



Blueprint for Zero to Five

Alabama's Plan to Ensure That:

“Every Child Has the Opportunity to Succeed in Life”

Developed through the Early Childhood Comprehensive
Systems Planning initiative and adapted from *The National
School Readiness Indicators Initiative*

Alabama Partnership for Children
Alabama Department of Public Health/ECCS Planning

Blueprint for Zero to Five
“Ready for School and Ready for Life”

WHY

- It is more effective and cost efficient to build a healthy child than to remediate a troubled youth or rehabilitate a troublesome adult
- Unlike the K-12 education system and other critical community services, there is often little coordination, joint planning, acceptance of common goals, and integration of the many different service providers and interventions
- Though there is much research to guide investment in the most efficient and effective interventions and many good programs exist in the community, without broad acceptance of common measures and goals, the collective investment is not maximized, nor is progress measured

WHO

- Alabama Partnership for Children, Children’s Trust Fund, Alabama Department of Public Health, VOICES for Alabama’s Children, AL Department of Human Resources, AL Early Intervention System, AL Department of Children’s Affairs led the systems mapping effort which involved consultation with over 60 agencies/individuals (consultant Braintree Solutions)
- Alabama Department of Public Health, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems steering committee, planning workgroups, committees, parent focus groups (with assistance from US Department of Health and Human Services)
- Work of different groups such as the Early Learning Commission, Child Day Care Advisory Committee, Child Care Task Force, CPC Needs Assessments, Success by Six and other local initiatives

HOW

- Defined what young children need to develop optimally
- Reviewed the research of proven interventions
- Identified existing programs, structures, and funding
- Developed a plan of action, the *Blueprint for Zero to Five* which is a concise comprehensive plan to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed
- Continuously solicit input and new partners in the initiative

WHAT

- The *Blueprint* can serve as a starting point for directing resources and efforts towards what has proven to make a difference
- Can serve as a structure for planning, funding, advocacy, accountability and policy decisions so that increased emphasis and resources can be leveraged to impact children during their most formative years

Overview:

The *Blueprint For School Zero to Five* is the result of the statewide Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems planning process through the Department of Public Health and is offered by the Alabama Partnership for Children as a comprehensive plan for reaching its mission. A broad-based group of service providers, advocates, community leaders, families, and other stakeholders participated in strategic planning sessions to develop a concise, comprehensive plan to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed. The process has been comprehensive and inclusive, building on work that has been done over the past several years. Over ten plans or sets of recommendations were compiled to determine common needs identified or interventions proposed – areas on which there is broad agreement. And, over a period of nearly two years, statewide experts (both service providers and consumers) examined the “state of young children” in Alabama, defined what young children need to be ready for the rigors and opportunities of the K-12 school system, reviewed the research of proven interventions, identified existing programs and structures, and developed a plan of action.

The work is also informed by the National Governor’s Association “Building the Foundation for Bright Futures” and other compiled research of the Alabama Partnership for Children’s System Mapping and other state’s initiatives, *Good Start, Grow Smart*, and the *National School Readiness Indicators Initiative* (see references attached).

The *Blueprint* is offered as the starting point for directing resources and efforts toward what has proven to make a difference. Viewed as a structure for planning, funding, advocacy, accountability, and policy decisions, the goal is to develop statewide support for the *Blueprint* as the comprehensive plan for children’s healthy development and school readiness.

An overarching goal of the plan is to promote investments in early childhood as proven strategies with enormous benefits to family and community well-being, education, and economic development. Joining our nation’s Governors, economists, scientists, and early childhood advocates, the Alabama Partnership for Children’s plan for young children offers what is needed most in these difficult and uncertain financial times – a plan for investment where there are the greatest returns. Because of the relatively small investments we make in young children and because there is such fertile ground for impact, few opportunities provide such a cost-benefit return.

Many good things happen each day in Alabama for young children and their families, and we have identified many programs or components of a “system” that are all ready in place. But, unlike the K-12 or higher education system – there are few common goals, integration and coordination can be improved, and acceptance and accountability to a common set of goals are needed. The *Blueprint* is offered as the structure through which we can better utilize existing resources, provide the basis for leveraging additional resources, and measure our progress toward our common goals.

