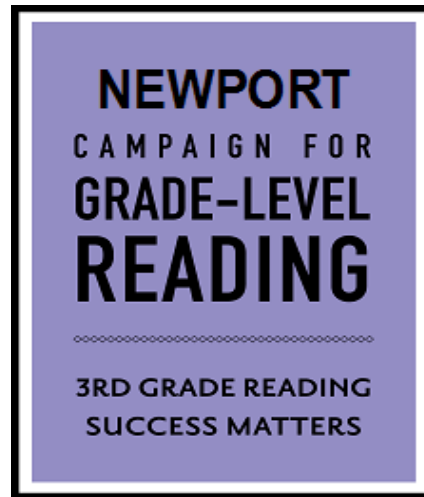


Newport Learn to Read by 3G



School Readiness Action Plan

August 2017

Early Learning and Development Matters

Research shows that a child's brain develops most rapidly during the first five years of life. What happens during this time period is critically important to the development of the brain's architecture and impacts their readiness and success in school. Language development begins in infancy and is intertwined with social-emotional development and exposure to enriching learning opportunities. Language development differences between children from lower- and higher-income families appear in infancy and widen during the toddler and preschool years without intervention. High-quality early learning opportunities and family support programs help to build foundational skills and knowledge in children. High-quality instruction during the early elementary grades (Kindergarten – Grade 3) can build on high-quality early learning opportunities and work to compensate for inadequate early learning opportunities.

Development of the Newport School Readiness Action Plan

In January – June 2017, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT facilitated a small planning group to develop an action plan to improve the school readiness of Newport's children and promote smooth transitions to kindergarten. This plan builds on Newport's Learn to Read by 3G Plan which includes goals to 1) improve school readiness, 2) expand summer learning, 3) reduce chronic absence, and 4) implement in-school strategies for improving grade level reading.

The small group included Kathy McKeon, Elementary Curriculum Coordinator at Newport Public Schools; Karen Ettefagh, Co-Chair of Newport's Thrive by Five Committee and Manager of Maternal and Child Health at Visiting Nurse Services of Newport & Bristol Counties; and Linda Laliberte, Vice President and Director of Head Start at East Bay Community Action Program. Relevant community data was compiled by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and state-level experts were brought in to provide information and advice. State experts included: Allison Comport & Ruth Gallucci, RI Department of Education; Emily Eisenstein & Kristine Campagna, RI Department of Health; Jennifer Kaufman, RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services; Lisa Hildebrand, RI Association for the Education of Young Children/BrightStars; and Sue Washburn, RI Center for Early Learning Professionals.

The draft action plan was shared with the Newport Learn to Read by 3G Steering Committee and Thrive by Five members for feedback. Together these activities shaped the resulting plan that sets the course to improve school readiness and transition to the early grades for Newport children.

Key Data & Infrastructure

Children:

- 173 children in kindergarten in Newport in 2016-2017 (approx. 65% low-income /112 children)
- 54 State Pre-K slots for four/five year olds
- 60+ Head Start slots for children ages three through K entry
- 61 children receiving preschool services through Newport Public Schools (ages 3 to K entry)
- 50+ Early Head Start slots for children from birth up to age three
- 286 children birth through age five participating in the Child Care Assistance Program (centers and family child care)
- 6% of children under age 3 receiving Early Intervention
- 6% of children ages 3 through 5 receiving preschool special education services, below state average (17% of students in K-12 have an IEP)

Early Learning & Development Programs:

Center-Based Programs

- 4 licensed early learning centers in Newport (EBCAP, MLK, Emmanuel Day School, and Tender Care)
- 2 licensed family child care providers
- Newport Public Schools Pell Annex in Middletown with two classrooms (double sessions) primarily serving children with developmental delays and disabilities
- State Pre-K and Head Start/Early Head Start through EBCAP
- Middletown licensed centers serving Newport children with high-needs: EBCAP at Pell Annex, Sandpipers/Child & Family Services, Twice as Nice/YMCA of Newport County, and others

- 100% of licensed Newport programs participating in BrightStars, 50% have a high-quality rating (EBCAP and Emmanuel Day School)

Family Focused Home Visiting Programs

- First Connections short-term home visiting through VNS of Newport & Bristol Counties
- Healthy Families America evidence-based model through EBCAP
- Early Head Start evidence-based model through EBCAP
- Parents as Teachers evidence-based model through EBCAP
- Nurse-Family Partnership evidence-based model through Children's Friend
- Early Intervention (Part C of IDEA) through Easter Seals and Looking Upwards

