Center for the Study of
Educational Policy
Emphasizing Research That Matters
Illinois State University

From Birth to Graduation and Beyond:

Aligning Best Practices in Educational Systems to Improve Learning Outcomes




Profiles of State, Province, and Local P-3 Initiatives

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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For high school and college graduates looking back on their elementary school years, third grade may not stand out as an especially significant or even memorable time. They may be surprised to hear that their ability to read proficiently by that point factored significantly into the fact that they have their high-school diplomas or post-secondary degrees.

In fact, educational leaders, researchers, and policy experts have identified third grade as a pivotal point in a child's education. It's the critical juncture where children build-on the previous years they spent learning to read and start using these capabilities to learn and comprehend the subject material their various classes cover. According to the 2012 "Double Jeopardy" study commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a student who isn't reading at grade level by the third grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than one who's reading capably by that time. That's without considering economic factors that contribute to high-risk populations. For example, impoverished children not reading capably by third grade are 13 times less likely to graduate than their peers who don't struggle with reading or financial hardship, according to the report's author, Donald Hernandez, an advisor to the Foundation for Child Development.

Reading ability is so important that it trumps even socio-economic status as a predictive indicator of academic performance: Students who fail to meet the third-grade reading benchmark comprise 88% of the overall percentage who don't graduate high school, while those who spend at least a year in poverty account for 70% of that segment.

Defining P-3: How to View this Report

Learning continuum reform efforts focus on improving education outcomes through the seamless integration of early instructional and developmental experiences with those of the grade school years, beginning with kindergarten. Depending on their ideologies and scope of work, researchers and education leaders throughout North America refer to learning continuum concepts and initiatives by a variety of terms, including "PreK-3", "P-3", "P-12", "P-20", and other nomenclature.

For the purposes of our research and this report, we define "P-3" as encompassing the birth through third grade timeframe and have standardized on this nomenclature to describe the various initiatives we studied. While "P-3" is often used to describe the integration of education systems encompassing traditional preschool years (children ages 3-4) with the early elementary grades (grade three, approximately age 8) we believe that defining P-3 as including learning that starts at birth best reflects the work of the sites we studied. Because we have designed this report to appeal to a broad audience, we believe that describing learning continuum initiatives using this standard term enhances readability.

Research note: To accurately represent the work of the sites presented in this report, we reference the specific terminology that our case study subjects use to describe their own learning continuum initiatives. In some cases, their individual terminology highlights integration efforts that extend beyond grade three to encompass high school, college, and graduate school. However, for general discussion purposes, we standardized on "P-3" to characterize alignment efforts overall.

This age 8 milestone, however, is just one key marker on the education continuum. Based on a substantial and growing body of research, educators increasingly recognize that the earlier children have access to high-quality learning opportunities, the better they do in school and in life. Historically, preschool programs have focused on starting the learning process at age 3 or 4, but increasingly, experts believe experiences should begin at birth to optimize the rapid brain development that occurs between ages 0-5 by combining it with rich, positive interactions with early caregivers. High-quality learning that starts very early in life — particularly when combined with community support and intervention services that mitigate socio-economic and developmental disparities — can significantly improve a preschooler's readiness to enter elementary school. This contributes to better academic performance and stability throughout the child's educational years and to success later in life.

However, while early-learning opportunities are extremely important, gains in early math and reading that children make in pre-kindergarten programs can "fade out" once they reach elementary school. Extensive research into the long-running Head Start program, for example, shows that academic advances made by children enrolled in the federal program typically dissipate when they enter elementary school. While

this fade-out can be attributed in part to low-quality elementary school programs, which are more common in impoverished areas with insufficient resources and less-qualified teachers, there's another contributing factor: In the vast majority of school districts, early-learning programs and K-12 school systems operate independently of each other, have different governance and funding structures, and don't share information on curriculum, assessments, practices, and individual child development in any formal way, if at all.

The failure to maintain preschool gains that help students meet critical milestones in elementary school — and growing awareness of the role these elements play in the long-term success of students — has catalyzed a tectonic shift in thinking about the education system structure in the U.S. and Canada. Concern over the inability to sustain early-childhood investments has driven federal, state, and local reform over the last 10-plus years focused on transitioning childhood education systems to a "P-3" model. P-3 concepts emphasize aligning standards, curriculum, and assessment best practices across pre-kindergarten (PreK) and the elementary school years to create a seamless learning continuum that sustains and builds on early-childhood gains. Though some define the "PreK" component of P-3 as encompassing traditional preschool programs targeting children ages 3-4, a growing number of experts are convinced that education will see the best returns from adopting a model that encompasses learning starting at birth, and further, extends beyond the third grade to create a birth-through-grade 12 (P-12) or even a P-20 continuum.

ERIKSON INSTITUTE NEW SCHOOLS PROJECT

When Chicago Public Schools closed the Daniel Hale Williams Elementary School in 2002 due to continued poor performance, the Erikson Institute, a graduate school focused on child development, decided to take action. The Institute, whose charter is improving education and care for children ages 0-8, worked with stakeholders to identify and address the school's shortfalls, assisted in hiring and training key staff members, and ultimately helped transform the school to the point where it was able to successfully reopen. Facilitators from the Institute continue to provide professional development assistance to the school's administrators and educators, through classroom observations, coaching, co-teaching partnerships, and other activities.

Based on this positive outcome, Erikson launched its New Schools Project in 2005 so it could take the practices that helped transform Williams and apply them to other low-performing charter and traditional schools in the Chicago area. The New Schools initiative provides services to help schools execute on Erikson's core belief: Quality early-childhood learning experiences — facilitated by educators who understand child development to ensure gains carry-over to elementary school — can significantly improve students' success throughout their education and beyond.

To that end, New Schools focuses on helping schools adopt a P-3 model, emphasizing such concepts as learning continuity; consistent, aligned teaching, curriculum, and assessment best practices across classrooms and grade levels; and program flexibility, so educators can address the individual child's needs.

A critical component of Erikson's P-3 framework is systemic leadership training through "professional learning communities," These address the leadership issues that hinder many P-3 efforts by ensuring that principals, teachers, and other stakeholders understand learning continuum advantages, and can use their knowledge to gain widespread buy-in and educate others in best practices. New Schools consultants work with administrators, teachers, community services providers, and other community groups in a diverse range of public charter and traditional schools throughout the Chicago area. They strive to not only improve the quality of classroom instruction, but the level of engagement of young children in the learning experience.

In the 2010-2011 academic year, Erikson partnered with six schools on New Schools Project efforts. The Project's leaders also provided support to an Academy of Urban School Leadership (AUSL) Early Childhood Task Force, which developed recommendations for integrating elements of P-3 across 14 AUSL turn-around schools.

For more, see:
http://www.erikson.edu/newschools.aspx?utm_source=newschools&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=newschools_newschools

UEI AND THE OUNCE PARTNER ON BIRTH TO COLLEGE INITIATIVE

In 2009, the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI) and the Ounce of Prevention Fund (the Ounce) joined forces to build a new public education model that will create an integrated learning continuum extending from a child's birth through his or her college years. Funded by the McCormick Foundation, W.K Kellogg Foundation, and Foundation for Child Development, the partners will collaboratively create and align instructional best practices, as well as academic and social supports, to develop a seamless learning model for children and their families.

A birth-to-grade-three initiative is the first step in developing the larger program. As part of the initiative, according to Ounce-funded Educare, the partners are working to change the traditional teacher mindset so that infant caregivers see themselves as instrumental to preparing children to be accountable to educators throughout their college years.

UEI designed a three-phase plan for its partnership with Educare. First, the Business Strategy Team created vision and mission statements, outlined core values, and identified partnership priorities. Next on the agenda is a research and development phase during which the partners will develop, implement, evaluate, and refine a model that can be sustained and adapted over time. The model will focus on best practices in aligning standards, curriculum, instruction, assessments, and professional development, and academic and social supports.

Third, the partners are working to integrate the systems that support their 0-8 model. This includes coordinating admission policies: When a three-year-old is admitted to the Educare program, he or she is guaranteed enrollment in a University of Chicago charter school. This essentially creates a dual-enrollment program where parents have access to parenting services through Educare while the child is in that program, as well as those offered by the charter school. Operating within a 'parents as asset' rather than a 'parents as deficit' framework, this strategy will help the partners develop a coordinated, seamless system of supports for families and children ages 0-8.

To facilitate this effort at the elementary school level, UEI restructured its current assistant principal positions to create Directors of Family and Community Engagement. Assistant principals, who are primarily involved with student discipline, will now be responsible for leveraging family assets to serve the academic and social development of children within the schools.

For more, see http://uei.uchicago.edu/news/article/case-study-working-together-build-birth-college-approach-public-education

Influential stakeholders from both the public and private sectors are on board. The National Association of Elementary School Principals, American Federation of Teachers, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and U.S. Department of Education all formally recognize P-3, and the latter two have already designed their policy and program supports around the birth-to-8 age (0-8) span. Private foundations, including the McCormick Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Anne E. Casey Foundation, and Foundation for Child Development, are providing funding and resources to support research and state and local P-3 implementation initiatives.

Seamless P-3: Individual, Community, and Fiscal Benefits

Sustained learning continuum programs have the potential to be an educational game-changer. There's both empirical and anecdotal evidence linking P-3 programs with student success during their school years and beyond, and the inclusion of learning opportunities that start at birth — including play-based learning, motor skills development, and socialization activities — will only increase positive results. Moreover, with early-childhood programs providing key resources for children ages 3-5 as part of strengthening the P-3 foundation, educators prime the pump during the period when children develop critical problem-solving, emotional, and social skills, teaching them to respond to challenges in appropriate ways.

Integrated and aligned P-3 programs, according to research findings, show quantifiable returns on investment for not just individual students, but the larger school district and entire communities. Investments in these programs have been shown to translate to both short-term benefits and improved long-term outcomes. Short-term benefits seen in elementary schools include higher achievement test scores, reduced need for special education services, and fewer students forced to repeat a grade. In fact, children who aren't involved in any P-3 programs are three times more likely to be held back or placed in special education classes than children who have had the benefit of P-3 opportunities.

Quality P-3 programs deliver long-term educational, social, and financial advantages as well. On the education front, children who have access to such programs enjoy higher high-school graduation rates, are more likely to attend college, and

are more likely to earn a college degree. From a socio-economic standpoint, research shows that kids educated in school systems that have adopted P-3 best practices have more-stable employment histories and lower incarceration rates than those who don't have the same opportunities.

As for the fiscal benefits of P-3 programs, the closely tracked Perry Preschool initiative, Abecedarian Project, and Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPCs) showed an average economic return of $6.11 for every $1 invested because of reduced need for special education services in later grade levels and lower rates of criminal activity by young adults. Moreover, a study analyzing long-term outcomes for children who attended Chicago's P-3 CPCs showed a societal return of $8.24 for every $1 invested — an 18% annual return — due to higher earnings, increased tax revenues, and fewer funds funneled into the criminal justice system.

P-3 CONTINUUM ADVANTAGES

Short-term benefits:

- Higher achievement test scores
- Reduced need for special education services
- Fewer children forced to repeat a grade

Improved long-term outcomes:

- Higher high-school completion rates
- Increased likelihood of attending college
- Increased likelihood of earning a college degree
- Improved stable employment history
- Reduced incarceration rates

Fiscal ramifications:

- Short-term youth impact: A $6.11 return on every $1 invested in P-3 due to lower special-education costs and truancy
- Long-term economic benefits: A $8.24 return for every $1 invested in P-3 due to higher earnings, increased tax revenues, and lower criminal justice system expenditures

Consider the macro-level ramifications of successfully developing an aligned, sustainable P-3 learning continuum that integrates wrap-around services. Experts believe high-quality P-3 programs coupled with comprehensive community-based services turn out better-educated graduates who are more likely to go on to earn their college degrees and contribute to creating thriving communities. These communities, in turn, are able to offer their citizens better employment opportunities, resources for launching entrepreneurial ventures, improved public safety services, cultural and recreational programs, and other resources that attract new businesses, skilled workers, and financial investment.