Each year, about 60,000 babies are born in Alabama, and they will pass quickly through the most critical years of development and opportunity for impact -- during a single gubernatorial term. They will then all arrive at school “ready or not”, and our schools will be accountable for their progress. Our plan is to invest more when it means more so that all children have the best start in life.

The *Blueprint* is developed from “Getting Ready”, the 2005 report from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative (www.GettingReady.org). This is a 17-state initiative supported by three national foundations that developed sets of indicators to track results for children from birth to age 8. The work is offered as a starting point for other states and communities as they develop effective and comprehensive early learning systems. Other partners are the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislators, the Education Commission of the States, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children – providing guidance, advice, and serving as disseminator partners. Its stated objectives are to: 1) create a set of measurable indicators related to and defining school readiness that can be tracked regularly over time at the state and local levels; 2) to have states and local governments adopt this indicators-based definition of school readiness, fill in the gaps in data availability, track data over time, and report findings; and 3) to stimulate policy, program, and other actions to improve the ability of all children to succeed in school.

Based on what works to support early learning and improve school readiness, the indicators are designed to guide policy decisions and also to track progress toward meeting our goals for young children. Unlike other facets of community life, there is limited data on young children who are often living in vulnerable families and sometimes “invisible” during their most formative years, so this initiative provides a valuable framework. A goal of the initiative is to offer this rich list of critical measures (based on hard research and state experiences) as a framework to focus more attention and resources on the needs of our youngest children and their families. A more comprehensive community initiative, *Community Counts*, has been done in the greater Birmingham region, and their publication describes the use of indicators as measures of *conditions*. Comparing these measurements with other county, state, and national benchmarks allows us to establish targets for progress. And, as is described in this initiative, each indicator is but one piece of the puzzle, and when analyzed together, can provide insight into the overall goal of successful children prepared for success in school and life.

Challenges identified by the national initiative are immediately evident in Alabama. In order for relevant, reliable annual data to be available to inform policy and funding decisions, we must have the resources to develop, track, and report indicators. Our first step is to glean relevant baseline data from existing sources, but where data sources do not exist for priority areas, we need to develop mechanisms to collect and manage information that allows for reliable assessment of progress. The best investments, then, are proven initiatives that are comprehensive and will result in both the data needed to measure progress and interventions that positively impact outcomes. An example is a program that greets new parents in the birthing hospital and then follows up with regular in-home contact to encourage regular health check-ups and to provide referrals for support services.

The *Blueprint* is developed around the readily available indicators, but also stresses the need for measuring and tracking emerging indicators – those vital factors that years of research indicate as predictors of positive or negative child outcomes. And, we should be mindful that the current K-12 education system in our country was in development for over 50 years – so much of our progress in the development of an effective early learning “system” and our evaluation of success should include development of infrastructure components, the intermediate steps necessary for sustaining a viable system. For there to be long-term success in improved child outcomes, some investment in statewide and local planning and coordination is necessary to bring unity and shared responsibility to a set of agreed-upon outcomes for children and families. Without this structure, the disjointed, though well-intentioned investments will continue to yield isolated and marginal results in measurable improved outcomes for healthy child development and school readiness. We accept the premise “that which gets measured, gets done” and view the *Blueprint* as a mechanism to move us closer each year to improved indicators in child well-being that will move Alabama from 48th in the nation – building a better future for Alabama, one child at a time.

Alabama Partnership for Children's School Readiness Ruler*



Every Child Should Have:

Ready Families:

Information, resources and support for families, involved parents, protection and nurturing

+

Ready Communities:

Access to high quality early learning programs, concrete support, insurance and preventive care, reduced child poverty, assessment and referral, coordinated high quality early learning system

+

Ready Services (Health and Education) :

+

Ready Schools:

School leadership, language/reading readiness, school transition teams

= Ready Children Prepared For School Success and Bright Futures

**Adapted from the AL State Board of Education's
Educational Ruler: Making and Measuring Progress*

Ready Families + Ready Communities + Ready Services + Ready Schools = Ready Children With Bright Futures

1) **READY FAMILIES** – Parents and families play the most critical role in children’s healthy development. Providing the resources, information, and supportive network to parents enables them to do their best job of raising healthy, ready children.

