



A Framework for School Readiness in Georgia



Convened by GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students

August 2017

BACKGROUND

Over the course of the last several years, agencies and organizations across Georgia have stated commitments to “school readiness,” with a number of initiatives featuring kindergarten readiness as a critical milestone or component of strategic frameworks. For example, Get Georgia Reading, the state’s campaign for grade-level reading, identifies “prepared and ready for school” as a crucial step on the path to third-grade reading proficiency; the vision of GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students is that by 2020, all Georgia students will “enter kindergarten prepared to succeed” and on a path to read to learn by third grade; and Learn4Life, the Metro Atlanta Regional Education Partnership, cites “school readiness” as the first of six key indicators in its collective impact framework. A shared understanding of the construct of readiness serves to align such efforts, providing common language and context for the internal work of organizations, agencies, and systems and serving as a lever for identifying action steps that support Georgia’s young learners.

In 2016, GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students, with the support of senior leadership at the Georgia Departments of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), Education (GaDOE), and Public Health (DPH), convened a committee of stakeholders representing early childhood, K-12, families, health, and higher education to develop and adopt a shared school readiness framework. The committee’s work was informed by a survey of nearly 2,000 stakeholders across Georgia—including early childhood educators and administrators, parents and families, elementary educators and principals, school system leadership, health care providers, community organization and family support staff, and others—that assessed respondents’ perceptions of school readiness. Over the course of approximately nine months, the committee met to outline priorities, review existing school readiness definitions, consult with national experts, and, ultimately, develop the framework that follows.

The framework articulates not only the central components of school readiness but also the roles various stakeholders play in promoting it.

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AN APPROACH TO SCHOOL READINESS IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA



A strong foundation for success in school and throughout life results from families, schools, and communities providing safe, stable, and nurturing environments during a child's earliest years when brain architecture is developing most rapidly.

A common understanding of school readiness provides the opportunity to align and promote equitable policy, practice, and investments that support the healthy development of children from birth to age eight. Agencies and organizations across Georgia worked together to articulate the shared vision of school readiness and accompanying *Framework for Action* that follow.

WHAT IS SCHOOL READINESS?

School readiness is *multifaceted* and not defined by a single indicator.



School readiness requires families, schools, and communities to work together to provide the healthy foundation that supports children's growth in the following fundamental domains:

physical development, including physical health, well-being, and motor skills;

social-emotional development, including self-regulation and relationships with peers and adults;

cognition and general knowledge, including mathematics and problem-solving;

language & literacy development, including language understanding and use, emergent literacy, and early writing; and

approaches to learning, including initiative, attentiveness, persistence, and play.

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Families, educators, community leaders, policymakers, and health and service providers all play a role in assuring that every child has access to the experiences and supports needed to enter kindergarten prepared for success in school and throughout life. Because children's early experiences and development vary, a coordinated effort to understand and respond to children's needs is essential.



FAMILIES

SCHOOLS

COMMUNITIES

FAMILIES



Families, including parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, grandparents, and other caregivers

- As a child's first teacher, promote healthy development by talking, reading, and playing with children starting at birth
- Provide safe, stable, responsive, and nurturing environments for children
- Access regular, on-time preventive medical and dental care and understand children's developmental milestones
- Communicate concerns to educators, health professionals, and other service providers and use early intervention services for children experiencing delays
- Provide nutritious food options and opportunities for physical activity
- Advocate for and engage in children's learning to support their long-term success
- Access social supports, resources, and services for families with young children

SCHOOLS



Educators, *including early childhood and elementary educators*

- Create safe, stable, responsive, and nurturing early childhood and elementary learning environments
- Understand and implement developmentally appropriate practices that are research-based and data-informed
- Respond to children's cultural, linguistic, familial, and developmental diversity, committing to the success of each and every learner
- Document student progress and communicate with families and other professionals as appropriate
- Support transitions, including the critical transition to kindergarten, by working collaboratively with other teaching staff, families, and community members
- Engage in high-quality professional development
- Partner and collaborate with families, acknowledging and respecting their strengths, values, cultural practices, and languages
- Collaborate across early learning and K-3 contexts to promote birth-eight alignment

