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School

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Outcomes

## Lessons from Six Communities

*By Ann Segal, with Charles Bruner / December 2003*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Annie E. Casey Foundation

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

**I**N 1989, the nation's governors led by Governor Bill Clinton and President George Bush worked together to establish seven national educational goals. The first goal was that, "by the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn." While there has been no federal legislation creating new resources specifically to achieve this goal, federal funding for child care services, for children's health care, and for Head Start have expanded significantly. This has provided states more tools for developing early learning systems to ensure school readiness, although the expansion of funding for child care was primarily to enable more parents to go to work under welfare reform rather than to enrich learning environments for children.

This report describes six local government efforts to develop early learning systems to achieve the goal of school readiness—efforts that use federal and state resources but are locally owned.

Some states have made major commitments to early learning and school readiness, with North Carolina's Smart Start Initiative, Georgia's universal preschool legislation, and California's Proposition 10 (now First 5) Initiative being among the most publicly recognized. Even with these commitments and expanded federal support, no state has sufficient resources to create fully comprehensive early learning systems for their youngest residents.

Innovative local governmental efforts to develop comprehensive school readiness strategies have emerged in a number of states. After all, it is at the local level that state and federal funding sources and regulations and guidelines focused upon young children and their families must be integrated and acted upon. Parents are unlikely to find their child care arrangements at a state-run center at the state capitol or a medical home for their young child in a federal medical institution. The worlds of young children revolve around their home and neighborhood, so services and supports need to be available at a local and immediate level. To get what their children need, parents must draw upon local resources—public and private, professional and

voluntary. The promising models described here have developed because of the unique situations, commitment, and relationships at the local level.

This report describes six local government efforts to develop early learning systems to achieve the goal of school readiness—efforts that use federal and state resources but are locally owned. These efforts were identified and selected based upon discussions with a number of early childhood experts in the field. They represent some of the most sophisticated and comprehensive efforts in the nation to focus attention on achieving school readiness and to create early learning systems that encompass health, early intervention, child care, enriched preschool, and parenting support strategies. Site visits were conducted in May, June, and July of 2003, interviewing key stakeholders and visiting exemplary programs. Circumstances may have changed in these models since the site visits were conducted.

The six efforts—in Miami-Dade County in Florida, Richland County in South Carolina, Orange County and Santa Clara County in California, Lancaster County in Pennsylvania, and the Hampton Roads region in Virginia—are summarized below, with more detailed case studies in the complete report. Following these summaries are six themes that emerged from the case studies.

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## MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

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Florida state law has a special provision that enables any of the state's 67 counties to create a special taxing district for children's services—authorizing the levy of property taxes to establish a trust fund to support children's services. Miami-Dade County is Florida's largest and most diverse county, with 2.3 million residents, 58 percent Hispanic, 21 percent African American, and 21 percent non-Hispanic white. Each year, 31,000 babies are born. Fifty-five percent of preschool children (0–5) live in poor or low-income families (below 185 percent of poverty), and only 40 percent of fourth-graders read at grade level in the public schools.

In September 2002, Miami-Dade voters passed, by a 2–1 margin, the establishment and funding of a special taxing district, with half of the \$60 million in new funding dedicated to early intervention and prevention efforts for children prenatal to age five and their families. A 33-member Board governs the Children's Trust to administer the funding from the special taxing district, the largest children's taxing district in the state.

The campaign to establish the Trust and the resulting efforts to build an early childhood system represented a public and private partnership, with strong leadership from David Lawrence, retired publisher of the

Work on school readiness in Miami-Dade County involves a coalition of organizations representing many different aspects of school readiness, pulled together by the Children's Trust.

*Miami Herald.* Lawrence now chairs the Children's Trust and heads the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, which raises private funding for early childhood initiatives and supported the initial strategic media campaign to create the Trust.

Work on school readiness in Miami-Dade County involves a coalition of organizations representing many different aspects of school readiness, pulled together by the Children's Trust. United Way contributes funds and houses several collaboratives and coalitions. The Miami-Dade School Readiness Coalition oversees \$121 million in subsidized child care funds. The Family Learning Partnership supports literacy specialists that work with parents as well as young children. The Alliance for Human Services coordinates Dade County's investments in human services. The Boards from these entities are interlocking and include significant private-sector representation.

As a result of the Trust, Miami-Dade school readiness program efforts have expanded dramatically. Particularly noteworthy approaches are:

☆ universal provision of information to new mothers;

- ☆ training and enhanced support to upgrade the quality of both child care and Head Start (including development of a star rating system);
- ☆ a family literacy emphasis that recognizes the diversity of the population and its languages; and
- ☆ greater outreach to identify and address special needs through early intervention.

