



Solving School Readiness: The Three-Component Solution

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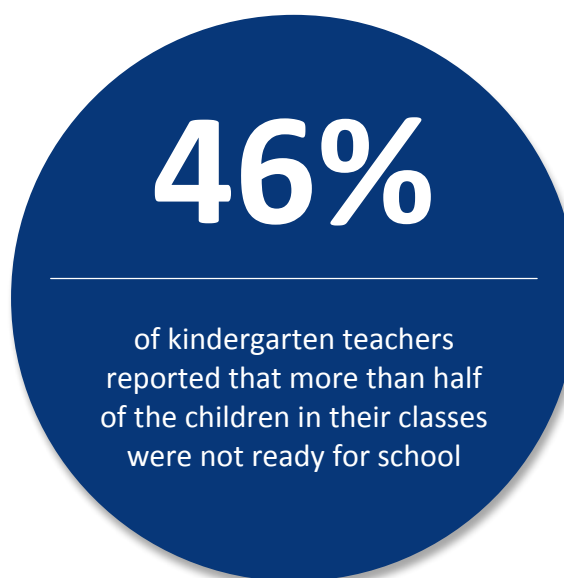
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School readiness is a topic that is constantly present in studies concerning early childhood education and development—this should not be surprising considering the impact school readiness can have on a child’s long-term academic and developmental success. As stated in one article, school readiness is “a key role in young children’s future interpersonal adjustment and academic success” (Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller 2008, p. 1). With this information in mind, it is crucial to examine the issues of school readiness in order to produce a resolution for it.

According to one survey - conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning - 46% of kindergarten teachers reported that more than half of the children in their classes were not ready for school (Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller 2008, p. 16). Additionally, an issue cannot be solved until it is acknowledged; considering the clear issues with school readiness, one question must be answered in order to begin a path to the solution(s): *what are the components needed to solve school readiness issues?* While there are many possible answers to this question, there are three components—developmental screenings, child care quality, and parental engagement—



that have been proven to increase school readiness. If *all* three of these components are implemented as mandatory standards for all childcare environments, the issues of school readiness will drastically fade away.

Brilliantly, the federal government has acknowledged the issue of school-readiness through its 2014 historical bi-partisan legislation, known as the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). The reauthorization of CCDBG provides states a framework with a focus on school-readiness that illuminates the three components. The legislation encourages states/lead agencies to adopt policies to promote

The Three-Component Solution to Increased School Readiness

1. Developmental screenings
2. Child care quality
3. Parental engagement

developmental screenings and parental engagement activities in child care programs, and to implement quality rating and improvement systems.

The Administration of Children and Families funds two separate programs that address the early care and education needs of young children: Head Start and Child Care. Many of the new components of CCDBG have been mainstays of Head Start, from developmental screenings to parental engagement. One big piece that affects child care quality that is recommended through CCDBG, but required for Head Start is post-secondary education for most staff positions. Over 20 years ago, Kagan and Neuman (1996) analyzed national studies relating to staff education/ training to child care quality, and found that more training/education yields higher quality. Since there is a correlation between child care quality and staff education/training, the component of quality is heavily dependent on a program's commitment to formation and maintenance of a competent workforce.

Problem Definition

Child care environments should implement the three components- developmental screenings, child care quality, and parental engagement to increase school-readiness.

Solution

The incorporation of the three components must be weaved into the structural and process

features of child care environments. Quality child care is typically measured by process and structural features. Structural features are those policies and practices that are fixed, usually by state licensing rules, and/or program guidelines, that have an indirect influence on the child's experience. Process features are elements like caregiver quality: interactions, use of language, discipline practices, etc. that are believed to have a direct effect on a child's development. If the three components are reflected in both the structural and process features children will have an enhanced learning experience and most likely be school-ready.

Responsibility

Everyone concerned with children's development shares the responsibility for quality child care. This responsibility even extends beyond parents, educators, and human service professionals, to our policy makers and the leaders in neighborhoods and business communities. The additional two components – developmental screenings and parental engagement are extensions of quality child care. Policy makers via regulatory systems can impose these as requirements, but the utility and implementation must be embraced by the child care staff.

For example, many child care environments make minimal effort to reach out to parents/ guardians and, when they do, represent “engagement” as the need to support program priorities rather than to create a

mutual responsibility for supporting children's success. Parent engagement or more appropriately stated, family engagement should be a shared responsibility that consists of mutually agreed upon, or co-constructed, roles. Given that learning occurs before children enroll, and that it also takes place beyond the school walls, a shared responsibility for children's learning is the foundation for effective family engagement (Rosenburg, Lopez, & Westmoreland, 2009). This can be accomplished via inclusive strategies that respect and integrate family values and aspirations, home, culture, and community into the context of activities offered to families. It is important to concede that there are not specific times when family engagement is more or less important for children's success. Developmental screenings are crucial to: identify problems that otherwise go unnoticed at a point of maximum impact, identify children in need of further assessment, and enable qualifying children access to needed services.

Developmental screenings are most important during the child care years, birth to three years of age. Child care staff are in an ideal position to assess children's development and often are the first to observe potential delays. These environments usually have good relationships with the parents, and can partner with them in monitoring and supporting their child's development. However, this necessitates typical and atypical child development knowledge, and keen observation skills. There are child care environments that may employ a child development specialist to complete the necessary screenings for accuracy, consistency and efficacy. Nevertheless, developmental screenings are best implemented and utilized by the environment that is accountable for the education and care of the child being screened – the child care environment.