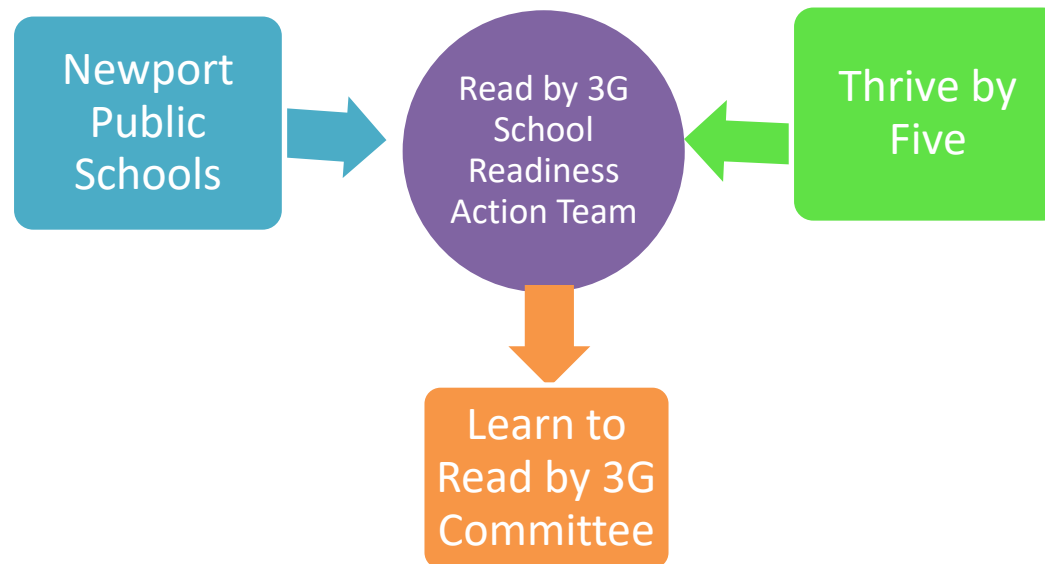
Other Programs/Resources

- Baby Steps through EBCAP: Weekly play & learning group for families with young children
- Newport Public Library: Playgroups and storytime
- Reach Out and Read: Promotes reading with young children
- Even Start through EBCAP: family literacy/GED for parents
- Aquidneck Pediatrics: Health care and developmental screening
- East Bay Family Health Care at EBCAP: Health care and developmental screening
- Health Clinic at U.S. Navy Newport
- Newport Health Equity Zone @ the Women's Resource Center: planning and organizing to improve neighborhood health
- Thrive by Five: Collaborative group with monthly information sharing meetings to promote social-emotional development of young children
- Newport Partnership for Families: Collaborative group working to support children, families, and individuals in Newport

Strategic Goals & Action Steps

Goal 1: Establish & Sustain a Newport School-Readiness and Early Learning Action Team

- Identify a small 3 to 5 person **action team**, including members from the school department and community-based organizations that serve young children, to lead continued planning and activities to improve children's school readiness and successful transition to Pell Elementary School.
- This action team should provide regular updates to both the **Newport Learn to Read by 3G Committee** and **Thrive by Five**.
- Hire/identify a school **district leader to be responsible for school readiness** planning and activities, developing and working with school readiness partner agencies, and building relationships with and helping families with young children.
- Continue to explore ideas and **seek opportunities to take action**. Identify resources to support activities.



Goal 2: Improve Family Outreach/Engagement to Boost Enrollment in High-Quality Programs that Support Learning & Development

- Create **2 resource sheets** for families: 1) highlighting early childhood programs for infants and toddlers (under age 3), including child care, Early Head Start, and home visiting and 2) highlighting early childhood programs for preschoolers (ages 3 to K entry) including child care, Head Start, and State Pre-K with operating hours, enrollment, cost, and quality information.
- Consider sending a **mailing to all Newport babies (at 6 months of age) and preschoolers (at age 3)** from Superintendent with resource sheet on school readiness resources. Idea to include a high-quality book in mailing as a gift?
- Post resource info on the Newport Public Schools website and App (One Newport).
- Post info on Pell PTO Facebook page.
- Provide copies of resource sheets to schools, pediatric practices, Newport Hospital, the Newport library, and the U.S. Navy.
- Use the new outreach staff person employed by the Newport HEZ to develop long-term relationships with families of young children and share resources.
- Continue Pre-K Fair.
- Make sure **pediatric health care providers** for Newport children know about and refer families to high-quality programs that support children's early learning and development, including evidence-based home visiting services, Early Head Start/Head Start, State Pre-K, Early Intervention and preschool special education. Establish a school district contact for pediatric health care providers to help families with high-needs navigate and get connected with appropriate services.
- Make sure pediatric health care providers have a strong relationship with the school department to **ensure children receive developmental screenings** through Child Outreach at ages 3, 4 and 5 and that all children with suspected developmental delays (birth through K entry) are referred to Early Intervention or preschool special education for evaluation and services when eligible. Discourage "watch and wait" practice among professionals and families.
- Offer all Newport nine-month olds not already engaged in Healthy Families, Nurse-Family Partnership, or Early Head Start, the opportunity to enroll in **Parents as Teachers**, an evidence-based school readiness program funded by the state. (work with RI Department of Health).