Perhaps most important for long-term system building, the combined public and private leadership and its emphasis upon public awareness and education have created a strong grassroots constituency for investing in early childhood and school readiness.

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#### RICHLAND COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

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In 1999, South Carolina established its First Steps to School Readiness program, providing funding and some technical support to counties to create local First Step Partnership Boards. These Partnership Boards were given five goals directed to achieve school readiness:

The Richland County Partnership Board illustrates how local planning boards can enable people to come together to fashion new, but practical, solutions at a very hands-on, ground level.

- ☆ provide parents with support as their young child's first teacher;
- ☆ increase comprehensive services to prevent or provide early intervention for special health and developmental needs;
- ☆ promote high-quality preschool programs;
- ☆ ensure all young children receive health, nutrition, and protection services; and
- ☆ mobilize communities to support this comprehensive agenda.

Richland County, which includes the city of Columbia, is a moderate-sized county that is quite diverse, with 24,500 children under age six, 53 percent African American, 39 percent white, and the rest a variety of other races. Forty-six percent of Richland County children under age six are eligible for Medicaid. The Richland County Partnership Board is both diverse and collaborative, with over 30 members representing early childhood providers, local school district and state agency officials, advocates, and the faith and business communities.

Following a strategic planning process, the Board identified and launched a number of strategies, including child care provider licensing, a childhood asthma program ("Breathe Easy"), Medicaid and SCHIP outreach and enrollment efforts, and the expansion of a library and Success by Six program to encourage parents to read to their children.

The Partnership has proved to be a source for innovative action, such as the "Breathe Easy" program, which responded to the high rate of emergency room admissions of children with asthma and the need to help parents develop responses to address environmental issues, primarily second-hand smoke, that contribute to asthma episodes. The Partnership was the catalyst for collaboration to tackle this issue with a program that is being carefully evaluated for its impact and could be a model for other counties and states in dealing with asthma. The Richland County Partnership Board illustrates how local planning boards can enable people to come together to fashion new, but practical, solutions at a very hands-on, ground level.

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## ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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In 1997, through a ballot initiative called Proposition 10, California raised its tobacco tax by 50 cents per pack and dedicated those funds to early childhood. The resulting state Children and Families Act of 1998 established a state structure and county governance structures of five to nine members, now called First 5 Commissions, in each of California's counties. The First 5 Commissions must develop school readiness plans, and they administer 80 percent of the funding raised by Proposition 10. The First 5 Commissions must work to supplement and not supplant other funds, develop measurable results for their programs, and ensure that programs are "integrated into a consumer-oriented and easily accessible system."

Orange County is just south of Los Angeles and has a population of 2.4 million people (similar in size to Miami-Dade and larger in population than 17 states). Because California is so large, much of the planning and delivery of services historically happens at the county level, so taking on responsibility for Proposition 10 planning and fund administration was not new to Orange County. Still, the size and scope of the Act and the flexibility afforded to counties enabled them to establish unique approaches to the work.

Orange County established its First 5 Commission as separate from the County Board of Supervisors, but includes one supervisor among the Commission's nine members. The Commission has adopted a strategic plan built upon three "platforms" that use existing services—the birthing hospitals, family resource centers, and the schools.

The work with birthing hospitals has involved multiple strategies, including universal parent education information to all new parents, screening and follow-up early intervention services for both newborns and parents, and ongoing infant case management for vulnerable families and children. The work with family resource centers has been to increase the effectiveness of the existing 18 centers through technical assistance and support to build professionalism and capacity, including partnerships with the Boys and Girls Club and other organizations. The work with schools has been to support school readiness coordinators within every school district to address transition issues to school and to support parents. Each of these platforms is connected to the others to ensure coordination and a more seamless system of services for young children and their families.

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## SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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Like Orange County, Santa Clara County's First 5 Commission includes a member of the Board of Supervisors, with other members representing different parts of the county. Santa Clara County is located south of San Francisco and includes the city of San Jose, with an overall population of 1.5 million. The First 5 Commission, with extensive community involvement, has established five goal areas for its work: (1) family support, (2) quality early learning opportunities, (3) health, (4) neighborhood and regional needs, and (5) systemic change.

To maximize civic engagement, the Commission has developed two regional partnerships and the East Initiative, with support provided to each one for strategic planning and citizen engagement. The Commission also has established partnerships with the city of San Jose, the county, and the Packard Foundation to ensure universal health coverage for all children prenatal to age five, including dental care. Multiple initiatives have been supported to engage families, support early childhood professional development, and provide for transitions to school. As of the summer of 2003, 56,000 children have been enrolled in health insurance since the initiative began.

