a focus on improving the quality of existing child care programs, which included the integration of the Quality Rating System and improving the training and professional development for early childhood teachers. Hawaii’s work also focused on workforce development through the creation of a PreK-3 master’s degree program. In Ontario, feeling that elementary teachers did not have the background in constructivist learning, full-day kindergarten programs implemented were co-taught by an early childhood and elementary teacher allowing for the opportunity for the two professionals to work hand in hand in aligning the different paradigms of their professions.

*Current issues and barriers to creating a seamless learning continuum*

Several issues and barriers identified through our site visits are highlighted below as well as strategies taken by the sites in which to address these.

The most evident issue in which PreK-3 initiatives face is the different approaches, philosophies, and beliefs that surround the two different sectors of education. As such, the approaches of multi-organizational collaborations is to create a blending of the two or more organizations rather than an acquisition. Several effective strategies in which achieve a blended model were implemented at these sites.

The first strategy is to take time to do readiness work and joint planning to prepare for the initiative.Often, new initiatives are started strategic planning and analysis to stakeholder buy-in and support and as a result, the initiative often fades out once the funding ends. Planning grants were granted in both Pennsylvania and Hawaii in order to allow time for the partners to be involved in joint planning before beginning the work of implementation. Pottstown brought in independent facilitator funded by the United Way to guide their planning efforts and to assure the early childhood and K-12 stakeholder were equally at the table.

Likewise, another effective strategy implemented was to engage in strategic activities that map out each of the partnership commitments. Too often in multi-organizational partnerships, responsibility and duties are delegated within the two partners rather than across the partners, preventing the collaboration and alignment needed to address the broad challenges. The work in Halton Region, Ontario is overseen by a group known as the ‘Protocol Partners’ who provide financial support, infrastructure, guidance and human resources to the Network. They have all signed a “Protocol Agreement” which formalizes their commitment to the vision and mission of Our Kids Network. To be a protocol partner, each organization must have contributed at least $1000, though many contribute more as well as much in-kind support. Halton’s Our Kids Network also uses the Developmental Assets framework developed by the Search Institute, in the creation of a report card that serves as a tool for community-wide discussion and monitoring how children birth through age 18 are doing in Halton Region. The report card is helpful to sharing how the vision of the Halton Our Kids initiative fits within the scope of their work.

Similarly, a key part of mapping out each partner’s role was to embrace joint accountability and shared ownership. Joint ownership and accountability to this work is monitored through a report card, based on the 40 Developmental Assets, that serves as a tool for community-wide discussion and monitoring how children birth through age 18 are doing in Halton Region. The report card is used not only by the schools but also community service organizations, including the police. To measure how well they are proceeding through the process, the Protocol Partners for Halton’s Our Kids Initiative uses the Results Based Accountability (RBA) model developed by the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute to measure progress attached to programs and services within a collaborative process.

Lastly, all of the sites embraced the push up/push down concept as a way to create a sharing and learning community of practice. At the Nanakuli-Wai’anae site in Hawaii, early childhood and elementary school teachers were working together to align curriculum and instruction and share data on the students they had in common to create aligned learning opportunities for their students as they move from the early childhood environment into the early elementary grades. There was also a strong emphasis on curricular and instructional alignment. The early childhood and elementary teachers were scheduling a few days in the semester for joint observations where elementary teachers would attend and observe a few early childhood teachers’ classrooms, and then later in the day or a few days later, the early childhood teachers would observe the elementary teachers. In addition to scheduling the observations, the teachers were also talking about the purpose of the observations, and what they should be looking for. Then, at the next meeting, the teachers would talk about what they saw and what the implications were for learning effective practices from each other, and implications for curricular and instructional alignment across the early childhood and elementary classrooms. The push up of early childhood philosophies and practices was also evident in the other sites that we visited. Kindergarten rooms visited in Ontario, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania were all arranged by centers with play-based instruction guiding the classroom.

 In addition to strategies, though, several challenges were noted during the site visit. A real notable challenge found during our site visit was the issue of training for principals and teachers on how to work across sectors (early childhood and K-12). All sites noted that this was a challenge and with disappointment, we found that none of the sites really had efforts in place to work with school principals and/or early childhood leadership on the alignment of early learning and K-12. The sites did; however, try to utilize systemic professional development and support structures to address teacher support and training. The most notable examples were in Hawaii, which created a new graduate level PreK-3 certification for teacher leaders to learn how to work across the two systems and Ontario, which implemented a full day kindergarten program province-wide that is co-taught by a kindergarten and early childhood teacher.

 Although funding was a challenge in each of the sites, we found that the sites utilized effective strategies to keep costs down. The work in Pottstown was funded primarily by the United Way and private funders, though, funding was targeted at helping the initiative to pool resources and run more efficiently; thus, less dependent on outside funding. In Halton, Ontario, the report card helped each of the partners to see how the Our Kids Initiative fit within their organizational scope of work; thus, enhancing their work instead of adding to it.