Getting to P-3: What's Required

While various state and local initiatives in the U.S. and Canada are seeing some promising results from P-3 efforts, they're largely still in the implementation phase. The ground they're breaking demands they continually assess and reassess programs, practices, and progress, adjust their strategies based on data analysis, and work to gather the evidence they need to make persuasive cases to secure consistent funding. A number of elements have to be in place — and a number of challenges overcome — to achieve the program sustainability that eluded earlier P-3 efforts.

A legitimate prototype for P-3 sustainability might look something like this: Government leaders would support and fund the kind of

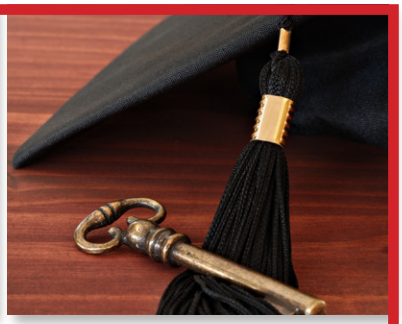
top-down initiatives that are not only positioned to secure committed buy-in from educators, services providers, and community leaders, but also able to incorporate innovative practices adopted by districts. This kind of two-way, "push-up/push-down" prototype could significantly advance efforts while uniting and mobilizing stakeholders.

Realistically, however, P-3's nascence constrains early adopters at both ends of the leadership spectrum in efforts to build broad consensus, particularly in cases where systems are highly decentralized and accustomed to autonomy. The upshot: While state and local P-3 proponents continue to work to gain across-the-board buy-in and commitment from stakeholders, they're not hesitating to put in place the building blocks of integrated P-3 systems and services at all levels so they can improve the lives of the children and communities they serve.

Research has identified several program and practice features that combine to create sustainable P-3 programs, including:

- Smooth transitions — through continuity enabled by consistent learning opportunities — to reduce the negative effects of mobility.
- Aligned standards, curriculum, and assessment best practices across grade and development levels so children benefit from a consistent, holistic learning experience.
- Comprehensive, integrated family support services that promote positive family behavior and build social capital.
- Common definitions of student readiness and proficiency and shared assessments as learning progresses.
- Communication, coordination, and knowledge-sharing among caregivers, educators, and families.
- Structural features — supported by leadership, coordination, and evidenced-based practices — that increase intensity, length, and quality of programs.
- Push-down of policies and practices from K-12 systems that make sense for early-learning communities to adopt, and push-up of policies and practices from early-learning programs for K-12 programs to adopt.





PROJECT OVERVIEW

Established in 1960, the Center for the Study of Education Policy conducts applied research and performs public service related to current and emerging policy issues affecting the entire education continuum — from birth to college graduation and beyond. The Center brings research findings to school administrators, governmental leaders, and higher-education policymakers in Illinois and across the country. Renowned for its work in education finance, it also excels in early learning to K-12 transitions, education leadership development, school improvement programs, higher-education finance, and organizational partnerships.

Located at Illinois State University and housed within the College of Education, Center initiatives support the University's goals of serving the citizens of the state and beyond. Central to the Center's mission is the intersection of research and practice, demonstrated through its publications (Grapevine, Planning and Changing Journal, and Illinois State Education Law and Policy Journal), conferences, and service to education institutions, professional organizations, and government.

As a result of work on the LINC (Leadership to Integrate the Learning Continuum) project, the Center discovered several collaborative efforts engaged in building an educational learning continuum. Based on these discoveries, researchers developed a study to examine educational collaborations at the state, province, and county levels to describe the effective policies and practices that stakeholders have adopted to create comprehensive learning-continuum systems. For this report, the Center chose sites in Hawaii, Pennsylvania, and Ontario, Canada that have shown early success in state- and local-level education alignment initiatives.

Study goals:

- Identify the challenges associated with creating and fostering an aligned P-12 system
- Identify effective policies and practices used by leaders at all levels to create a system of aligned P-3-and-beyond programs and schools
- Define the role of leaders in facilitating and sustaining alignment
- Develop policy and practice recommendations for policymakers and practitioners
- Explore interplay between state and local entities to identify how state policies can help support local practices

In 2011, Center researchers conducted in-person interviews with primary partners in P-3 initiatives at both the state/province and local levels. Partners included program coordinators, teachers, school leaders, state education agency representatives, advisors to state agency directors, and members of community-based organizations. In addition to interviews, researchers also used secondary data available on web sites, in newspapers, and from other electronic print sources, as well as documents received during site visits, including data reports, annual reports, external evaluations, and logic models.

For the purposes of this report, the Center defines P-3 as the time span covering birth through grade three. The case studies in this report describe various leadership approaches, structures, policies, practices, and challenges that characterize efforts to align and integrate P-3 education systems and services as of 2011.

REPORT SPOTLIGHT: P-3 INITIATIVES IN U.S. AND CANADA

This report focuses on the efforts of Hawaii, Pennsylvania, and Ontario, Canada to align early-learning and K-3 education systems that integrate quality wrap-around services to benefit children and families. The following case studies detail various leadership strategies, structures, policies, and practices that characterize efforts to integrate systems and services as of 2011. While the sites studied are still in the implementation stage and have their own approaches, they share some common practices that can inform P-3 efforts in other regions. Promising P-3 alignment and coordination accomplishments at sites studied include:

- **Comprehensive early education and improved access to quality 0-5 services.** Every site emphasizes comprehensive early-education services for children age 0-5 to prepare them for the transition to elementary school and improved access to quality health, social, and other community-based services. They all intend to extend comprehensive services to the elementary school level.

- **Partnerships with families.** Recognizing that families play a critical role in their children's success, sites encourage parents and other family members to become part of the solution. Ontario matches families with a range of community resources, while Hawaii's culture recognizes parents as a child's 'first teacher' and is working to incorporate this and other cultural concepts in their education practices. Sites in Ontario and Hawaii offer early-childhood programs for both children and parents. Pennsylvania's Pottstown district provides full-time family engagement services through a family center that hosts social networking events and provides workshops and classroom activities for parents to learn about their child's development.

- **Cross-sector collaboration for data-sharing.** Pennsylvania is working to merge its Early Learning Network with its K-12 data infrastructure. In Ontario, the Halton Our Kids Network (OKN) has developed a coordinated, data-driven model for planning and delivering services. Program partners use a report card to assess joint ownership and accountability and measure performance against metrics. It also serves as a tool for community-wide discussion and monitoring the progress of children ages 0-18.

- **Joint professional development.** At the Nanakuli-Wai'anae (N-W) site in Hawaii, early-childhood and elementary school teachers work together to align their curriculum and instruction practices and share data on the students they have in common, enabling them to align learning opportunities that ease the transition to early elementary grades. In Ontario's Halton Region, early-childhood and full-day kindergarten teachers take part in joint-planning sessions and training opportunities provided through the school boards and the regional government child-care system manager.

- **Workforce development.** Pennsylvania has adopted a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for its early-childhood educators and is working to improve training and professional development programs targeting this sector. The state offers a new PreK-4 certification, which will replace the older Early Childhood Education N-3 (ECE/N-3) certification in August 2013. To support its full-day kindergarten program for children ages 4-5, Ontario has implemented a co-teaching approach, in which kindergarten teachers are partnered with early-childhood educators so the two can work together in classrooms to align the paradigms of their respective age groups. For its part, Hawaii is driving workforce development both from the top-down, through a P-3 master's degree program, and from the bottom-up, through local-level programs that provide tuition, books, and social support services to people who want to become early childhood and elementary school teachers in their communities.

Though some early P-3 efforts across North America have not proven sustainable due to various political, ideological, and economic issues, the promise remains. Stakeholders leading P-3 initiatives in these case studies understand that they'll continue to face complex challenges as they move to create seamless learning continuum models, but they've made progress on several fronts and have in place elements considered hallmarks of P-3 alignment and integration.

Case Study: Hawaii

Hawaii took its first steps to address educational alignment soon after a 2001 study revealed that many children in the state weren't prepared to enter kindergarten. The state established a task force comprising a spectrum of stakeholders, who developed standards, assessments, and tools to help districts prepare children to transition to elementary school. In 2002, it created the Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education (Hawaii P-20), a program designed to strengthen the education pipeline encompassing early childhood through higher education. A key Hawaii P-20 initiative was the roll-out of a state-level P-3 program, starting with pilot programs in Farrington and Nanakuli-Wai'anae funded primarily by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Important programs and accomplishments in Hawaii's educational alignment efforts include:

• **Improved early-childhood opportunities through the Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA).** Established in 1997, the GBA is an intermediary organization funded by private groups to support initiatives that focus on high-quality early-childhood education.

• **Kindergarten readiness for children and families through SPARK-HI.** In 2002, The Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE) was awarded a SPARK-HI (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to help communities develop and implement strategies to ready children and families for kindergarten.

• **Kindergarten-readiness standards through the School Readiness Task Force.** The state's response to a 2001 study that revealed children were entering the public school system with vastly different levels of readiness, the task force was established to develop standards and guidelines to help educators and communities better prepare children for kindergarten. Task force members include representatives from the legislature, state education and health and human services departments, public and private education agencies, early-childhood service providers, Head Start, INPEACE, and the University of Hawaii.

• **Hawaii State Preschool Content Standards, Family/Community Guidelines, Transition Toolkit, and Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (HSSRA).** Developed by the School Readiness Task Force and SPARK-HI stakeholders, these products were first tested in implementation-phase pilots in select communities in 2004, and then deployed state-wide.

• **Statewide early-learning system initiatives through the Early Learning Council (ELC).** In 2008, the GBA and the CEO of INPEACE advocated for the passage of the Act 14 First Special Session 2008 legislation, which established the ELC to work on developing policies for implementing Keiki First Steps, a statewide early-learning system. Though funding and governance challenges prevented this system from successfully getting off the ground, ELC member groups and other organizations are working together on new initiatives to create a sustainable, statewide early-learning system.

• **Hawaii Early Learning and Development Standards (HELDS).** Under development beginning in 2011, HELDS will align with the Hawaii State Preschool Content Standards and Common Core State Standards.

• **Kindergarten-entry assessments.** Since deploying the HSSRA, which is used to assess students in preschool classrooms collectively, the state has begun to pilot kindergarten-entry assessments that assess individual students.

• **Early-learning and K-3 alignment through P-3 program.** Hawaii started piloting its state-level P-3 program in schools in the Farrington and Nanakuli-Wai'anae complex areas in 2009, and has since expanded this work to three additional demonstration sites: the Windward District on the island of O'ahu and the Honoka'a Complex on the island of Hawai'i, both added in 2010, and Ka'ū-Kea'au-Pāhoa Complex on the island of Hawai'i, added in 2011.

• **Extended educational alignment through Hawaii P-20.** The Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education (Hawaii P-20) focuses on strengthening the state's education pipeline all the way from early childhood through higher education.

Education in Perspective

Hawaii has a number of unique structural, fiscal, and cultural characteristics that differentiate its education systems from those of other states. These present both alignment challenges as well as unique opportunities to provide quality learning programs for children throughout the state.

First, it has a centralized education system, with one school district — the Hawaii State Department of Education (DOE) — and one state superintendent. The DOE oversees 288 public schools, 13,000 teachers, and approximately 178,000 students. At the local level, the school system is organized in complexes, which function like local school districts in other states. Each complex has one high school, with feeder middle and elementary schools. Complexes are combined to create clusters called "Complex Areas," each of which has its own superintendent, similar to district superintendents in other states.

Second, Hawaii's controversial history continues to impact its educational system. When the island nation was colonized, the colonists brought their own culture, values, and traditions to largely replace those of the native peoples. This history continues to create tensions between native and Western populations, as native Hawaiians seek to reclaim their traditions by pushing for a more culturally based education system that integrates their traditional learning practices and content.

