PreK-3rd: How Superintendents Lead Change

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**Introduction**

A superintendent’s job depends on his or her ability to incorporate diverse early education into the PreK-12 system. Strong student achievement, a narrow achievement gap between ethnic minorities and their peers, and benefits for English Language Learners are seen in education systems that have integrated PreK-3rd programs. Despite this, superintendents are not heavily involved in early learning programs. It requires courage, persistence, political skills, and relentless focus for superintendents to effectively link PreK programs with the K-12 system. This article examines the successful efforts of three superintendents.

**Courage to Lead**

Excellent outcomes have been seen as a result of the persistence, focus, and courage of superintendents. In the Montgomery County Public School district, 90% of kindergarteners are excited and ready to learn, 89% of third graders are reading proficiently, 86% of high school graduates are going to college, and a huge narrowing of the achievement gaps in every grade has been seen.

**Step 1: Getting Started and Keeping it Simple and Focused**

According to the former Bremerton Superintendent, trying to do too much too fast is the biggest mistake a superintendent can make when getting involved in early learning programs. Instead, he or she should build on the existing early learning programs. For example, leaders can hold meetings with local service providers, administrators, and public school staff. This creates a strong foundation of trust.

**Step 2: Making PreK-3rd Work by Supporting Joint Professional Development**

Perhaps the most challenging aspect for superintendents is changing teachers’ instructional practices both in and outside their district. Superintendents have accomplished this by supporting professional development in their districts and then communicating their efforts to organizations outside their district. This improved both student achievement and partnerships with community agencies, and silenced critics. Some districts also offered these workshops to private early childhood service providers in their communities.

**Step 3: Sustaining PreK-3rd by Focusing on Results**

A superintendent will meet opposition when they first try to take an active role in early learning. He or she must demonstrate that linking PreK with K-12 education produces results by establishing measurable goals based on key literacy skills. This allows the superintendent to show community partners that the PreK-3 efforts are worthwhile.

**Conclusion**

Superintendents need to become more involved in early childhood education because this is the period of time when children’s brains develop the most. This change will happen slowly and must start with small, focused investment in pre-existing programs. Courage and intensive personal investment are the keys to success.

Marietta, G. (2010). PreK-3rd: How superintendents lead change. *PreK-3rd Policy to Action Brief (5).*