

Ready Schools for Ready Kids

*An Envisioned Future for All
New Mexico's Children and Families*

Strategies for School Success

New Mexico SPARK
Leadership for Ready Schools Team

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A New Era in Education

Executive Summary

This report is presented by the NM SPARK Leadership for Ready Schools Team, a New Mexico Community Foundation initiative with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the McCune Charitable Foundations, Daniels Fund, J.F. Maddox Foundation, Brindle Foundation and others. The NM SPARK Leadership for Ready Schools Team is comprised of a diverse group of New Mexico's early childhood, public education and business. The team was convened in early 2007 to select key strategies to focus their efforts in contributing toward systems change that promotes school success.

The SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) initiative is one key component of the New Mexico Community Foundation's vision to "walk with the community". NM SPARK is focused on meeting the educational and health needs of children in our state to ensure their success knowing that to achieve this we must walk with others.

The report is an effort to share the commitment to building an early childhood movement in New Mexico, a state that has historically not been able to tip the scales on child well-being. The report "makes the case" for the need to invest in school readiness. The factors that contribute to New Mexico's rating of 46th in the nation in child well-being illustrate the human and economic impact associated with poor educational outcomes.

Public funds in New Mexico are currently skewed toward remediation. In 2005, an staggering \$1 billion was spent in the areas of crime including prisons, welfare and unemployment. We can do better by providing public funding in support of young children. Investing in early childhood is an investment in New Mexico's economic well-

being. Research has demonstrated that every dollar spent in early childhood yields a \$1 to \$7 rate of return; for every dollar spent, seven dollars are generated in productive workforce capital. Investing in productivity and prevention rather than dedicating public funds to unemployment and prisons only makes sense. Ensuring school success for New Mexico children and youth is the key.

The good news is that multiple early childhood initiatives are currently underway in New Mexico. As in any complex system, however, there are many dimensions to school success. The Leadership for Ready Schools team is bringing a focus on the important issue of Transition.

Supportive transition across the grade levels, most significantly, the move from preschool to kindergarten, contributes to school success. Transition can be effectively achieved with partnerships between early childhood preschool programs and kindergarten. The NM SPARK Leadership for Ready Schools Team is promoting that transition process through the "Joining Hands" Framework, an approach and set of tools that help to build bridges from early childhood education through higher education.

The Leadership for Ready Schools Team is directing its efforts at both the community and statewide levels. Strategies at the community level are aimed toward growing the numbers of Joining Hands teams and addressing their long term preservation. If efforts are to succeed in communities, policies, programs and funding at the state level must be aligned. At the state level, the LRST is identifying strategic policy and funding opportunities that will support the growth and sustainability of Joining Hands.

Envision a Future for New Mexico where...

- **All Children are** physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally healthy. All children are supported and are engaged, happy learners in developing to their full potential. All children are treated as competent capable and resourceful. All children have the opportunity to be safe and to achieve economic success and a chance to contribute to society.
 - **All Families have** the resources they need. All families are empowered with the necessary skills, resources, knowledge and attitudes to be and to raise healthy families. All families have open access to educational opportunities within their communities.
 - **All Communities are** responsive to the needs, hopes and dreams of families. In every New Mexico community, each child matters. All communities foster connectedness among and investment in their members. Unique circumstances are responded to creatively and collaboratively by the community. All communities create supportive environments in which all families can access the services necessary to promote family and child success.
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What Would This Future Look Like?

In this future children explore new opportunities and challenges which nurture their curiosity, brightness, and dreams. Their individualized needs are attended to and met.

Families are involved in the education of their children. Families understand the connections between what is needed to promote student success and how the actions taken by the schools, cities, counties and state will support them and their children.

Communities feel that every child matters and see children as competent, capable and resourceful. Communities provide leadership in supporting the well-being of children at various levels from the schools, to parks, to libraries. Communities identify and offer critical services that fill in the gaps for families.



In this future....

- ❖ Children are happy and are learning
- ❖ Families are involved
- ❖ Communities support children and their families

How Close to Achieving this Vision are we?



It is time to act!

The people of New Mexico have grown tired of hearing that New Mexico is either lagging behind the rest of the country in child well being or leading the country in negative indicators.