Third, Hawaii doesn't have any state-funded preschool programs, though it does have federally funded Head Start programs. For the most part, preschools are funded through private entities, tuition fees, and federal child-care subsidies. The state's DOE, unlike many states, doesn't have an early childhood division. However, the agency has an early-childhood specialist on staff, and the state has been striving to improve preschool program access and quality since the late 1990s when it created the GBA. Private foundations, including the Samuel N. & Mary Castle Foundation and Kamehameha Schools, continue to provide operating funds and grants to support initiatives to improve access to high-quality early-childhood education.

Finally, compared to national averages, Hawaii has a large non-Caucasian population that presents educators with both challenges and intriguing opportunities on the cultural front. According to the 2010 Census, 38.6% of residents are of Asian descent, compared to the national average of 4.8%, while 10% are of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander descent, relative to the national average of 0.2%. Meanwhile, 23.6% stated they were of two or more races, compared to a 2.9% national average, and 8.9% indicated they have Hispanic or Latino origins. Among other issues, this diversity creates language considerations for education policymakers working to develop programs that respect the cultural make-up

of the state's residents and their children. Among children five years or older, almost 22% speak only Asian or Pacific Islander languages in their homes, while 74.5% speak only English at home.

Comprehensive Early Education and Access to Quality 0-5 Services

The results of a kindergarten-readiness study conducted in 2001 catalyzed policymakers and education practitioners across the state to put school-readiness initiatives high on their agenda. In response, the Interdepartmental Council on Children and Families (IDC) established the School Readiness Task Force, facilitated by the GBA, an intermediary organization focused exclusively on the development and care of young children.

Recognizing the need for multi-stakeholder involvement, IDC staffed the task force with representatives from the state legislature, human services agencies, public and private education agencies, Head Start, INPEACE, and the University of Hawaii. In the first phase of its work, the task force developed several key products: Hawaii State Preschool Content Standards, Family/Community Guidelines, Transition Toolkit, and Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment. It piloted tests of this packaged content in select communities in 2004, followed by state-wide deployment.

Partnering with the task force to produce these readiness tools were leaders from INPEACE's SPARK-HI, a local-level initiative that enables individual communities to develop strategies that bolster children and family kindergarten-readiness. The Kellogg Foundation grant that funded SPARK-HI requires that award recipients focus on achieving specific objectives, including: strengthening connections between children, families, early-childhood providers, and schools; improving the quality of early-learning programs; and developing community services for young children and their families.

> "The state's role is to set the roadmap for early childhood and our public schools and determine ways we can join initiatives funded by both private and public sources."
>
> *Ronn Nozoe*
> *Hawaii Department of Education*

Findings from the 2011 HSSRA highlight the continuing importance of school-readiness work. According to assessment findings, approximately 40% of children entering kindergarten have little to no preschool experience; 40% do not possess habits and attitudes that facilitate learning; and 25% do not have the necessary literacy and math skills. Moreover, 40% do not exhibit the behaviors and skills needed to be successful in school settings, and nearly 50% do not have the social-emotional skills needed to regulate their behavior and interact with teachers and their peers.

Hawaii took its first steps to improve child-readiness through seamless learning in 2002, when it established its Hawaii P-20. Overseen by the Hawaii State DOE, the University of Hawaii, and the state's Executive Office of Early Learning established in 2012, the program focuses on strengthening the state's education pipeline all the way from early childhood through higher education.

Hawaii P-20 is implementing a P-3 initiative called "Capturing the Momentum: Hawaii P-3," a state-level effort funded primarily by the Kellogg Foundation. In line with Hawaii P-20's objectives, the primary goal of this project is to ensure all children are reading at grade level by third grade.

"The state's role is to set the roadmap for early childhood and our public schools and determine ways we can join initiatives funded by both private and public sources," said Ronn Nozoe, Deputy Superintendent, Hawaii Department of Education, who formerly served as a Complex Superintendent at a P-3 demonstration site.

The P-3 initiative seeks to build-on SPARK-HI efforts to increase children's access to high-quality early-learning programs. Because there's no state funding for these programs, mandated state-level program standards for quality don't exist. To address this, leaders have primarily relied

on the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation to validate early-childhood programs. However, in 2010, Hawaii's DHS-funded Quality Childcare Program (QCP) began work to develop a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for licensed child-care centers in the state, and is piloting the voluntary system at select sites. Various entities are campaigning for the state DOE to officially adopt the QRIS, but because Hawaii is committed to integrating native culture in its educational programs, some question how the QRIS can be implemented in a way that upholds cultural traditions.

In 2009, Hawaii designed a P-3 framework and after issuing an RFP for demonstration sites, selected Farrington and Nanakuli-Wai'anae (N-W) as the first two complexes to receive grants to launch P-3 programs. Three additional demonstration sites have since been selected: the Honoka'a and Windward complexes, both added in 2010, and the Ka'ū-Kea'au-Pāhoa complex, added in 2011.

The P-3 HI framework outlines seven key areas and their corresponding objectives:

- **Literacy leadership:** Administrators provide strategic vision and leadership for literacy instruction.
- **Standards, curriculum, and assessment:** Components are aligned to ensure seamless transitions.
- **Instruction:** Quality classroom instruction is developmentally appropriate and grounded in research-based practices.
- **Teacher professional development:** Educators are trained in research-based and developmentally appropriate practices.
- **Comprehensive early education and access to 0-5 services:** Schools serve as a community-based hub to provide resources and referrals to comprehensive services, and more young children participate in effective early-learning experiences.
- **Family and school partnerships:** Families and educators partner to support children's learning.
- **Data:** Student-level enrollment and assessment data is used to improve curriculum.

For this research report, we visited the N-W and Farrington Complex Areas. The N-W program, previously a SPARK site, is led by INPEACE and the DOE'S N-W Complex Area superintendent, with help from partners that include the Keiki O Ka'Aina Family Learning Centers, Head Start, DOE complex leaders, and N-W elementary schools. The Farrington program is led by an early childhood specialist from Hawaii's DOE in partnership with KCAA Preschools of Hawaii, Parents and Children Together (PACT), Honolulu Community Action Program (HCAP), and Farrington elementary schools.

To move toward standardized assessments that bridge PreK and K-12, the sites are implementing the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), an observation tool whose usage spans from early childhood through high school. CLASS gives observers insight into the quality of teacher-child interactions and available learning opportunities. As such, it's considered a key lever in efforts to improve quality across early-childhood programs and the early elementary grades.

Early-childhood providers at the Farrington and N-W complexes have adopted the CLASS tool. However, because some of Hawaii's P-3 activities are voluntary, not all elementary school principals in the complexes are participating in CLASS activities, instead electing to continue using the common assessment tool they'd previously adopted. Proponents continue efforts to encourage principals to adopt CLASS to leverage the valuable qualitative data it produces.

Both sites continue to gauge student kindergarten-readiness using the HSSRA. Kindergarten teachers collectively assess children in their classrooms when they enter kindergarten, and after they complete all assessments, they aggregate the data from all classrooms so state officials can calculate the percentage of children considered ready. This information is shared with the school community for continuing educational improvements and is available to the public. To review Hawaii's HSSRA, click: http://arch.k12.hi.us/school/hssra/hssra.html.

> "One mistake we've made is not paying enough respect to the state's indigenous population. Hawaiians are proud of who they are and we need to capitalize on that to guide our education programs."
>
> *Alfred Castle*
> *Samuel N. & Mary Castle Foundation*

Partnerships with Families

Over the last few decades, Hawaii has made a concerted effort to integrate the Hawaiian culture into its educational programs. In the early years of Hawaii's colonization, missionaries educated Hawaiian children according to Western cultural values, norms, and customs, which often contradicted Hawaiian cultural norms. For instance, Westerners value individual effort while native Hawaiians value group learning. Therefore, Hawaiian children attempting to solve problems together rather than individually have often been accused of cheating. Further, Native Hawaiian culture has historically operated on the belief that families function as children's first teachers. To accommodate this mindset, P-3 HI encourages parents and other caregivers to take part in early-childhood classroom learning.

One initiative designed to support this cultural norm is the INPEACE-sponsored Keiki Steps, a 0-5 program that requires the caregiver and child to participate in learning activities together. In Keiki Steps programs, the classroom is divided into centers in the mode of high-quality early-learning models, is staffed by early-childhood professionals, and runs for three hours per day, four days a week, with the fifth day dedicated to parent education classes or field trips. Children take part in early literacy and math exercises, language development in both English and Hawaiian, recreational activities, and lessons geared toward social and emotional development. Immersing both parents and children in such programs not only offers children valuable, consistent learning opportunities, but gives parents a chance to observe how their kids learn so they can continue learning activities at home.

Keiki Steps further seeks to integrate Hawaiian culture by treating the outdoors as a natural extension of the classroom. At one complex, a plot has been cultivated with indigenous Hawaiian flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Children hear traditional Hawaiian stories and songs in the Hawaiian language, and learn the role indigenous plants played in sustaining native peoples. Connection to the land is a cultural value that's been passed down through the generations — a value that outdoor classrooms strive to perpetuate.

"A real strength in Hawaii's demonstration work is its work to build upon Hawaiian epistemology for preschool learning," said Alfred Castle, executive director of the Samuel N. & Mary Castle Foundation, which provides funding and other resources to support the state's education initiatives. "One mistake we've made is not paying enough respect to the state's indigenous population. Hawaiians are proud of who they are and we need to capitalize on that to guide our education programs."

To improve kindergarten-specific preparation, INPEACE also sponsors Keiki Steps to Kindergarten (KSTK), a three-week program for children slated to enter kindergarten in the fall. Funded by Kamehameha Schools, the program offers children with little or no preschool experience the chance to attend classes led by kindergarten teachers to learn classroom routines, interact with other children, and participate in group activities. It also provides activities for parents to help them feel comfortable in school settings and learn how to replicate learning opportunities for their children at home.

Since 2005, nearly 4,400 students have attended KSTK programs, with around 680 participating in 2012. Students take part in morning gatherings, group activities, outdoor play, and tours of the school building and grounds, cafeteria, and library. The program also offers weekly parent activities, including reading and hands-on activity in the classroom, and formal workshops separate from children's activities. INPEACE's assessments of children's and parents' knowledge prior to entering the program and after completing it reveal that children are

better able to follow classroom rules and routines, better appreciate books, readily participate in group activities, and experience less separation anxiety. The majority of parents say the program makes them more comfortable in school settings, appreciate their role in their child's learning, and understand what's expected of children entering kindergarten.

Demonstration sites have implemented other family-engagement initiatives as well. In the Farrington Complex, the Linapuni Elementary School, located in a public housing project in Honolulu, houses a preschool program. The majority of the school's preschool and elementary school students come from the islands of Micronesia and Samoa, with 99% qualifying for free or reduced-cost lunch programs. A requirement for participation in Linapuni's preschool program is that parents stay with their child for 30 minutes upon arriving at school in the morning so they can take part in a joint-learning activity.

"Our strategy is not only to help parents understand how to work with their child in learning activities, but to integrate them into the school system," said Diane Young, a state DOE Educational Specialist for Early Childhood and Kindergarten, whose office is located at the site. "We want families to feel welcome, not fearful of the school system. A key piece of our alignment work is to ensure school officials build relationships with parents so they'll trust us and our recommendations."

Professional Development

A key tenet of Hawaii's P-3 initiative is improved teacher quality through professional development opportunities. Through its funding, the program offers teachers tuition assistance to earn associate and bachelor degrees in early-childhood education. In addition, N-W offers a program to help parents who want to become early-childhood teachers earn their Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials. In the Farrington complex, KCAA Preschools of Hawaii is building a new professional development center that will offer workshops that allow early-childhood teachers to improve their skills. The facility will house an early-childhood classroom so teachers can observe high-quality, developmentally appropriate teaching practices. The center, funded primarily by the Castle Foundation and other Hawaii family foundations, will actively participate in research projects in conjunction with Honolulu-based Chaminade University.