Rationale: Mother’s limited educational level and being born to a single mother are two of the most powerful predictors of poor outcomes. The early relationships developed in a caring environment of nurturing and protection are critical to young children’s future success. Providing information and support beginning at the time of birth are effective in supporting effective parenting.

- A. Mother’s Education Level -- % of births to mothers with less than 12th grade
- B. Births to Teens and Single Mothers -- # of births to teens, and % of births to unmarried women
- C. Vulnerable Families (multiple risk factors); Two parents -- % of children with (2) parents actively involved; family divorce rates
- D. Child Abuse and Neglect – rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect
- E. Substance Abuse Rates – arrest rates for drugs and alcohol
- F. Family Information and Resources -- % of parents of newborns receiving resources at the time of birth; % of families participating in a parent support program (research-based)
- G. Increased awareness – community-wide awareness and education effort

2) **READY COMMUNITIES** – Parents need a wide range of supports and connections to provide stable homes where children can thrive. Community emphasis should be on empowering families as first teachers and as primary caregivers and supporters of children.

- A. Young Children in Poverty -- % of children under 6 in families below FPL
- B. Supports for Families of Young Children – community connections for social networks, parenting support activities, family strengthening emphasis in programs
- C. Coordinated Emergency Assistance – access to emergency assistance for basic home needs, clearinghouse of assistance and programs available, common/shared intake, plan for family strengthening
- D. Common Intake/Referral for Early Education Options – # of agencies and programs using a community-wide intake form; process to make referrals and track data

3) **READY SERVICES – HEALTH** – Access to health insurance and a medical home are necessary for children’s optimum development. This includes prenatal care, well-baby check-ups and immunizations, and detection and treatment of illness and delays.

- A. Health Insurance -- % of children under age 6 without health insurance
- B. Low Birthweight Infants -- % of infants born weighing under 5.5 pounds
- C. Prenatal Care -- % of births to women who receive late or no prenatal care
- D. Immunizations -- % of children who have been fully immunized at kindergarten
- E. Medical Homes -- % of children who receive their health care from a consistent health care provider
- F. Comprehensive Screenings -- % of children who receive periodic developmental screenings and appropriate referrals

4) **READY SERVICES – EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION** – Working families need access to dependable, high quality child care, and children benefit from developmentally appropriate programs with a commitment to high quality experiences. (Over 60% of Alabama’s young children have their parents in the workforce). In a variety of settings, children can benefit from programs that are staffed by well-educated, caring teachers who provide a language-rich experience based on children’s developmental levels.

- A. Children Enrolled in EE Program -- # of slots available in quality programs; % of preschoolers (infants through Pre-K) enrolled in high quality programs
- B. Early Education Teachers -- % of ECE teachers with a CDA credential, 2- or 4-year degree in child development and specialized training in ECE; turnover rate of ECE teachers
- C. High Quality Child Care Programs -- % of child care programs nationally accredited or demonstrating high quality through an objective measure (Star rating); % of programs participating in quality enhancement system; % of children attending a Star-rated program
- D. Access to Child Care Subsidies -- % of eligible children under 6 receiving child care subsidy or other financial assistance/scholarships

5) **READY SCHOOLS** – Because schools are accountable for the progress of children once they enter Kindergarten, schools need to support efforts to enhance children’s readiness. The transition into Kindergarten and the first few grades often lay the foundation for success or failure in school. Schools can provide leadership and guidance for a better transition to improve the likelihood of early success, and schools are uniquely situated to share key data about kindergarten readiness.

- A. Class Size – average teacher/child ratio in K-1 classrooms
- B. Language Readiness -- % of children proficient on DIBELS
- C. School Success – 1st grade retention rates; % of children with reading and language proficiency by Grade 3; special education enrollment rates
- D. Transition Teams -- % of schools participating in community transition teams made up of child care, Head Start, kindergarten teachers

6) **READY CHILDREN** – The Five Domains of School Readiness developed through a wealth of research on which there is consensus are: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge. Though difficult to measure, the success of Families, Communities, Services, and Schools in supporting these domains is critical.