Innovations have been developed to ensure community involvement and enable community groups to

seek and secure funding they might not otherwise receive under traditional grant-making processes. This includes the use of an "intention to negotiate" rather than a normal RFP process, with applicants given technical assistance as they develop a proposal and with proposals reviewed by community panelists. A rapid-response system provides ongoing follow-up and supports midcourse corrections once programs are financed.

The First 5 Commission in Santa Clara County has sought to integrate existing services through the use of care coordinators and to maintain a focus on outcomes, with systems in place to track how well different aspects of its work are contributing to those desired results.

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## LANCASTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

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Lancaster County has a population of almost one-half million, with the city of Lancaster the largest city in the county. In the city, 59.1 percent of the children who attend school come from low-income families. One in five women do not receive prenatal care, and 11,300 children are uninsured. In 2000, 1.7 students of ten were ready for school and a very small percentage of children eligible to attend pre-school under state or federal guidelines actually attend.

In 1999, leaders in Lancaster County developed extensive data on the conditions of children in the county, which led to a call for more integrated services—a major focus of Success by 6.

The United Way of Lancaster County has established a School Readiness Initiative, Success by 6, with a Governing Board. The Board includes both public- and private-sector leaders and stakeholders. In 1999, leaders in Lancaster County developed extensive data on the conditions of children in the county, such as those listed earlier, which led to a call for more integrated services—a major focus of Success by 6.

As a result, three parenting programs now collaborate. The Nurse Family Parent Program, Parents as Teachers, and Healthy Beginnings have worked to identify their appropriate niches in meeting the needs of families with young children by establishing screening and referral systems to get families the help they need.

Success by 6 has done similar work in coordinating programs and services to get children health coverage,

including working with two health foundations created through hospital conversions. Success by 6 also is working to reduce the existing 31 percent turnover rate for child care providers within the child care community and to increase child care quality, including developing training programs.

The existence of strong business and private-sector leadership, along with public-sector leadership and vision, has made it possible to engage in advocacy and public mobilization, as well as service design and implementation. Success by 6 has an advocacy team that both aids in this community mobilization and seeks to secure grants and funding support for identified early childhood needs.

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## HAMPTON ROADS, VIRGINIA

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Like many New England states, Virginia's local governmental structure is largely through cities and towns. The Hampton Roads area of Virginia is composed of 17 separate municipalities, each with its own health and human service agencies. Its overall population is 1.6 million, 62 percent white and 32 percent African American, with the remainder Hispanic, Asian, and others. The area lags behind the rest of the state in women receiving prenatal care in the first trimester and in the healthy

The Partnership established Square One to focus on early childhood issues under one of its six primary economic development goals, improving the region's emerging workforce.

birth index. While school readiness improved from 26 percent of local children identified as "needing more instruction" in 2000 to only 20 percent in 2003, the proportion of children not ready for school is still very high.

The Hampton Roads Partnership was established in 1996 as an economic development coalition. The Partnership includes elected officials of the municipalities as well as leaders in business, education, the military, and the community. The Partnership established Square One to focus on early childhood issues under one of its six primary economic development goals, improving the region's emerging workforce.

James Eason, the former mayor of Hampton and now president and CEO of the Hampton Roads Partnership, has placed special emphasis upon workforce development and Square One's role in that development. Square One has become a locus for planning and mobilizing communities around a variety of early childhood issues. In fact, Square One set out a four-phase approach to this mobilization and action:

- ☆ listen to the system—to discover the emergent future;
- ☆ develop a strategic theme—to give direction to the campaign;
- ☆ sweep people in—to mobilize energies; and
- ☆ build the infrastructure—to make change possible.

The listening phase identified two key concerns around school readiness—the need to plan for the challenges the region would face in meeting the 2004 state standards of learning (SOL) performance tests and the need to improve birth outcomes. Sweeping people in involved a public awareness campaign making use of Dr. Seuss and *Green Eggs and Ham*. These listening, theme development, and public awareness activities both raised school readiness issues to heightened community attention and established Square One as a credible focal point for action.

Subsequently, Square One has maintained its presence by reporting regularly on the status of children 0–5, based upon a set of benchmarks. It also has secured

funding for early childhood initiatives and programs and served as a convening and coordinating body across existing early childhood services and collaborative programs. Its attachment to the Partnership has assisted in maintaining its visibility as an essential element in the long-term future of the region. Square One is currently at its own crossroads, as its initial funding has run out and it must seek a financial base to sustain its infrastructure.

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## COMMON THEMES

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These six local government efforts to build early learning systems to achieve school readiness are not unique, but they are among the most advanced, sophisticated, and successful efforts in the country. Three (Miami-Dade, Orange, and Santa Clara counties) started with substantial new sources of funding to expand school readiness strategies in their communities. Three (Richland and Lancaster counties and the Hampton Roads region) are convening and planning entities, seeking to identify sources for new investment in promising programs but primarily serving as coordinating entities for existing funded services.