To embed a P-3 mindset in the education workforce, the state has created a P-3 master's degree program geared toward practicing teachers working at demonstration sites. Through this two-year program offered by the University of Hawaii, teachers receive 100% tuition assistance and take courses on literacy, language development, curriculum, and instructional psychology for diverse populations. If they want to further their education, they can apply this coursework toward a Master of Education degree in curriculum studies with an emphasis on P-3 education.

Cross-Sector Collaboration for Data-Sharing

At the N-W complex, early-childhood and elementary school teachers work together to align their respective curriculum and instruction practices. After kindergarten teachers receive their student rosters for the upcoming year, they work with PreK teachers to share data on students they have in common so they can align learning opportunities that ease the transition to kindergarten. At each school in the complex, teachers collaborate in focus groups addressing topics such as kindergarten registration, transitions, assessments, and curriculum revision.

Groups meet regularly to define goals for their focus area, develop work plans to meet these goals, and monitor their progress. In an N-W group focused on curricular and instructional alignment, for example, we observed teachers working to schedule a few days during each semester for joint observations. Their plan called for elementary teachers to first observe instructors in a few early-childhood classrooms and later, for early-

learning providers to visit elementary school classrooms. Prior to starting observations, the teachers agreed they would reach consensus on the purpose of their visits and detail the criteria they should observe. At follow-up meetings, they would discuss their findings and the implications for curricular and P-3 instructional alignment.

Both N-W and Farrington are also working to formalize ways to share data on children as they move from early-childhood programs into kindergarten. During the year prior to a child's transition to kindergarten, early-childhood teachers compile a portfolio for each child containing data about the child's family and learning and developmental progress, including samples of the child's work. Prior to the start of the new school year, they send the portfolio to the appropriate elementary school, where it's given to the child's kindergarten teacher. With this approach, the kindergarten teacher gets to know the child and their families before the school year begins, as well as develop learning plans that align with the child's progress on the learning and developmental continuum.

This effort has encountered some challenges that highlight the need for widespread buy-in and ongoing communication. At the N-W and Farrington demonstration sites, some kindergarten teachers said they never received the portfolios, even though early-childhood teachers said they forwarded them to the schools as planned. As it turned out, some school staff didn't know what the portfolios were or who was supposed to receive them, nor did principals have the information to guide them, so they stockpiled the portfolios in a storeroom. During our site visit, the N-W focus group was discussing effective ways to educate school staff and principals to ensure portfolios are routed to the appropriate kindergarten teachers and used for their intended purpose.

The Road Ahead

Hawaii's government and education leaders, with strong financial support from private philanthropic organizations, have made strides to strengthen their early-childhood programs and align them with their K-12/K-20 education systems. They've likewise made progress in their attempts to integrate native cultural traditions within their education systems to better serve the entire population of the state. INPEACE-sponsored programs such as Keiki Steps and Keiki Steps to Kindergarten are doing commendable work to address gaps on the early-learning front and integrate families into the learning process. These efforts serve as a model that other states can emulate to increase family engagement.

Though Hawaii doesn't currently fund early-education programs, work to address preschool funding issues is gathering steam. In June 2012, Hawaii's governor Neil Abercrombie signed legislation that created the Executive Office of Early Learning, appropriating $300,000 in start-up funding for the new office. He also appointed a cabinet-level director to head the office as well as establishing the Early Learning Advisory Board (ELAB), compromising member groups from the former ELC as well as other organizations. The Executive Office's director and board are charged with developing an implementation plan for a state-funded preschool program, which they are slated to deliver prior to the start of the 2013 legislative session. Though questions remain as to how the new initiative will be funded, there's overwhelming support for a state-driven early-learning system. According to poll findings released in August 2012, 74% of Hawaii citizens surveyed said they support state-funded preschool programs.

P-3 Defining Features: Hawaii, Farrington and Nanakuli-Wai'anae (N-W) complexes

Learning Continuum Feature	Accomplishments
Transitions: Smooth transitions — based on continuity created by consistent learning opportunities — that reduce negative effects of mobility	• Focus groups complete action-plan steps to foster seamless continuum • Early childhood and elementary teachers observe the other in their own classrooms to understand practices that enable alignment (N-W) • Schools working to ensure child early-learning portfolios follow child to kindergarten
Curriculum and Teaching: Aligned standards, curriculum, and assessment practices across grade and development levels so children benefit from a consistent, holistic learning experience	• Classrooms arranged in centers based on NAEYC practices, with frequent use of outdoor space • Early childhood and elementary teachers work to align curriculum and instruction
Structural Features: Increased intensity, length, and quality of programs through strong leadership, coordination, and data-driven practices	• Professional development through tuition assistance for teachers to earn degrees/credentials • N-W program enables parents to earn EC certificate • P-3 master's degree through University of Hawaii
Family: Integrated family support services that promote changes in family behavior and build social capital	• Native Hawaiian culture prioritizes family engagement in education, so P-3 initiative dovetails well with familial supports and services offered • N-W program model encourages parents and children to visit sites together so children learn skills and parents learn how to extend their child's development • Farrington program model requires parents to engage in joint-learning activity with their child each morning as a condition of preschool enrollment
Assessment: Common definitions of student readiness and proficiency and shared assessments as learning progresses	• Portfolio of child's early-education work is available to kindergarten teachers (N-W) • Sites working to standardize on CLASS observation tool • Initiative continues to use HSSRA to gauge kindergarten-readiness of aggregate groups
Communication: Communication and coordination among caregivers and families to support student learning	• Strong communication between early childhood and elementary teachers on individual students as they transition

Defining Features Excerpted from Grantmakers for Education, 2007; Graves, 2006; Kaurez, 2008; Reynolds, 2006

Case Study: Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's commitment to high-quality early-learning programs was spurred by a statewide study conducted in 2002 that examined the quality of its early-childhood programs. The study, conducted by the state-funded Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force, found that the quality of child-care centers had dropped between the 1980s and 2000. Since then, the state, as well as individual districts, have launched several programs designed to address this problem, while simultaneously developing seamless learning models. One district-level P-3 initiative, Pottstown School District's PEAK (Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness), stands out as a model demonstrating strong leadership, governance, innovative use of funds, collaboration, and stakeholder buy-in. Key programs, tools, and accomplishments that feed Pennsylvania's educational alignment efforts include:

- **Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force.** Established to examine the quality of early-childhood programs across the state, the task force conducted the Pennsylvania Early Childhood Quality Study in 2002. Its final report recommended that the state focus on improving the quality of existing child-care programs before expanding services.

- **Keystone STARS.** A voluntary statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), the Keystone STARS system provides research-driven program standards designed to promote quality early-learning environments.

- **Pre-K Counts.** A state-funded preschool program launched in 2004, Pre-K Counts targets children ages 3-4 who are most at risk of school failure. In 2010-2011, the state provided $82,784,000 in funding to serve 11,359 children.

- **Eight early-development programs in addition to Keystone STARS and Pre-K Counts.** The state's early-development programs provide a range of key support services, including financial assistance for child care, early intervention services for children with disabilities or developmental delays, a nurse-family partnership program targeting first-time expectant mothers, and a parent-child home program that assigns home visitors to assist parents of high-needs children.

- **Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL).** OCDEL was created in 2007 to streamline the policies and rules governing early-learning programs, and reports to both the state Department of Education and the Department of Public Welfare.

Education in Perspective

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 chose to establish a school. Reflecting a widely held belief on local control, Pennsylvania's education system includes 500 school districts with more than 3,000 public schools that serve approximately 1.7 million students annually. A hallmark of Pennsylvania's

educational alignment efforts is its emphasis on scaling P-3 initiatives statewide while simultaneously honoring its long-standing culture of enabling districts to maintain local control.

Recognizing the connection between the experiences in a child's first five years of life and his or her performance in elementary school, Governor Mark Schweiker established the Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force in 2002 to examine the quality of early-learning programs across the state. The same year, the task force conducted the Pennsylvania Early Childhood Quality Study, which found that the quality of child-care centers declined between the 1980s and 2000, with significant decreases in the quality of community-based and family child-care centers. The study also reported a drop-off in the qualifications of early-childhood staff. It recommended that the state focus on "improving the quality of existing child-care programs before considering further expansion of services in the commonwealth."

Based on this recommendation, Pennsylvania piloted a voluntary statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), dubbed Keystone STARS (Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources, and Support). Keystone STARS provides research-driven performance standards for promoting quality early-learning environments. According to the 2010 Keystone STARS program report, more than 4,400 early-learning providers (3,007 center providers, 349 group providers, and 1,064 family providers) participate in the program, with 1,772 early-learning providers (779 center providers, 50 group providers, and 943 family providers) earning level 3 and level 4 ratings, the system's highest program-quality ratings.

Comprehensive Early Education and Access to Quality 0-5 Services

In 2004, Pennsylvania funded Pre-K Counts, a preschool program that targets children ages 3-4 who are most at risk of school failure. Included within this category are children in families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level, whose first language isn't English, or who have special needs. In 2010-2011, the state provided $82,784,000 in funding to serve 11,359 children. Even in a challenging fiscal climate, Pennsylvania has been able to maintain funding for Pre-K Counts.

In addition to Keystone STARS and Pre-K Counts programs, the state supports eight other early-development programs:

- **Child Care Works**, which provides financial assistance for child care for eligible families.
- **Early Intervention**, which provides services to children 0-5 with disabilities or developmental delays.
- **Head Start**, **Early Head Start**, and **Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program**.
- **Nurse Family Partnership Program**, which pays registered nurses to work with low-income, first-time expectant mothers during their pregnancy and through the baby's infancy.
- **Parent Child Home Program**, which assigns a home visitor to assist parents of high-needs children with developmental activities and building positive parent/child relationships.
- **Child Care Certification**, which licenses all child-care centers, whether family-, group-, or community-based.
- **Children's Trust Fund**, which gives resources to community-based organizations to provide support services to pregnant teens, teen parents, and other young parents.
- **Maternal, Infant,** and **Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program**, which provides home-visiting services to approximately 1,850 high-need children over a four-year period.

These programs all fall under the oversight of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). Established in 2007, OCDEL was created to streamline the policies and rules governing early-learning programs. Funded jointly by the state Department of Education and the Department of Public Welfare, OCDEL unifies the administration of services directed at young children and reports directly to both departments. In addition to overseeing these programs, OCDEL is involved with policy initiatives, including the development of a career lattice designed to support educational and professional development opportunities for early-learning practitioners.

Cross-Sector Collaboration for Data-Sharing

Pennsylvania has implemented a coordinated statewide early-learning data system — the Early Learning Network — designed to improve the effectiveness of state early-childhood programs and collect specific information about teachers and children within them. The network's data systems are integrated with the state's public welfare systems and house data at the child, program, and classroom levels. Systems capture data on each child, including family demographics, health information, service referrals, attendance, and enrollment information, as well as outcomes on children ages 0-5 gleaned from various approved observation-based assessments. To analyze program-level quality, data is collected on teacher qualifications, benefits, turnover rates, and program-quality rating scores, while classroom-level data includes staff information and classroom-quality rating scores.

The Early Learning Network has unique identifiers for children and teachers, similar to the identifiers used for teachers in the state's K-12 data collection system, the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS). Although the Early Learning Network isn't currently integrated with the PIMS infrastructure, the state is working to merge the two systems and standardize the format for the unique identifiers assigned to children and teachers. Pennsylvania is also developing a Kindergarten Entry Inventory, which will provide standards-based measures to assess program quality and enable districts to shape future instruction practices and policy decisions. Inventory outcomes will be reported through the PIMS system, providing educators with a comprehensive view of the status of children within 45 days of entering kindergarten.

District Drill-Down: Pottstown

Educational alignment work conducted by the Pottstown School District serves as a model for many elements of P-3 initiatives, illustrating the importance of strong leadership, solid understanding of learning continuum benefits, school and service provider communication and collaboration, and family engagement.