Benefits

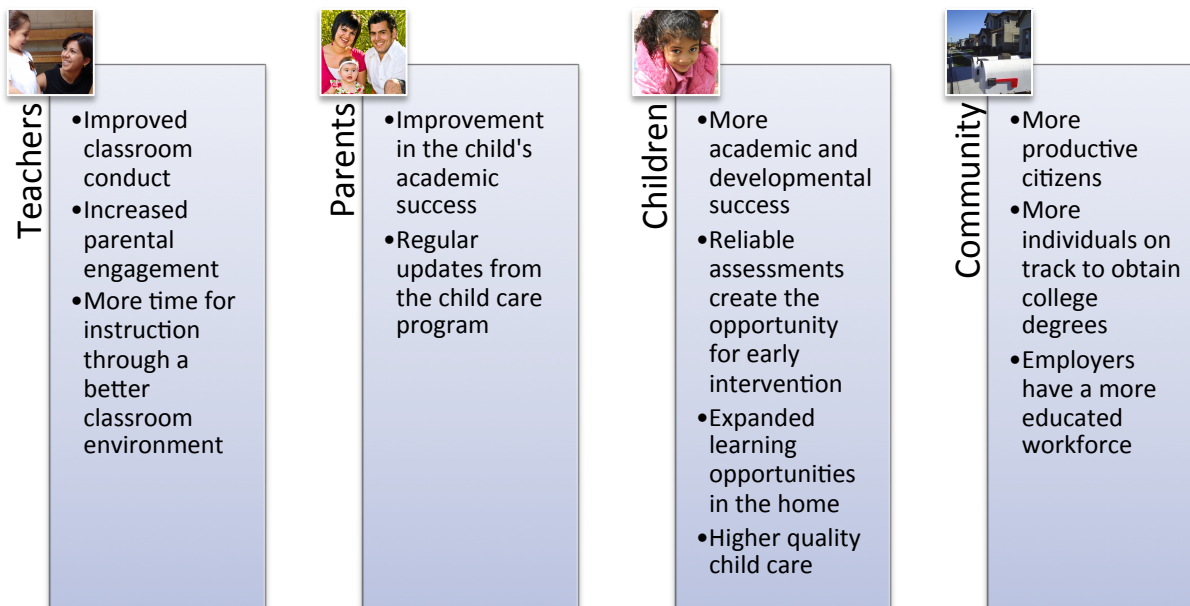
There are multitudinous benefits of implementing the three components—

developmental screenings, child care quality, and parental engagement—as mandatory standards for all childcare environments. Some of said benefits include a return on investment for the teachers, parents, children, and the community as a whole.

Because research has shown that issues with school readiness causes issues with students' classroom *conduct* (Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller 2008, p. 16), teachers would majorly benefit from the results of the three components being present as part of their companies' standards. Concerning parental engagement in particular, studies have shown that there is “increasing evidence to suggest that teachers' efforts to involve parents in ways to support their children's learning at home...have positive effects on children's academic, social and emotional competence” (Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller 2008, p. 3). Therefore, the implementation of the three components would help to prevent conduct issues, thus contributing to the overall betterment of the classroom environment and productivity of a teacher's job.

Regarding the parents' return on investment, they will quickly begin to see improvement in their children's academic success, due to the three components being put into action. Parents need the child care/school environment to provide information on their child's developmental progress and daily activities. An environment that consistently engages parents on these issues will set a tone of responsiveness and reciprocity. For example, reading to children is crucial for early language acquisition and communication skills. Parents are more likely to interact with a focus on literacy when their child care environment provides motivation with regular information and resources. Therefore, children do better when parents and early childhood teachers form a strong partnership (Weigel & Bennett, 2005).

Benefits of the Three-Component Solution



Furthermore, children who attend childcare environments with the three components in place will benefit from obtaining better academic and developmental success. Reliable developmental assessments will provide a point of reference to scaffold a child's development. It will catch possible concerns early to allow for proper interventions to be applied timely. Parental engagement will allow for openness for dialogue around the child's needs, and connect/expand the learning beyond the walls of the child care environment. Additionally, quality child care will assure the staff, environment, and activities can meet the needs of the children in care. Child care quality is a well-documented predictor of children's intellectual and social development.

Lastly, the community will benefit from the three components, due to the fact that children who are positively impacted by the three components will become productive citizens, thus paving the way not only for future academic success, but

economic success as well. Several studies attest to the fact that individuals who go on to obtain college degrees earn more and are happier. Citing one study, research showed that those who gain "higher levels of education earn more, pay more taxes, and are more likely than others to be employed" furthermore, "college education increases the chance that adults will move up the socioeconomic ladder and reduces the chance that adults will rely on public assistance," (Broad, 2017, p.A36). Therefore, benefits of quality child care amass to society at-large, including all children in schools with children who had child care; taxpayers, who are likely to save in costs of future schooling by reduction in cost for programs like special and remedial education; employers, who have productive employees; and citizens, due to future reductions in crime and public assistance programs.



Summary

School-readiness begins with the child's earliest experiences. Families often rely on child care arrangements outside of the home, to meet the child's care and education needs. These environments become responsible for care and education of the young child, and therefore the production of a school-ready child. Research reveals three components are necessary for child care environments to achieve school-readiness - developmental screenings, child care quality, and parental engagement. These components must be reflected in the structural and process features of a child care program, with emphasis on teacher training/education. When these elements are present, an awesome return on investment is bequeathed onto the teacher, parent, child and the community at-large.

Call to Action

Given knowledge of the three components, child care environments must prepare for and/or request support for implementation. Parents and the community at-large must advocate for support, in the form of policy and funding. The intended illustration as set forth by this manuscript provides reasonable rationalization and supportable information for the three components to be considered the hallmarks of school-readiness in Tennessee.

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