Perhaps the most prominent issue found is that of governance. Despite that PreK-3 shows both individual and societal gains, the alignment of two separate education systems, as well as the alignment of education and health and human service systems, requires more than bringing together multiple organizations through collaboration, especially when the different sectors have separate reporting, regulatory, and funding lines. Ontario’s work around integrated services and now integrated systems helps to coordinate and align the governance, structural, and funding pieces affecting these programs. Likewise, Pennsylvania has taken a similar approach to the development of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), which operates as a “dual deputate” and has joint lines of reporting and funding to the Department of Education and the Department of Public Welfare.

*Actions to facilitate and sustain a P-12 learning continuum*

Perhaps the most prominent actions learned that could facilitate and sustain the P-12 learning continuum is the role of leadership – both early childhood directors and principals. It was evident at each of the sites, that leadership support is key to successful and sustainable PreK-3 collaboratives. In Pottstown, Pennsylvania, the assistant superintendent was the key champion around the district’s work with PEAK based on his personal observations on the long-term impact of early childhood programs on the students that he coached as the high school football coach. In Halton, Ontario, the principal that we interviewed had a background in both early childhood and adult education.

However, it was apparent from our site visits that coordinated leadership training on how to align the early learning continuum is still isolated and not comprehensively tied to state or local PreK-3 initiatives. Instead, we found that the strong PreK-3 initiatives that we visited were a result of an already developed understanding or openness to the integration of early childhood on behalf of the principal or other leadership in the district. Efforts to sustain these learning continuums are at risk though when person dependent and the site visits showed that more education and support to principals and key leadership needs to occur to plan for sustainability over time.

*Federal, state, and local policies that support effective P-12 learning continuums*

The tie between state/province and local interplay in building effective P-12 continuum was most evident in Ontario, where the government has played a directive role with the creation of integrated services supporting education and care for children ages birth and beyond. Learning from these efforts, the government has also worked to integrate the systems that support the care and education for children. While Pennsylvania is also addressing the systems integration role with the development of OCDEL, the impact of it is not yet as apparent in the field, likely because of the strong ‘local control’ culture of the state. Nonetheless, the key policy initiatives in which Pennsylvania is focusing – including standards alignment, P-20 data integration, and workforce development will influence positive program changes locally. This draws us to our biggest conclusion from the study – that unless the systems that finance and govern these care and education programs are aligned, the services themselves will be disjointed. This lesson has been learned through the failed federal efforts to provide integrated transition supports from Head Start programs to the schools. As such, the federal government as well as state and local governments should examine the system structures that they have in place serving children and how these system structures can be coordinated. The development of P-20 data systems as well as learning standards and assessments that are aligned from early learning to K-12 schools are a good start.

Another policy lever in need of increased attention is the training programs geared to preparing teachers, principals, and superintendents on how to align early learning and K-12 schools as well as education and the health and welfare services. In Ontario, the training for elementary and early childhood teachers is so vastly different, that the government felt that they only one in which they felt that the cultures and practices of the two fields could be merged was to have joint instruction in the classroom. While the development of a PreK-3 graduate program in Hawaii is a good start, it was evident from the site visits that much more work is needed through the initial training programs for teachers and leaders as well as in professional development and support.

A last strong policy lever that we found was the collection of data for continuous improvement. In Ontario, funding for an independent evaluator (directed by faculty at the University of Toronto Institute of Child Study) was provided to conduct a formative evaluation of the Toronto First Study and Full Day Kindergarten program to monitor implementation and make continuous improvements. Often we support summative evaluations for programs that have been implemented; however, by practice in Ontario, they fund formative evaluations as programs are being implemented to assess what is working and not working and to be able to make course adjustments.

*Conclusion*

The lack of sustained PreK-3 programs, despite the evidence of their success, led to the purpose of our study, which was to identify long-standing PreK-3 initiatives and learn from them on what features were present to make their initiatives successful and sustainable. From our site visits, we observed and identified many effective practices to bridging the divide between early learning and K-12, but also found gaps and weaknesses still with addressing the role of leadership (both school principals and early childhood directors) in guiding and sustaining this work. Though leadership is important, the biggest conclusion drawn from the study was the alignment of systems that finance and govern these care and education programs and that unless they are aligned, the services themselves will be disjointed. The best examples of how this is being done were found in Ontario and lessons from Ontario’s integrated systems approach can help address the sustainability piece for the work in Hawaii and Pennsylvania (though at the state level, Pennsylvania has taken steps to integrate their early learning governance system). In all though, effective practices were seen at each of the sites visited that shared can inform and strength the work of other organizations (local and state) enacting models of aligning early learning to K-12 education.

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1. We recognize that some cases chosen for this study may have different grade configurations in the schools so that some of the collaborations may be a P-3 continuum, while others could be a P-8. Therefore, in this proposal we are using a generic term of P-12 to refer to the possible cases that could be included in the study. For clarification, “P” refers to programs that include programming for children ages birth to age 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. While we have used PreK-3 as the nomenclature for these initiatives, Hawaii uses P-3 in the official title of its initiative. Therefore, we will use P-3 in place of PreK-3 when describing Hawaii’s work. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)