- A. Physical Well-Being and Motor Development -- % of children with age-appropriate fine motor skills
- B. Social and Emotional Development -- % of children who often or very often exhibit positive social behaviors when interacting with peers
- C. Approaches to Learning -- % of kindergarten children with moderate to serious difficulty following directions
- D. Language Development -- % of children almost always recognizing the relationships between letters and sounds at kindergarten entry; % of children proficient on the DIBELS
- E. Cognition and General Knowledge -- % of children recognizing basic shapes

Data Sources for Baselines

2000 US Census
2004 Kids Count Data Book
2005 Community Counts, Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham and Region 2020
2005 Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Needs Assessment (Dr. Don Bogie, AUM)
AL Early Intervention System
AL Department of Children's Affairs, Head Start Collaboration, CPC, and School Readiness
AL Department of Human Resources (unpublished CAN data, child care data)
AL Department of Public Health, Center for Health Statistics on line and PRAMS Survey
AL State Department of Education
AL Substance Abuse Indicators (Dept. of Public Health)
AUM Center for Demographic Research
National Association for the Education of Young Children
University of Alabama, Center for Business and Economic Research

Alabama planning initiatives and documents compiled to determine common elements:

1987-88 Governor's Child Day Care Task Force
2000 Early Childhood Agenda for the South, SECA
2001 Early Learning Commission Report
2001 Smart Start Technical Assistance Plan for Alabama
2000-02 University of Alabama Action Agenda for Alabama's Children
2002 Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning Strategic Plan
2003 Child Day Care Advisory Committee Recommendations
2004 Children's Policy Council Needs Assessments
2004 HHS-sponsored planning for early childhood systems
2004 Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Planning (AL Dept. of Public Health)
2004 ACF--Strengthening Families Leadership Forum



Early Childhood Development – An Investment in Alabama’s Future

88% of Alabamians believe that the state should help fund quality and affordable child care and pre-school programs for working families to prepare children for school. – Capital Survey Research Center.

Economic Development:

“Early childhood development programs are rarely portrayed as economic development initiatives, and we think that is a mistake. . .Policymakers must identify the educational investments that yield the highest public returns. Here the literature is clear: Dollars invested in ECD yield extraordinary public returns. The return on investment from early childhood development is extraordinary, resulting in better working public schools, more educated workers and less crime.”-- Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

Better Outcomes:

Rutgers University economist Steven Barnett estimates that “the cost to society of failing to provide at least two years of quality early childhood care and education to low-income children is approximately \$100,000 per child.” And Police Chief George Sweat adds, “We need to start fighting crime in the high chair, not the electric chair.” -- “America’s Child Care Crisis: A Crime Prevention Tragedy,” Fight Crime: Invest in Kids.

“About 82% of all Americans in prison are high school dropouts. It cost about \$20,000* a year to house a prisoner. In comparison, a year of high-quality preschool cost about \$4,800 and has been shown to decrease the rate of arrest during the teenage years by 40%.” -- The Committee For Economic Development, 1991.

(*According to the Montgomery Advertiser June 2003: *The cost for Alabama to house a female prisoner in Louisiana is \$8,310.25 per year per prisoner*).

School Readiness:

Early experiences have a strong, lasting influence on later learning and are essential for healthy brain development. -- “Rethinking the Brain: New Insights Into Early Development”, Shore, 1997.

Schools can expect to save more than \$11,000 per child for children who benefit from high quality early learning experiences because these children are less likely to require special or remedial education. -- National Inst. for Early Education Research, 2002.

While 85% of a child’s brain development occurs by age three, less than 1% of public investments on education and development have occurred by that time in Alabama. -- “Early Learning Left Out,” VOICES for America’s Children and the Child and Family Policy Center, 2004.

Return on Investment – High quality early learning experiences, the ABC program:

- \$ Children in ABC are projected to make about \$143,000 more over their lifetimes than the controls.
- \$ Mothers of ABC children can expect to make about \$133,000 more over their lifetimes.
- \$ School districts can expect to save more than \$11,000 per child because participants are less likely to require special or remedial education.
- \$ Participants were less likely to smoke resulting in health benefits and longer lives for a total of \$164,000.

-- National Institute for Early Education Research, 2002

“The business community supports high-quality early childhood education programs because they lead to improved education results, a world-class work force, a healthier society, and ultimately a stronger economy.”