Pottstown is a small urban town located about 35 miles to the northwest of Philadelphia. Like numerous manufacturing-dependent communities across the U.S., Pottstown has lost the majority of its historic manufacturing companies, resulting in a low-income, largely transient population. According to district statistics, 30% of students live at or below the poverty level, while 55% qualify for free or reduced-cost lunches. The median household income is $35,000, compared to the county median of $68,000. Approximately 30% of residents are employed in low-wage service occupations such as sales, clerical, food, and janitorial services.

Early efforts were inspired by Pottstown's assistant superintendent, Dr. Jeffrey Sparagana, who made the connection between quality early-learning programs and later success during his years as a high school football coach, when he observed that successful students were more likely to have attended quality preschool programs than those who were at risk of dropping out. In his doctoral studies, he focused on researching the effects that early-childhood programs had on school readiness in children who attended the Pottstown School District's PreK program, as well as Head Start and community child-care programs. His research showed that of the three sample groups, the school district PreK children performed the best in kindergarten, but those from both the Head Start and child-care programs performed better than children who didn't attend any type of PreK program.

Based on this research, Sparagana approached school district leaders in 2006 to see how their schools could begin working with the early-childhood programs in the community. Thanks to his leadership and ability to convince key stakeholders of the potential returns of school-readiness programs, the PEAK (Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness) program was born.

PEAK Comprehensive Early Education and Access to Quality 0-5 Services

PEAK is a collaborative effort between the school district and early child-care providers, including the Montgomery County Head Start, Montgomery Early Learning Centers, Freedom Valley YMCA, and YWCA Tri-County Area, and community-based organizations such as the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, Pottstown Family Center, and the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey.

> "We invited stakeholders to the table and developed a governance structure so we could best meet the needs of children and families."
>
> *Jeffrey Sparagana*
> *Pottstown School District*

When school district leaders first convened these organizations to discuss the importance of aligning their programs, they brought in facilitators to reduce potential tension by emphasizing participants' common interest in improving educational opportunities and success rates for the community's children. The managing partners developed a governance structure with contracts and memorandums of understanding that outlined partner roles and responsibilities. In addition to the managing partners, who meet monthly, PEAK has community partners who provide technical assistance to the program. Unlike managing partners, community partners do not have voting rights in PEAK's governance.

"We spent a year developing these partnerships, so our principals get it," said Sparagana. "We invited stakeholders to the table and developed a governance structure so we could best meet the needs of children and families."

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts program is PEAK'S primary funding source, but the program also receives funding and donations from The United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, other foundations, and private sources. The PEAK program employs a PEAK coordinator, a PreK coach, a family engagement specialist, and a developmental specialist.

The PEAK initiative focuses on four key goals:

- **Community outreach**, to recruit business leaders, legislators, community policymakers, and community representatives who recognize the importance of high-quality early-learning experiences.
- **Quality improvement and workforce development**, focused on improving the quality of community programs through on-site coaching, professional development, increased levels of credentials, and higher teacher-retention rates.
- **Family engagement**, by supporting families in their role as their child's first teacher and providing a framework to involve them in activities and connect them with resources and services.
- **Health and wellness**, by identifying physical issues that may impede learning and school readiness, providing nutrition education, and improving social and emotional development.

"When we first started the PEAK initiative, there was very little connection between the school district and community programs," said Mary Rieck, PEAK Coordinator. "We knew if we worked together as a community, everyone would benefit, and this initiative has succeeded in bringing everyone together."

PEAK Professional Development

PEAK staff members provide many opportunities for teachers in community programs and early elementary grades to take part in professional development activities. They coordinate monthly meetings for early-childhood directors, as well as monthly meetings for teachers. In these meetings, educators learn new P-3-related concepts and skills related to curricular alignment, assessments, developmentally appropriate classroom practices, and data usage to improve instruction. PEAK also promotes leadership development by offering a series of classes in conjunction with the Institute for Family Professionals.

"We've created strong professional development opportunities for our teachers," said Rieck. "Five years ago, professional development focused on basics like developing lesson plans and classroom arrangement, but now we're focusing on developing strategic skills in differentiated instruction, reviewing assessments, and developing learning plans based on assessments."

> "The professional development from the PEAK partnership has been tremendous."
>
> *Ilona Seidel, Montgomery Early Learning Centers*

"The professional development from the PEAK partnership has been tremendous," said Ilona Seidel, former Director of Montgomery Early Learning Centers. She cited classes for teachers that better equip them to understand children's emotional issues and develop effective discipline practices, as well as classes for early-childhood directors and assistant directors that address leadership issues. "PEAK looks at the whole training picture and finds the best ways to make training more inviting for everyone," Seidel said.

As part of its professional development activities, PEAK is committed to increasing the credentials of early-childhood teachers in its network. To increase the number of teachers who obtain CDA certifications and higher-level Associate's (AA) degrees, PEAK provides tuition for early-childhood educators to attend classes at the local community college. Between 2007 and 2010, the percentage of teachers with CDA certifications rose from 54% to 88%, and the percentage with AA degrees grew from 22% to 57%. If they want to go further, teachers can take advantage of a Bachelor of Science degree program offered through Eastern University.

To improve teacher-retention rates, PEAK offers on-site coaching, teacher mini-grants, such as action research grants, and an induction plan for new teachers. In 2011-2012, PEAK reported a retention rate of 96% for teachers participating in partner programs.

PEAK Cross-Sector Collaboration for Data-Sharing

Understanding the importance of evidence-based P-3 investments, PEAK relies heavily on data to drive its programs and activities. One of the primary drivers behind PEAK was the large number of children who performed poorly on DIBELS assessments at the beginning of their kindergarten year. In the 2006-2007 school year, less than half of students — 45% — beginning kindergarten were rated at "benchmark" level.

In line with data-sharing objectives, PEAK coordinators are working to institute "data days" that bring together PreK and early elementary teachers to spend the day sharing data on students moving from one grade level to the next. They already have some data-transfer processes in place to help ease transitions: When rosters are ready for the upcoming year, teachers receive transition sheets with student data that helps them review achievement levels so they're prepared to work with children based on their progress. The district continues to use DIBELS test results and Response to Intervention (RtI) data to assess student progress throughout the school year, as well as to improve instruction in accordance with teacher Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) plans, and is working to implement the RtI model for community-based early-childhood classes. By 2011, the number of kindergarteners who earned "benchmark" ratings had climbed to 55%, and district administrators expressed confidence that 90% of kindergarten students will soon meet benchmark levels on Pennsylvania's state test.

"Our research shows that children who attend our pre-kindergarten program are now much better prepared than those who attended Head Start or the child-care programs that were in the community when we started PEAK," said Sparagana.

PEAK Partnerships with Families

To increase family engagement with the school district, PEAK set goals to ensure that parents have access to high-quality resources needed to prepare them to be their child's first teacher and in turn, to prepare their children for success in school.

Through the PEAK program, families have access to the Pottstown Family Center, which allows community providers to provide full-time family engagement services. To bring families together, PEAK Family Engagement Specialist Whitney Leone hosts informal social networking events at the Center, including the PEAK Parent Breakfast Club, which allows families to discuss issues concerning their children.

"There's a significant amount of prep work, but the Parent Breakfast Club provides a great social environment where parents get to know each other," says Leone.

In addition, parents are encouraged to participate in workshops and classroom activities where they learn about their child's development. PEAK provides parents with Family Activity Bags, which include children's books, activity guides, and games to encourage parents and children to engage in joint learning activities. To further strengthen family involvement, PEAK asks parents to volunteer in classrooms as readers or in other roles. In 2011, PEAK reported a 216% increase in family participation in its workshops since the program's inception.

In her role, Leone also provides resources and services referrals to help families meet holistic needs, such as academic support for children, and basic housing and food needs. PEAK has adopted the Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education model, a framework that defines strategies to support families and reduce child neglect and abuse. The framework comprises "protective factors" that address parental resilience, parenting skills, social connections, and child development, including health, social, and emotional development.

PEAK Access to Quality Health Services

As health and wellness are known to be major contributors to successful learning, PEAK is determined to ensure every child has access to related services so they are prepared to maximize their potential in school. The PEAK Health Initiative receives funding from the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation to offer a range of services through community-based providers. Among its collaborative partnerships and related services:

- **Cedar Crest College nursing program**, which gives senior-level nursing students experience working in community-health settings and classrooms, where they provide health and wellness assessments, hygiene advice, and other health-related services.
- **Pottstown-based Community Health and Dental Care center,** which provides free hearing, vision, and dental screenings to all partner classrooms serving children ages 3-4.
- **The Montgomery County Health Department**, which provides lead screening.
- **The Albert Einstein Medical Center**, which offers nutrition education to all children ages 3-4 who attend PEAK community-based classes.
- **Local mental health services provider**, which has contracted with the Health Initiative to provide the services of a behavior management specialist to work with teachers to develop plans to address violent and aggressive behavior in young children.

- **PEAK partner programs have adopted the Preschool PATHS/social emotional curriculum**, through which children learn problem-solving strategies, cooperation, and appropriate ways to verbalize emotions. PEAK coordinators plan to adopt the RtI model's social/emotional development process, which provides a framework for collecting data on classroom behavior, establishing site-based teams that review data and develop appropriate strategies, and ensuring effective follow-up.

Thanks to its health and wellness efforts, PEAK in 2011 reported a 272% increase in the amount of class time devoted to nutrition and a 10.5% increase in children's overall fitness since the program's inception. Further, 85% of children in a targeted sample showed significant improvements in behavior as a result of classroom behavior management support.

The Road Ahead

In its P-3 efforts, Pennsylvania is determined to balance its need to establish top-down initiatives that it can disseminate throughout the state with its historical culture that emphasizes local-level educational control. In doing so, it can pave the way to leverage effective P-3 legislation while also learning best practices from innovative districts that it can adopt at the state level. The state's Pottstown District PEAK program, for example, provides some exemplary P-3 components that could be instrumental in a synergistic top-down/bottom-up model for advancing P-3 programs.

Meanwhile, the state took a critical step forward when it created OCDEL in 2007, and established a joint funding and reporting structure for the office under the state Department of Education and the Department of Public Welfare. In addition, it has made significant investments in early-learning programs and extended services, including Pre-K Counts, a preschool program that targets children ages 3-4 who are most at risk of school failure; the Keystone STARS QRIS, which serves as a strong example of a top-down program that's driven quality improvements in early-learning programs; and several other early-education and health and wellness programs.

Further, its commitment to do the systems integration work needed to gain a 360-degree view of its educational data so it can assess program progress and enable continuous improvement is a critical component of its P-3 efforts — and one other regions should consider replicating.

P-3 Defining Features: Pennsylvania, Pottstown School District's PEAK program

Learning Continuum Feature	Accomplishments
Transitions: Smooth transitions — based on continuity created by consistent learning opportunities — that reduce negative effects of mobility	• Aligning PreK and K-12 to ease transitions between levels • Partners share responsibility for moving toward seamless transitions across sectors • Embedded PEAK support in PreK and K-12 culture to foster sustainability and reduce dependence on individual leaders • State created OCDEL to unify administration of services
Curriculum and Teaching: Aligned standards, curriculum, and assessment practices across grade and development levels so children benefit from a consistent, holistic learning experience	• Use PATHS social/emotional curriculum • District-wide requirement that kindergarten classrooms integrate play-based learning • Use RtI tool to differentiate instruction for students • Strong physical and mental health sector supports children and families
Structural Features: Increased intensity, length, and quality of programs through strong leadership, coordination, and data-driven practices	• Several organizations fund PEAK • PEAK staff provides aligned professional development opportunities for PreK teachers in partnering centers and support kindergarten teachers in integrating play-based instruction
Family: Integrated family support services that promote changes in family behavior and build social capital	• Local family center provides full-time engagement services
Assessment: Common definitions of student readiness and proficiency and shared assessments as learning progresses	• Data-sharing increases kindergarten teacher knowledge of children before they enter school
Communication: Communication and coordination among caregivers and families to support student learning	• All PEAK initiative partners meet regularly; Joint Steering Committee and individual site principals also meet separately • PEAK monthly newsletters and other written communications inform parents and caregivers on individual child performance and upcoming events

Defining Features Excerpted from Grantmakers for Education, 2007; Graves, 2006; Kaurez, 2008; Reynolds, 2006

Case Study: Ontario, Canada

Ontario serves as a model for educational alignment in several ways, and has already put in well over a decade of work on various efforts. The Ontario government recognized early the importance of driving programs from the top-down, and government, education, and community leaders have been working for 15 years to integrate the systems and services that serve children and families in the province. The Halton Region's Our Kids Network (OKN) program serves as a strong example of a sustained, region-wide integrated services effort. Key service and system integration efforts and programs resulting from Ontario's P-3 work include:

- **Services integration through Ontario Early Learning Centres (OEYCs).** OEYCs integrate education, human, and health services for children age birth to five and their families.