SCHOOLS



Education Leaders, *including early childhood administrators, principals, and superintendents*

- Foster positive learning environments that are safe, stable, responsive, and nurturing
- Promote alignment and collaboration between and within early childhood and K-12 systems
- Foster a family-friendly atmosphere and serve families with diverse cultural, linguistic, and developmental needs
- Ensure teachers have access to appropriate and high-quality professional development and resources
- Support developmentally appropriate, evidence-based, and culturally and linguistically responsive practices and strategies that promote learning and development
- Embrace a model of continuous program improvement
- Empower families to be able to support their children
- Partner with community organizations to address the needs of the whole child
- Engage with community leaders and policymakers to communicate progress and challenges
- Stay informed of latest research and evidence-based resources and tools to promote best practices

SCHOOLS



Higher Education, *including teacher training, social work, allied health, nursing, and medical programs as well as researchers*

- Adopt, implement, and promote developmentally appropriate, evidence-based, and culturally and linguistically responsive practices
- Promote interdisciplinary training initiatives that encourage alignment and collaboration among early childhood, K-12, health, and social services systems
- Communicate and disseminate relevant research findings and translate for policy and practice
- Incorporate into coursework resources and tools that promote child- and family-centered practices
- Partner with communities and practitioners to support collaboration across child- and family-serving systems

COMMUNITIES



Community Leaders, including business leaders, family representatives, local governments and elected officials, advocates, faith communities, and community organizations

- Promote equitable access to resources and services that support children, families, and schools
- Establish positive, culturally responsive partnerships with families to address the needs of young children
- Help create safe and stable communities where children can thrive
- Communicate the importance of high-quality early childhood experiences for community well-being
- Convene stakeholders within the community to build momentum, foster collaboration, and create alignment in order to address the needs of the whole child
- Understand, monitor, and respond to the indicators of child and family well-being in local communities

COMMUNITIES



Policymakers, *including state agency leaders, lawmakers, grant makers, and regional planners*

- Invest in and champion policies, programs, and services that support all children and families
- Assure equitable access to and use of high-quality health services, early learning programs, and needed safety nets and supports
- Support and inform a comprehensive, well-funded early childhood system that connects health, education, and child welfare
- Stay informed of latest research and evidence-based resources and tools to promote best practices
- Communicate and collaborate with constituents and community partners, including educators and service providers, in order to understand and address the needs of children and families
- Promote alignment and collaboration between and within early childhood and K-12 systems
- Understand, monitor, and respond to indicators of child and family well-being across Georgia

COMMUNITIES



Service Providers

Health Care Providers, *including physical and behavioral health practitioners*

- Provide accessible, affordable, and evidence-based physical and mental health services that support children's early learning and development
- Monitor and communicate to parents and caregivers social-emotional, cognitive, and physical developmental milestones
- Collaborate with other service providers to ensure interconnected systems of support exist to address children's needs
- Implement comprehensive screenings that address children's development, caregiver mental health, and social determinants of health
- Incorporate social and behavioral health supports within the medical home that address family needs such as parental stress and depression
- Aid families and caregivers in accessing needed therapies, services, and supports for children experiencing developmental delays

Child and Family Service Providers, *including social workers, early intervention specialists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, caseworkers, family support staff, and community, youth, and recreation programs*

- Collaborate with other entities to ensure interconnected systems of support exist to address families' needs for stable employment, safe housing and neighborhoods, adequate nutrition, and reliable transportation
- Monitor and adapt delivery to ensure awareness, affordability, and accessibility of services and to meet the developmental, cultural, and linguistic needs of children and families
- Listen and respond to the needs of families, involving parents and caregivers as decision-makers



Additional Resources Coming Soon

For more information, please contact
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