Goal 3: Strengthen the Quality of Existing Early Learning Programs

- Develop relationships and secure resources to support quality improvement for community- and school-based early childhood programs, with the goal of **supporting programs to achieve a 4 or 5 star in BrightStars**. BrightStars effectively measures quality using research-based standards that are known to improve child outcomes. Programs may need support meeting basic health and safety standards, selecting and implementing curricula, supporting staff to complete college credits and/or degrees, improving teacher-child interactions, organizing their classroom and structuring the day, purchasing needed equipment and materials, and/or making improvements to their facilities. Use state resources for help (BrightStars, Center for Early Learning Professionals, Ready to Learn Providence, Child Care and Early Learning Facilities Fund, TEACH, CCRI, etc.)
- Pay particular attention to **meeting the needs of low-income working families** by supporting quality improvement at programs that are open long hours and programs that serve infants and toddlers (including centers and family child care homes). Provide wrap-around high-quality child care for families enrolled in Head Start, Pre-K, and preschool classrooms operated by the public schools. Ensure there are high-quality summer learning programs for young children when Head Start, State Pre-K, and the public schools are closed.
- **Advocate for state policy reform** to support program quality (e.g. Child Care Assistance Program rates that support delivery of high-quality learning programs, adequate funding for Head Start and Pre-K).
- Provide regular opportunities for Newport programs to have teachers and teaching assistants complete **12 college credits in Early Childhood Education through CCRI's Early Care and Education Training Program**. <https://www.ccri.edu/hmns/RIECETP.html> EBCAP may be able to host classes with staff from other programs. Consider providing stipends to staff to attend courses and/or bonuses or wage increases upon completion of coursework.
- Promote participation in the **Rhode Island T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood workforce development program** for staff to complete Associate's and Bachelor's degrees and receive increased compensation at regular intervals as they make progress toward their degree.
- Host trainings in Newport to improve early childhood learning environments with **on-site coaching and mentoring using observation tools (ECERS, ITERS, FCCERS)**. Baseline observations could be conducted and programs could receive individualized technical assistance to improve environments and interactions.
- Work with the **RI Child Care and Early Learning Facilities** resources to make needed improvements to facilities and/or to identify new facilities for early learning programs. <https://riccelff.org>
- Organize site visits to school district programs that have achieved high-quality BrightStars ratings (e.g. South Kingstown and Westerly).

- Ask RIDE to find a Newport training location for the **RI Early Learning and Development Standards**.
- Investigate and acquire curriculum resources and trainings that could be shared community-wide across early learning programs (e.g. Creative Curriculum, OWL, etc.) serving various age groups.

Goal 4: Increase Developmental Screening & Improve Follow-Up and Access to IDEA Services for Children with Developmental Delays & Mental Health Concerns

- Develop strong relationship with Aquidneck Pediatrics and the EBCAP Health Center to support **routine developmental screening activities at the practices for children under age 3 and connections to Child Outreach for screening children ages 3 – 5**. Make sure the practice knows how to request a Child Outreach screening directly if there are concerns regarding a **child's development**. Requests for screening and evaluations should take place for all children with suspected developmental delays in any category, including social-emotional, language, motor, adaptive, and cognitive skill. All children should receive regular developmental screenings even if a delay is not suspected.
- Reach out to U.S. Navy Health Services to ensure they have support to conduct developmental screenings and know how to connect patients to Early Intervention, Child Outreach and preschool special education services.
- Ask the RI Department of Health to provide data on young children living in Newport and where they receive pediatric health care services so additional practices can be identified for partnerships
- Ensure Newport Child Outreach routinely conducts screenings at all child care and early learning programs in Newport. Collaborate with Middletown Child Outreach to screen children in the region since many Newport children attend programs in Middletown. Offer regular drop-in screening opportunities at convenient locations and times (evening and weekend) and promote widely.
- Ensure all health care practices **refer ALL children under age 3 with red flags to Early Intervention** for further evaluation and potential services. Children with suspected developmental delays in any category, including social-emotional delays, should be referred to Early Intervention. EI provides services to address social-emotional delays along with language, motor, adaptive, and cognitive skill delays.
- Develop a system so that referrals to Early Intervention can be tracked by health care practices. Develop a follow-up process for practices to use to ensure children with suspected delays are referred to EI and receive further evaluation.
- Use Early Intervention brochures, rack cards, and posters in health care practices, child care programs, public schools, community locations to ensure families know about available Early Intervention services and how the program can help improve school readiness by addressing delays early.
- Encourage families to enroll in Early Intervention when they are eligible because of a developmental delay or significant family circumstances. Early Intervention can and does help children catch up with their peers so they do not need long-term special education services. Early Intervention provides services at children's homes, at early learning programs, and in the community.