- **Services integration through Toronto First Duty (TFD).** TFD centers integrate early-learning, care, and family-support services for children in Toronto up to age 6.

- **Services integration through the Halton Region Our Kids Network.** OKN serves as a strong example of a sustained, region-wide integrated services effort. Halton's work initially focused on prenatal to age 6, and has since expanded to serve prenatal to age 18.

- **Best Start Plan.** This comprehensive early-learning and care program is designed to enable the province and local municipalities to work with parents, service providers, and ministries to support healthy child development and early learning.

- **Governance systems integration efforts.** Ontario brought its early-childhood division into the K-12 system to align both sectors under the Ministry of Education. The Minister of Education now oversees Early Learning and Child Care Policy and Programs, Early Learning Implementation, and Child Care Quality Assurance and Licensing.

- **Education sector systems integration.** Ontario is working to fold all early-learning programs, including OEYCs and Toronto First Duty, under the domain of school boards.

Education in Perspective

Based on observations that a child's early years are a critical developmental period, Ontario's government leaders commissioned "The Early Years Study — Reversing the Real Brain Drain" in 1998. They wanted recommendations on the best ways to prepare Ontario's young children, including those at risk or with special needs, for scholastic, social, and career success. Central to their research directive was defining a model for

delivering seamless supports and early intervention services based on whole-child development concepts. They also wanted the study to provide data needed to guide leaders in defining and clarifying roles and responsibilities, and to recommend collaborative service models for early-childhood learning based on provincial- and local-level best practices.

Ontario's work over the last fifteen years has focused on integrating the services and systems that serve children and families in the province. Its integrated service model is transforming the way services are delivered: Multiple organizations now share ownership and accountability for co-ordinating the planning and delivery of services that improve outcomes for children served. Ontario views its approach as an ecological model in which all independent actors are dependent on the system as a whole.

Based on the Early Years Study recommendations, two different approaches to service integration emerged. One focused on establishing province-funded OEYCs that now operate in more than 100 sites throughout Ontario. The OEYCs integrate education, human, and health services for children ages 0-5 and their families. Primary programs and services include early-learning and literacy programs for parents and children; early-childhood development programs and services; pregnancy and parenting programs; outreach activities to encourage parental involvement; and partnerships with other community early-years programs. The province recommended incentives to encourage school boards, the Canadian equivalent of U.S. school districts, to integrate OEYCs with their elementary school systems.

The other integrated service model was piloted in Toronto in 1999. With support from the province of Ontario and participating community agencies, the City of Toronto, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, and the Toronto District School Board established the Toronto First Duty program, whose sites focus on integrating early-learning, care, and family-support services for children in Toronto up to age 6. Like Ontario Early Years Centres, Toronto First Duty sites are required to demonstrate how early-learning and family support programs can be integrated to create a single, seamless system. Unlike OEYCs, however, Toronto First Duty sites include full-day kindergarten programs.

> "Our research on Toronto First Duty sites showed that as the level of integration went up, so did the quality of the program."
>
> *Carl Corter*
> *University of Toronto's Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study*

"Our research on Toronto First Duty sites showed that as the level of integration went up, so did the quality of the program," said Carl Corter, professor at the University of Toronto's Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study. "This reinforces the concept that government policymakers should exert top-down pressure and provide supports but also need bottom-up buy-in from the local level."

In 2004, Ontario's government introduced its Best Start Plan, a comprehensive early-learning and care program designed to enable the province and local municipalities to work with parents, service providers, and ministries to support healthy child development and early learning. Similar to OEYCs, Best Start centers operate within a hub infrastructure and focus on providing information services, referrals, quality child care, and parent literacy supports; connecting families to other programs and services; and sharing outcomes among service providers.

While the Early Years and Best Start programs provided a good structure for coordinating and aligning services, various governance and funding issues, as well as newer legislative mandates, prevented the significant improvements the province intended.

"These programs experienced a number of challenges that are difficult to address," said Corter. "Child care and K-12 have different policies under different agencies, while professional services systems, such as teachers' unions, are complex and fragmented." He also cited difficulties with raising public awareness on the benefits of cohesive communities and getting cross-sector institutions to understand the shared returns they'd gain by working to bridge systems.

Like Head Start transition programs, Ontario tried multiple integrated service models over the years, but each neglected the governance, structural, and funding challenges that continually impact service integration efforts throughout North America. Based on these stalled efforts, Ontario commissioned the "With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario" report in 2009 to get recommendations for developing more-systemic approaches that would enable the province to fundamentally change its approach to structuring service integration.

Current Services and Systems Integration Efforts

Among the structural recommendations from the "Our Best Future in Mind" report was that Ontario "create a new Early Years Division within the Ontario Ministry of Education" to lead policy, funding, and accountability for 0-8 programs. Ontario responded by bringing its early-childhood division into the K-12 system and aligning both sectors under the Ministry of Education. The Minister of Education now oversees Early Learning and Child Care Policy and Programs, Early Learning Implementation, and Child Care Quality Assurance and Licensing.

In renewed integration efforts, Ontario has developed a province-level plan that calls for phasing-in a program model that seamlessly integrates full-day kindergarten, child-care, and parenting supports. The model for the full-day kindergarten — based on "emergent-learning" concepts — integrates the Ministry of Education's Kindergarten Program and the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) curriculum guidelines.

The province is also working to bring all early-learning programs, including its OEYCs and Toronto First Duty, under the domain of school boards. At an elementary school within the Peel School Board — which oversees OEYCs, Best Start centers, and full-day kindergarten programs — the OEYC is physically located in the school. The school principal reported greater parental involvement among families familiar with the OEYC's services whose children had transitioned into the school.

Professional Development

In addition to bringing its early-learning programs under unified oversight, Ontario has tackled professional development challenges by adopting a joint-development approach that brings together elementary and early-childhood teachers so they can align learning, curriculum, and teaching practices. The province mandates joint-classroom instruction programs that pairs early-childhood and kindergarten teachers so they can work together to merge the practices of the two fields.

In the province's Halton Region, for example, the full-day kindergarten program features integrated classrooms that use Ontario's ELECT curriculum guidelines. In each kindergarten classroom, an early-childhood educator partners with a kindergarten teacher to co-teach students. In addition, early-childhood and full-day kindergarten teachers in the Halton Region take part in joint-planning and training sessions.

Pivotal to the success of Ontario's new province-level program will be the ability to blend two different learning philosophies — whole child and content-based — and the expertise of early-childhood and elementary education professionals.

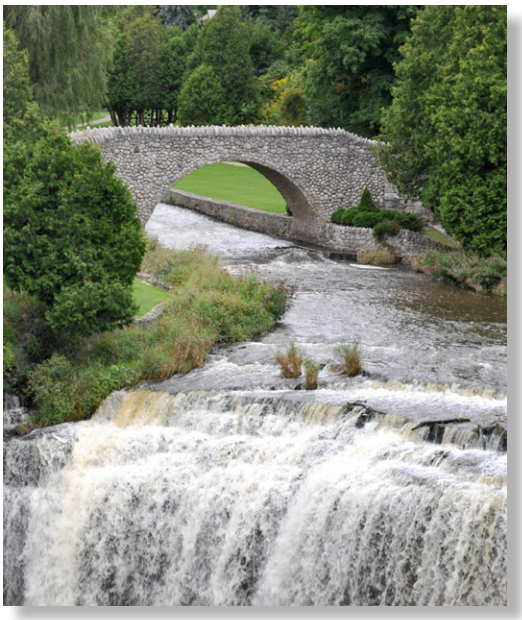
At this juncture, the challenges associated with such blending make it difficult to determine if this model is sustainable. Currently, early-childhood educators in Ontario are required to complete a two-year diploma program at a community college, though many go on to complete a four-year degree in early-childhood education. Kindergarten teachers generally complete a four-year undergraduate degree program that includes a year devoted to teacher education. The result is that early-childhood teachers receive more direct training in child development, while kinder-

garten teachers gain a stronger background in curriculum, assessment, and learning expectations defined by the Ministry of Education's Kindergarten Program standards.

One recommendation proposed in the "With Our Best Future in Mind" report to address these disparities was to create a specialty degree program for professionals working with children age 0-8. While Ontario has not yet acted on this recommendation, it could serve to build the province's workforce capacity for educators that have both a content-based and whole-child focus.

District Drill-Down: Halton Region

Established in 1996, the Halton Region Our Kids Network focuses on developing a coordinated model for planning and delivering services. The OKN initiative initially addressed prenatal to age 6, but has since expanded to serve prenatal to age 18.



The OKN governance structure comprises eight publicly funded organizations that form the foundation of the network: Halton Children's Aid Society, the Regional Municipality of Halton, Halton District School Board, Halton Catholic District School Board, ROCK Reach Out Centre for Kids, Halton Multicultural Council, Erinoak Kids Centre for Treatment and Development, and Halton Regional Police Services. These "Protocol Partners" provide guidance, financial support, and human resources to OKN. They've all signed a partnership agreement that formalizes their commitment to the Network's vision and mission, as well as to their respective financial contributions.

"The Network has become integral to the mission of the Protocol Partners; it's become entrenched in their culture and conversations," said Joyce See, Director, Community Health Services, for the Halton Region Health Department.

Among Protocol Partner responsibilities is providing strategic direction, resources, oversight, and advocacy for the Network. The partners also identify metrics that enable them to measure the degree to which OKN is achieving services integration and adding value to activities in pilot communities, as well as periodically sponsoring conferences and other events. OKN has several committees comprising representatives from organizations throughout the region that contribute to services offered.

The overall budget for the program is about $600,000, but it also receives significant in-kind contributions. To become a Protocol Partner, each organization must provide financial support to OKN.

Regardless of funding fluctuations, the Network is determined to find creative ways to carry out its mission, according to Elena DiBattista, OKN's Director. "We don't let ourselves get paralyzed by focusing only on the funding," she said. "If something is important, we find a way to do it."

> "The Network has become integral to the mission of the Protocol Partners; it's become entrenched in their culture and conversations."
>
> *Joyce See*
> *Halton Region Health Department*

OKN Cross-Sector Collaboration for Data-Sharing

To coordinate services through data-driven practices and monitor performance and results, OKN has adopted a report card based on elements of the Search Institute's Developmental Assets framework, which comprises 40 predictive assets that children need to develop so they'll be less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors. In addition to helping OKN leaders monitor the joint ownership and accountability of partners, the report card serves as a tool for community-wide discussion and assessing the development of children ages 0-18 within the region. According to OKN project staff, the report card helps protocol organizations and community-based agencies see how the Network fits within their local

municipalities, and how their programs help move the region move toward achieving targeted outcomes.

"Data collection was especially important with helping protocol organizations and community services providers understand that by collectively advancing the outcomes of this initiative, they were also advancing the outcomes of their work," said DiBattista.

To measure overall project progress, Halton Our Kids Network has adapted the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute's Results Based Accountability (RBA) model for its specific needs. Using the management tool, Network partners track their progress against self-defined population and performance metrics.