As a cautionary note, even those with substantial new funding have not had sufficient resources to truly build an early learning “system” that can reach

and serve the needs of young children in their communities to assure “school readiness.” They can and have used their funding to boost activity and to test and demonstrate success on specific aspects of a school readiness agenda, but they recognize that there are not sufficient resources available to scale up these activities to create a true system for every child. Therefore, all six local government efforts have recognized that system building requires additional funding as well as redirected and better coordinated resources.

The introduction to the individual case studies in the full report provides a number of cross-site lessons from these efforts. This summary focuses upon six key themes that appear common to these efforts and instrumental to the successes they have been able to achieve.

First, these efforts all have demonstrated an *entrepreneurial* mind set, identifying and taking advantage of opportunities as they have developed, and engaging in strategic planning but also taking actions to enhance or develop programs where opportunities present themselves. They have served as places for people to get together to fashion solutions, sometimes for such specific issues as improved responses to childhood asthma. This has made it possible for people with passion and energy to act on their issues and to share and broaden the leadership base.

Second, they all are *comprehensive* in their thinking and approach. They recognize that achieving school readiness requires not only health and nutrition, early care and education, and early intervention services specifically for young children, but also supports and services, often in these same areas, for parents and caregivers. While they may take strategic and entrepreneurial actions, they maintain an overall holistic and ecological approach that places young children in the context of their families, neighborhoods, and communities.

Third, these efforts all have been *integrative* in nature and sought, in service design and delivery, to connect different programs and people serving the same young children and their families, whether from health, early care and education, early intervention, or family support. They have recognized that effective integration is not trying to place individual programmatic efforts within a single organizational hierarchy, but rather in taking advantage of common interests and opportunities. These include sharing common training activities and outreach efforts, outstationing personnel, and using each other's facilities as places to provide services—in effect moving to where the children and families already are rather than requiring the young children to travel long distances to service providers.

Fourth, they have focused considerable attention to both short-term and long-term *base building*, engaging in public education and advocacy campaigns to heighten public awareness of early learning and the need to leverage additional investments to achieve school readiness. The business community has been key in this base building in many sites, both because of its capacity to secure resources and set community agendas and because of its bottom-line investment orientation to marketing the development of an early learning system. This business orientation has often helped the provider and advocacy communities move toward a more results-based framework in their own work and recognize their place in a larger system that must demonstrate results in order to receive additional funding support. Alternatively, the business community has gained a new appreciation for the importance of early learning and the scope and range of investments that need to occur to achieve school readiness on a community-wide level.

Fifth, they have produced some of their most impressive breakthroughs as a result of being *consumer focused*. Some of the best programmatic solutions have been established through drawing upon voluntary and informal support systems within neighborhoods and communities, and not simply relying upon professional services. When families with young children are involved in planning, the

solutions often draw heavily upon informal supports and reciprocity and are much less likely to be dependent on providers, with multiple benefits to consumers and the community.

Finally, they have sought to become *locally embedded*, sometimes even at a neighborhood level. Particularly for young children and their families, the early learning environment is usually quite intimate and bounded, with the child's life experiences often concentrated in a few blocks immediately around home. Early learning experiences and supports need to be provided within this environment, which requires localized strategies that must build upon (or create) safe and warm places where young children and their families congregate. These local government

When families with young children are involved in planning, the solutions often draw heavily upon informal supports and reciprocity and are much less likely to be dependent on providers, with multiple benefits to consumers and the community.

efforts all have sought to better devolve design and delivery to the level that best meets young children's and family's needs.

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## CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

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Each of these six local government efforts to build early learning systems to achieve school readiness is a work in progress. None of them are sufficiently resourced at this time to achieve their full goals, nor is it likely that this will be possible without additional state and federal support. All are building a base, however, for this to occur, through increasing public awareness, identifying needs, and showing how those needs can be successfully met.

Each of the six local government efforts also has innovations worth sharing with others in the field, successful ways to respond to specific needs and opportunities that exist in all communities. Some of these are described in the individual case studies, but many of the ideas and strategies developed in these laboratories deserve to be shared in more detail. This applies not only to the six local government efforts documented here, but also to the many other local collaborative efforts around the country that focus upon early learning and school readiness.

In addition, such local efforts can be powerful advocates for the broader state and federal responses necessary to build early learning systems throughout the country, if they act collectively. As works in progress, they will need to be sustained not only for their programmatic efforts, but also for their base-building and mobilization activities within their own communities and on a state and national level as well.

*Ann Segal wishes to acknowledge the generous time and input provided by the many extraordinary people working so hard to provide support for children and families in these sites.*

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