-- Joseph M. Tucci, the Business Round Table, President and CEO of EMC Corporation

Business Week included early care and education for all children as one of its “25 Ideas For A Changing World”.

“Government agencies and philanthropic organizations should focus on activities that have the greatest long-term social and economic results. Top-quality preschool education fits the bill. *This should become a national priority*”. Newsday, December 2002.

Readiness to Succeed in School and Life -- The first four years of a child’s life will determine the child’s capacity to learn, adaptability in society, and emotional and psychological stability.

- Research shows that at birth all children have the same number of brain cells.
- 85% of the synaptic connections that form the child’s future take place during the first three years of life, and connections not made are lost forever.
- 68% of low-income 4th graders cannot read at proficient level (NAEP, 2000).
- 90% chance that a poor reader at the end of 1st grade will be a poor reader at the end of 4th grade (Juel, 1988).
- a majority of reading problems can be prevented in preschool and the early grades. (NRC, 1998).
- By far the most effective strategy for closing racial and socioeconomic gaps in readiness and achievement is to increase access to high-quality center-based early childhood programs (The Future of Children, 2005).

For more information contact the Alabama Partnership for Children
(334) 271-0304 or 1-866-711-4025 (For Zero to Five) or visit www.SmartStartAlabama.org

Early Learning Resources

2005 Community County, *Measuring Progress in Our Region*, Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham.

Building the Foundation for Bright Futures, National Governor's Association Task Force on School Readiness, 2005, <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/0501TaskForceReadiness.pdf>.

Eager to Learn, Educating our Preschoolers, National Research Council, www.nap.edu.

Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, National Center for Education Statistics, USDE, www.nces.ed.gov/ecles.

Early Learning Left Out, VOICES for America's Children and Child and Family Policy Center, <http://www.voicesforamericaschildren.org/Content/ContentGroups/Publications-Voices/ECE1/ELLO/ELLO.pdf>.

Getting Ready, Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, sponsored by the Packard Foundation, the Kauffman Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, February 2005. www.GettingReady.org.

Good Start, Grow Smart, The Bush Administration's Early Childhood Initiative, to help states and communities improve early education for young children, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/earlychildhood/toc.html>.

Measuring the Regional Economic Importance of Early Care and Education: The Cornell Methodology Guide, Linking Economic Development and Child Care Research Project, www.government.cce.cornell.edu/doc/pdf/methodologyguide.pdf.

Meeting Great Expectations: Integrating Early Education Program Standards in Child Care, Schumacher, Irish, and Lombardi, The Foundation for Child Development Working Paper Series, Center for Law and Social Policy. www.clasp.org.

National Institute for Early Education Research. (2002). *A Benefit-cost analysis of the abecedarian early childhood intervention*. www.nieer.org/resources/research/AbecedarianStudy

No Child Left Behind Policy Brief, Implications for the Early Learning Field, Education Commission of the States, www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/51/82/5182.pdf.

Partnering for Success – Community Approaches to Early Learning, a report on partnerships in low-income communities from the Child Care Action Campaign, Susan Ochshorn.

School Readiness Begins at Birth, VOICES for America's Children, emphasizes including infants and toddlers in school readiness initiatives. www.voicesforamericaschildren.org.

School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps, The Future of Children, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and the Brookings Institution, www.futureofchildren.org.

Smarter Reform: Moving Beyond Single-Program Solutions to an Early Care and Education System, Stoney, Mitchell, and Warner. *Journal of the Community Development Society*, Vol. 37, No. 2, Summer 2006.

Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education (Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect through Early Care and Education), comprehensive information and resources provided by the Doris Duke Foundation and the Center for the Study of Social Policy at www.cssp.org.

Teaching Our Youngest, and ED guide for preschool teachers and child care and family providers (free) 1-877-EDPUBS or online at www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html.

The Economic Promise of Investing in High-Quality Preschool: Using Early Education to Improve Economic Growth and Fiscal Sustainability of States and the Nation, the Center for Economic Development, July 06, www.ced.org.

To Support Early Care and Education Initiatives, Financing Strategy Series, Flynn and Hayes. The Finance Project at www.financeproject.org.