- **Evaluate ALL children referred through Child Outreach screenings for special education services.** Investigate why so many referred children are not getting an evaluation for IDEA services.
- Explore the feasibility of **adopting RIDE's Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education model.** This model supports the school department to provide preschool special education services at Head Start and other community-programs to children with developmental delays, including social-emotional difficulties. Pilot test in EBCAP Head Start and Pre-K where 20% of preschool children have an IEP. Reduce practice of busing children between community-based programs and the public school for IDEA services.
- Explore expansion of **The Incredible Years** in Newport to more early childhood programs and to the schools.
- Adopt a **community-wide effort to support social-emotional health and positive behavior.** Align approach to PBIS across community programs and the public schools.
- Identify resources to provide **more individualized mental health therapies and supports** to young children and families experiencing toxic stress. Provide supports in natural settings (at school, in early childhood programs, at home). Collaborate with medical homes, schools, early childhood programs, Early Intervention, and preschool special education. Consult with experts on early childhood mental health.

Goal 5: Improve Transition to Kindergarten & Connections Between Pell and Community-Based Early Learning Programs

- Ensure early learning programs in Newport and Middletown know about the **current kindergarten transition programs at Pell** and have information to share with families about K transition.
- Provide basic training/orientation for kindergarten teachers about early learning programs. Is there a handbook for kindergarten teachers that could include information about early learning programs in the area? **Organize site visits** so kindergarten teachers and Pell administrators visit early learning programs serving Newport students and early learning programs are invited to visit Pell.
- **Encourage information sharing between community-based programs and the public schools:** 1) public schools should ask for information about children from families and ECE programs, 2) ECE programs should provide information to families and schools about children, and 3) parents should know about information sharing and support the process. Work with area ECE programs to clarify parent/family consent to share information between early childhood programs and kindergarten teachers. Families could provide consent for sharing information about their child. Families can also bring packets of information from ECE programs about their child and give it to the school district. Information could be shared at kindergarten registration and/or at the start of the school year. Send reminders to parents to bring information with them about their child (portfolios, assessments, teacher comments about child's strengths and challenges, ideas that work with this child, etc.)
- Find out more about **state resources to support kindergarten transition, adopt kindergarten entry assessment tools, and support high-quality kindergarten teaching and learning.**
- Explore adopting Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) for kindergarten entry assessment in consultation with RIDE. EBCAP uses TSG already and could share information with the school districts about children with family consent. There may be other opportunities to build connections across ECE programs and the public schools by using common assessment tools, curricula, professional development, etc.
- Host a **shared training on the RI Early Learning and Development Standards** for both Pell kindergarten teachers and administrators and community ECE teachers and administrators. This will help build relationships and a common understanding of what young children might be expected to know and be able to do at kindergarten entry and how to support the acquisition of early skills and knowledge.

Goal 6: Expand & Align Birth through Grade 3 Language & Literacy Resources

- Organize a **site visit to learn more about the Boston Public Schools Preschool through Grade 2 model** and curriculum resources. Some kindergartens in Rhode Island are adopting the BPS K2 curriculum.
- Explore what **other communities and states** are doing to improve partnerships and implement aligned language and learning curricula and teaching practices from birth through grade 3. Investigate efforts in Boston and Massachusetts as well as efforts in other states (New Jersey, Oregon, etc.).
- **Involve ECE partners in the Newport Public Schools strategic plan.** Make sure there is two-way communication between the schools and community-based partners for planning.
- Consider partnering with programs in Middletown since ECE programs and pediatric practices serve children across town lines.
- Consider using a **collaborative process to identify and adopt aligned Birth – Grade 3 curriculum and professional development** to for Newport Public Schools and ECE partners.
- Work with the Newport Public Library and pediatric practices to promote early talking and reading for young children who may not be enrolled in ECE programs.
- Continue working with Reach out and Read to promote early reading through pediatric health care practices.