OKN Comprehensive Early Education and Access to Quality 0-5 Services

A key innovation in the OKN initiative was the creation of "hubs" within the region's school systems, which offer on-site and off-site programs in conjunction with a variety of social services organizations. At a Halton Region public Catholic school that educates children from junior kindergarten through grade 8, the hub is a converted classroom where hub staff work with community agencies to provide services and counseling.

Opened five years ago, the hub serves clients ranging from pregnant mothers seeking prenatal services to children less than a year old to age 18. The staff also offer programs geared toward parents, home-based child-care providers, and others. According to Vanessa Box-Jones, the hub coordinator, the school's principal often invites her to sit in on parent conferences so that she can provide additional information. Box-Jones says many of the services they offer grew organically based on specific community needs or from suggestions made by experienced people providing in-kind support to the hub.

"Our work is ongoing and constantly changing so we need to be able to readily adapt as needs change," said Mary Beth Jonz, Director of Children's Services in the Halton Region Social and Community Services Department. "Our efforts must be continuously defined — we can never say, 'We're done.'"

At another public school in the Halton Region, a full-day kindergarten program features integrated classrooms that use the ELECT curriculum guidelines, which incorporate emergent learning. As defined by Halton's principal and teachers, emergent learning is child-directed learning stemming from a child's interests. In each classroom, an early-childhood educator partners with a kindergarten teacher to co-teach

OKN REPORT CARD AND RBA MEASURES

Based on its commitment to implementing practices backed by strong research-based evidence, Our Kids Network has adopted a report card that helps network partners monitor performance, progress, and results.

Developed using elements of the Search Institute's Developmental Assets framework, which comprises 40 predictive assets that children need to develop so they'll be less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors, the report card helps partners monitor joint ownership and accountability to OKN. It also serves as a tool for community-wide discussion and assessing the development of children ages 0-18 within the region.

To measure overall progress, OKN leaders use the Results Based Accountability (RBA) model, developed by the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, to track performance against their own accountability measures. The population and performance results they've identified are:

Population Results (termed the "Halton 7")

- **Children are healthy**

  Progress indicators include healthy eating, physical activity, and mental health

- **Children are learning**

  Progress indicators include kindergarten readiness, student achievement, and school engagement

- **Children are positively connected**

  Progress indicators include supportive, caring environments, commitment to learning, and social competencies

- **Children are safe**

  Progress indicators include protection from serious injury, reduced at-risk behaviors, and improved overall safety

Continued on page 29

students. Using data-collection documentation standards, educators regularly capture data on child development and learning.

According to the school's principal, Wendy Spence, who has a background in both early-childhood and adult learning and a master's in education, principals who are involved in building integrated systems should possess several attributes. These include: a strong developmental understanding of curriculum and developmentally appropriate practices; the knowledge to effectively staff classrooms; the ability to creatively free-up time for early-childhood and kindergarten teachers to hold joint-planning sessions; the ability to support staff during the transition to the full-day kindergarten model; and a commitment to enforce continuous documentation efforts that capture learning progress data.

The Road Ahead

Much of Ontario's P-3 focus over the last fifteen years has centered on integrating the services and systems that serve early-education and elementary schools in the province.

A key indicator of its P-3 commitment was Ontario's decision to bring its early-childhood division into the K-12 system and align both sectors under the Ministry of Education to ensure consistent leadership related to policies, funding, and accountability for 0-8 programs.

OKN REPORT CARD AND RBA MEASURES

Continued from page 28

- **Families are strong and stable**

  Progress indicators include quality child care, parental monitoring, and quality family time at home

- **Schools are connected to the community**

  Progress indicators include parental involvement, volunteerism, and community use of schools

- **Neighborhoods are where we live, work, and play**

  Progress indicators include neighborhood safety and cohesion, walkability, and residents caring for their communities

Performance Results

- Building towards service integration
- Supporting children, youth, and families through neighborhood hubs
- Turning research into action

To view an example of the report card, download the .PDF at: http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/1_okn_report_card_2011_12.02.11.pdf

The integration service approach the province has taken is transforming the way services are delivered. For example, multiple organizations share ownership and accountability for coordinating the planning and delivery of services that improve educational and social outcomes for children served. Ontario's leaders understand that strong interplay among provincial government, local government, and school boards building P-3 programs is critical to leveraging the resources and practices that incorporate the best aspects of sustainable province-level and region-level policies.

As is the case with other P-3 initiatives, Ontario has encountered numerous integration challenges, but continues its fight to ensure its children realize the benefits that seamlessly integrated and aligned systems and services can deliver. After testing several early integration initiatives that didn't prove sustainable, Ontario has regrouped to develop a province-level plan that will phase-in a program model that seamlessly integrates full-day kindergarten, child-care, and parenting supports. The model standardizes on the concepts put forward by the Ministry of Education's Kindergarten Program and the ELECT guidelines.

P-3 Defining Features: Ontario, Halton OKN, Peel ELC, and Bruce Woodgreen TFD Sites

Learning Continuum Feature	Accomplishments
Transitions: Smooth transitions — based on continuity created by consistent learning opportunities — that reduce negative effects of mobility	• Education, child-care, and health-care services providers work together within individual local hubs • Early childhood and kindergarten teachers team-teach to ease transition to kindergarten (Halton)
Curriculum and Teaching: Aligned standards, curriculum, and assessment best practices across grade and development levels so children benefit from a consistent, holistic learning experience	• Early childhood and kindergarten teachers co-teach preschool and kindergarten classes with weekly planning time available • Province-wide use of ELECT curriculum guidelines emphasizing child-initiated instructional activities • Professional development offered to all staff so children have seamless instructional experiences
Structural Features: Increased intensity, length, and quality of programs through strong leadership, coordination, and data-driven practices	• Strong commitment to OKN vision and mission by Protocol Partners (Halton) • Joint Steering Committee acts as leadership team to ensure OKN initiative meets short- and long-range goals (Halton)
Family: Integrated family support services that promote changes in family behavior and build social capital	• Hub offers comprehensive, easy access to education, health, and parenting services (Halton) • Hub model includes programs that bring parents and children together so children learn skills and parents learn ways to extend development at home (Halton) • Most sites have processes to assess family wants and needs, and frequently follow-up to gauge service satisfaction
Assessment: Common definitions of student readiness and proficiency and shared assessments as learning progresses	• Common report card monitors joint accountability and children's progress (Halton) • RBA model assesses progress related to programs and services (Halton) • Province-wide formative and summative service evaluations
Communication: Communication and coordination among caregivers and families to support student learning	• The most-integrated hubs/centers communicate frequently through detailed messages using various media

Defining Features Excerpted from Grantmakers for Education, 2007; Graves, 2006; Kaurez, 2008; Reynolds, 2006

PRACTICE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

While Hawaii, Pennsylvania and Ontario have their own structures, approaches, and leadership models, they have all developed promising P-3 coordination and alignment practices and continue to make progress on the services and systems integration front. They've encountered a number of unique and common challenges as well. Some they have been able to mitigate and even master, while others comprise such an intricate mix of variables that few solutions — short of government-mandated and funded educational reform and realignment — will suffice.

But paradigm shifts of this magnitude do not happen without a lot of starts, stops, and adjustments. The P-3 movement has momentum, bolstered by educational, societal, and fiscal benefits shown both by early-childhood programs that broke new ground, and newer continuum programs that continue to build on predecessor achievements.

However, to realize their vision — sustainable seamless learning continuum programs that transform the way children learn and live — the P-3 leaders in this study and elsewhere will have to find ways to work with legislators and other policymakers to reconcile the governance, funding, and workforce challenges that plagued early programs.

Practice Recommendations

1. Bring all partners to the table to 'blend' education sectors

To date, even gaining consensus on the best way to combine early-education and K-12 systems has been challenging. Stakeholders must reconcile not only their different approaches, but entire sets of philosophies that characterize the two sectors.

The best strategy to fostering the critical multi-organizational collaboration needed is to 'blend' the two systemss rather taking an acquisitive approach, where one takes control of the other. To build a collaborative foundation, leaders must build-in the necessary upfront time to jointly plan their project mission, timelines, and desired outcomes. Often, states, provinces, and districts launch new initiatives without the benefit of strategic planning that would encourage stakeholder buy-in and lay the groundwork for sustainability. Without it, initiatives stall when the original funding period ends.

All sites studied understand the importance of sound planning that includes key stakeholders. Both Pennsylvania and Hawaii received planning grants that enabled partners to hold joint-planning sessions before they started their initiatives. Pennsylvania's Pottstown District secured funding from the United Way to bring in an independent facilitator to guide planning efforts and assure that early-childhood and K-12 stakeholders felt they were on equal footing.

Second, P-3 program partners need to combine forces to map out each partner's responsibilities. In many multi-organizational P-3 partnerships, K-12 education system leaders assign responsibilities and duties for all education and community services partners, rather than include every group in the effort. This hampers the long-term collaboration needed to address broad challenges as well as the work each partner must perform. In Ontario's Halton Region, the Protocol Partners — comprising a broad range of government, education, and community entities — oversee development and provide financial support, guidance and human resources to the Our Kids Network. Further, they all signed a partnership agreement to formalize their commitment to OKN's vision and mission.

Third, program partners need to share accountability and ownership. In the Halton Region, Protocol Partners monitor joint ownership and accountability through a report card that serves as a tool for community-wide discussion and assessing children's progress. The report card is used not only by schools but local municipalities and community organizations.

Fourth, early-childhood and K-12 educators must embrace the "push-up/push-down" concept to create an environment that encourages the education sectors to share learning practices. At the N-W site in Hawaii, early-childhood and elementary school teachers work together to align curriculum and instruction practices and share data on students so they can ease the transition from the early-childhood environment into elementary grades. They also commit to observing each other's classroom practices. All the sites we visited were adopting promising push-up practices to blend early-childhood philosophies with elementary school education. For example, kindergarten classes in Ontario, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania are all arranged by centers, with play-based instruction guiding the classroom.

2. Develop and nourish strong leadership qualities

Dedicated early-childhood directors, school principals, and other proponents factor prominently in facilitating and sustaining a P-3 learning continuum. At each of the sites studied, leadership has been a key component in developing successful practices. In Pennsylvania, Pottstown's assistant superintendent championed the district's work on the PEAK initiative based on his personal observations of the long-term impact of early-childhood programs on the students he coached in the high school's football program. In Ontario, a school principal in the Halton Region has a background in early-childhood and adult learning, as well as a degree in education, that inform her cross-system work with early-childhood and elementary teachers in the school.

At the sites studied, however, coordinated leadership training on effective ways to head early-learning continuum efforts is still isolated and not comprehensively tied to state or local P-3 initiatives. One exception is Erikson Institute's New Schools Project, which emphasizes leadership training through "Professional Learning Communities," designed to gain widespread buy-in and build leadership capacity among principals and educators by educating them in learning-continuum advantages and best practices. In Pottstown and other sites, P-3 programs got off the ground because superintendents, principals, and other district leaders either already understood what was at stake or were open to alignment concepts. However, when continuing efforts needed to foster sustainability depend solely on the guidance of the person who spearheaded the initiative — or on a few key staff members — programs are at risk.

Sites that ultimately succeed in achieving sustainability in learning continuum initiatives will be those that have provided leadership training to a core group of superintendents, principals, teachers, and other key people who can foster a P-3 culture within the education workforce and external partners. Then, if the individuals who championed and drove early initiatives take a new job or retire, important integration and alignment work can continue apace.

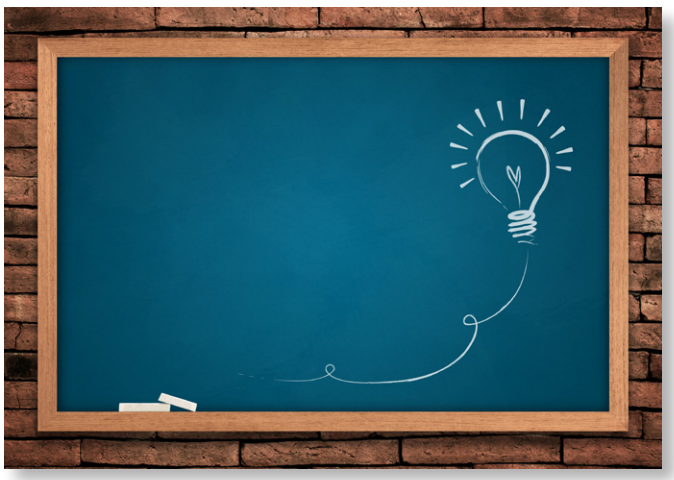
3. Collaborate to stretch funds

Minus state legislation that funds P-3 programs as a budget line item, initiative leaders struggle to assure consistent, sustained funding streams. Many have been able to count on philanthropic organizations committed to improving education to fund P-3 research and initiatives launches, but eventually they must be able to support themselves. While each site in the study has funding challenges, they're creatively using their financial resources while simultaneously working to keep costs down. Pottstown's PEAK program, funded primarily by Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts program with help from other public and private sources, pools all resources and allocates them to program partners. Leaders say this enables the program to operate more efficiently, thereby driving costs down and reducing their dependence on outside financing. In the Halton Region, Our Kids Network uses its joint ownership and accountability report card to help partners understand how the Network fits within their organizational scope. This focuses and directs their efforts so they don't have to spend time plotting their own course, which keeps costs in check.

Policy Recommendations

1. Align the systems that fund and govern child-care and education programs

The most important take-away from this study: Unless government administrative bodies align the systems that finance and govern child-care and education programs, P-3 services themselves will be disjointed. Federal agencies learned this lesson from their failed efforts to support transitions between Head Start programs and elementary schools. Aligning two separate education systems, as well as aligning these systems with health and human services sectors, requires more than bringing together multiple organizations through collaboration, especially when each segment has its own reporting, regulatory, and funding lines. To be effective and sustainable, learning continuum initiatives require federal, state, and local policies that support them.



2. Develop alignment-training programs for educators

To date, policymakers haven't paid sufficient attention to preparing principals and teachers on the best ways to align early-learning and K-12 systems — or to work with external providers to align these systems with quality wrap-around services. To have a chance at sustainability,

P-3 leaders need to provide more guidance and training to these educators so they better understand both education sectors and the community services that support them. In Ontario, training programs for elementary and early-childhood teachers differ so greatly that government leaders decided the most expedient way to merge the practices of the two fields was to rely on joint classroom instruction. While Hawaii's P-3 graduate program is a positive first step toward developing educators with cross-sector mindsets and skills, the state has much more work to do on initial workforce training programs as well as on the professional development front. Among the sites we studied in 2011, only Erikson Institute's New Schools Project incorporated leadership training as a central tenet of its P-3 model.

3. Enable data-driven continuous improvement

An essential component of driving P-3 continuum initiatives is quality data — to assess current status, measure progress, make cases for funding, identify areas for improvement, and to quantify returns on investment. To date, the separation that divides early-learning and K-12 programs extends to data collection methods and systems, which typically aren't integrated across the program levels or sometimes even with other data systems in the same sector.

To effectively capture all data needed to create quality P-3 programs, district administrators, early-learning, and K-3 educators need standard procedures that streamline student evaluations, evidence-based assessment tools for gathering the data needed for decision-making, and processes that make these efforts a natural part of their daily routines. To fully leverage the data they capture, program stakeholders will need to define progress and performance metrics that tie to various objectives so they can continually measure the impact of their work. In this effort, they would benefit significantly from access to data analysis experts, who can help them translate raw data into actionable insight that enables continuous improvement.

Further, for real-time review and analysis, administrators and educators require networked access to integrated cross-sector systems that house data related to children, teachers, school leaders, curriculum, instruction practices, and numerous other areas.

Pennsylvania has taken steps to best leverage its education data by implementing a statewide early-learning data system designed to improve the effectiveness of early-childhood programs. Although this Early Learning Network isn't yet integrated with the Pennsylvania Information Management System, the state's K-12 data system, the state is working to merge them so educators can gain actionable insight across sectors.

For its part, Ontario funded an independent consultant, under the direction of faculty from the University of Toronto's Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study, to conduct "formative" evaluations of the Toronto First Duty and full-day kindergarten programs during their respective implementations. Ontario employs both formative evaluations — to assess program features during the implementation phase — and "summative" evaluations, to assess programs post-implementation.

4. Incorporate proven local strategies in statewide policies to support sustainability

A primary objective of this study was to explore the interplay between the states, provinces, and districts building P-3 programs to identify ways that government-level policies helped support and sustain district practices. This interplay was most evident in Ontario, where the government played a direct role in integrating the services that support education and care for children from birth through age 18. Building on these efforts, the government's leaders have done extensive early work to integrate the systems that support the province's children, but, like other pioneering early-childhood programs, have been hampered by the different governance and financing structures of education and services sectors. As a result, they've been forced to regroup, reassess, and launch new efforts to address system integration.

Meanwhile, Pennsylvania launched its system integration efforts by establishing OCDEL, but the impact of this restructuring isn't yet apparent in the field, likely due to the state's strong local-control culture. Nonetheless, the key policy initiatives on which the state is focusing — including standards alignment, P-20 data integration, and workforce development — will positively influence program changes at the local level.

Savvy state and provincial leaders recognize that creating sustainable seamless learning continuum programs can depend as much on leveraging innovative district-level P-3 initiatives as they do on government-driven initiatives. Just as key state- and province-level policy initiatives positively influence program changes at the local level, innovative district-level initiatives can positively influence initiatives at the higher levels.

Therefore, it's critical that government heads, legislators, education agencies, educational leaders, community services providers, and policy experts be brought to the same table and given an opportunity to share information on innovative and effective practices. This is an essential step in creating a structure that encourages stakeholders to work together to define ways they can enable effective interplay between states/provinces and the districts they serve. No single organization has a monopoly on innovative thinkers and ideas, and accomplishing the hard work needed to change the current paradigm to one that improves the lives of all children requires that stakeholders across the government, education, and community spectrum be heard.

CONCLUSION

What will states, provinces and districts require to turn their early P-3 accomplishments into comprehensive, sustainable programs? How can they best capture data across all sectors and stage both raw data and analysis results in standard formats so districts and communities across states/provinces can replicate practices? How do they harness and align all the moving pieces and focus them on improving the lives of children — from the time they're born throughout their high school and college years — in ways that progressively build on strong starts to carry momentum into adulthood?

The P-3 movement hasn't gained the critical mass needed to definitively answer these questions, but dedicated work on programs throughout the U.S. and Canada continue to make inroads that can pave the way for other regions. Eyes are trained on state and provincial leaders, policymakers, and education stakeholders working to create legislation to see how mandates will address the variables that impact fundamental change. Any serious agenda will have to provide a state/province-level roadmap for not just education and services alignment, but for the heavy lifting required to reconcile fragmented regulatory, reporting, and funding structures that have impeded alignment and integration efforts to date. Meanwhile, the U.S. federal footprint is expanding, with lawmakers analyzing existing Congressional directives and introducing new legislation that will impact states across the country.

Given the immaturity of the P-3 movement and the current lack of consistent top-down directives and funding, districts with strong leaders have launched efforts on their own, with some making noteworthy progress. This begs the question: If best practices call for state- and province-level policies to support and sustain district practices, what's the role of notable grassroots district-level programs? How did leaders build district capacity? Can district policies scale-up? And if they can, which might be pushed-up to the state- and province-level so leaders can give them the proper care and feeding needed to push them out state/province-wide?

To date, there's been little research into the power of district-level programs to influence state and province policies and practices, but it's an area ripe for investigation. Educators and other professionals are hungry for more data and insight that they can apply in their P-3 continuum initiatives. As the sites studied in this report have proven, stakeholders are committed to making the foundational changes needed to help their children succeed in school and prepare them to compete in the evolving knowledge economy so they can likewise succeed in life. So stay tuned. The P-3 programs in this report that continue to make inroads, and newer programs set to launch, will be worth watching.

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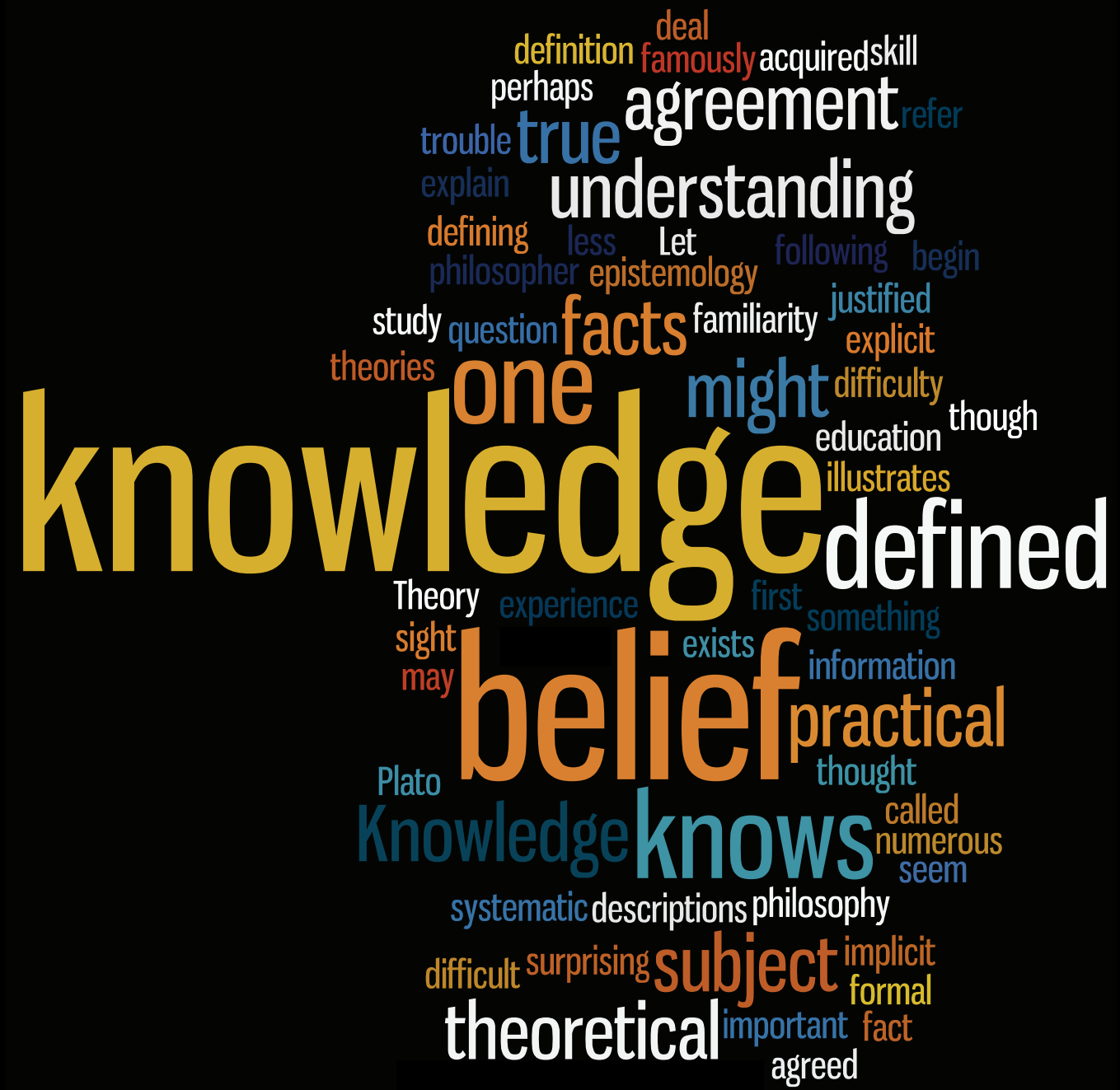

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