In 2006 New Mexico was ranked 46th nationally in child well-being.¹ Measures of child well-being include employment of parents, health care access, low birth weight babies, immunization rates, teen parents and high school drop-outs.

Table 1: New Mexico Ranking on Selected Indicators of Child Well-Being²

<i>Selected Indicators</i>	<i>New Mexico's Ranking Nationally</i>
Teen Birth Rate	48 th
High School Drop-outs	48 th
Children in Poverty	48 th
Low Birthweight Babies	33 rd
Infant Mortality	15 th

In a state where many committed people are acting to improve the well-being of young children poverty, lack of health care, and systems that do not support children and families, stand in the way. Despite all of the good work underway, we must face that what we are doing is not working.

Astoundingly, fifty percent (50%) as compared with 21% nationally of children in New Mexico live in poverty. Poverty is the root cause of problems in other critical life domains including employment, housing and transportation.

Health care, the cornerstone of child well-being, is something that many children in New Mexico cannot access. Fourteen percent (14%) of children lack health insurance compared to 11% of uninsured children nationally.

Choosing early childhood as a policy priority in the face of such challenges is absolutely essential and until we make the tough decisions, these conditions will persist.

New Mexico ranks 46th in the nation in child well-being.

Making the Case for Investing in New Mexico's Young Children

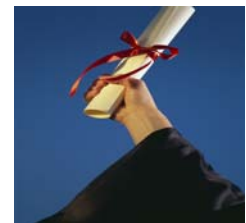


A Healthy New Mexico Economy depends upon a well-prepared workforce. Investing public dollars in quality early learning from birth through eight years old is an investment in human capital.

The education of children begins at birth. The most rapid period of brain development occurs in the first three years of life. Preparation for a quality workforce must begin early. Research shows that a strong early start is more likely to lead to high school graduation and college.

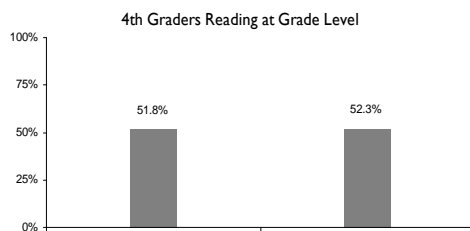
Higher paying professions such as accountants, computer programmers, teachers, physicists and engineers require a college degree. Research findings have shown that adults without college degrees “can expect to earn an annual income of around \$27,500” qualifying only for jobs such as waiters, sales clerks or bank tellers.³ This compares to annual earnings of \$51,554 for adults with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree.⁴

The road out of poverty, education, improves the lives of graduates, but furthermore supports the community as earnings are spent locally. Greater benefits are also realized. The costs associated with poverty including prisons, welfare payments and special education are reduced. These are considered the “costs of bad results”. Translated into real dollars, New Mexico spent \$1 billion in juvenile justice, child abuse, welfare and correction costs in 2005.⁵



On a per child basis, in 2006, an estimated \$3,828 per child was spent in high end remediation services. Consider the impact of having invested these public expenditures into building human capital by spending in quality early learning for children.

Preparing New Mexico’s workforce is a big challenge. We are rated 46th in the country for High School Drop-outs. In 2005, close to 5,000 high school seniors did not graduate and in 2006, 4,681 seniors did not graduate; this has earned New Mexico a rating of 46th in the country in drop-out rates.⁶ Despite on-going school improvements, gains made in decreasing drop-out rates between 2005 and 2006 were less than 1%. Furthermore, less than 10% of high school graduates historically apply to college.



Source: 2007 NM Children’s Report Card. NM Test Results & Achievement Gaps; NM PED, Student Assessment Bureau, October 2006.

We are not faring much better in the lives of young children. An indicator of the effectiveness of early education shows up in a child’s ability to read or demonstrate mathematical strategies and skills at grade level by the 4th grade. In 2005-2006, slightly above half (52.3%) of New Mexico’s 4th graders were reading at grade level, less that 1% over 2004-2005.^a

^a These data do not make the distinction between children who attended early learning programs; it represents all children in public schools. Data for children who attended NM PreK in New Mexico are not yet available.

SCHOOL SUCCESS is a key strategy in addressing the conditions that New Mexico's children face. It is a foundation with life long pay-offs. When children are ready for school, the opportunities for success are boundless. They thrive in school and success breeds further success.

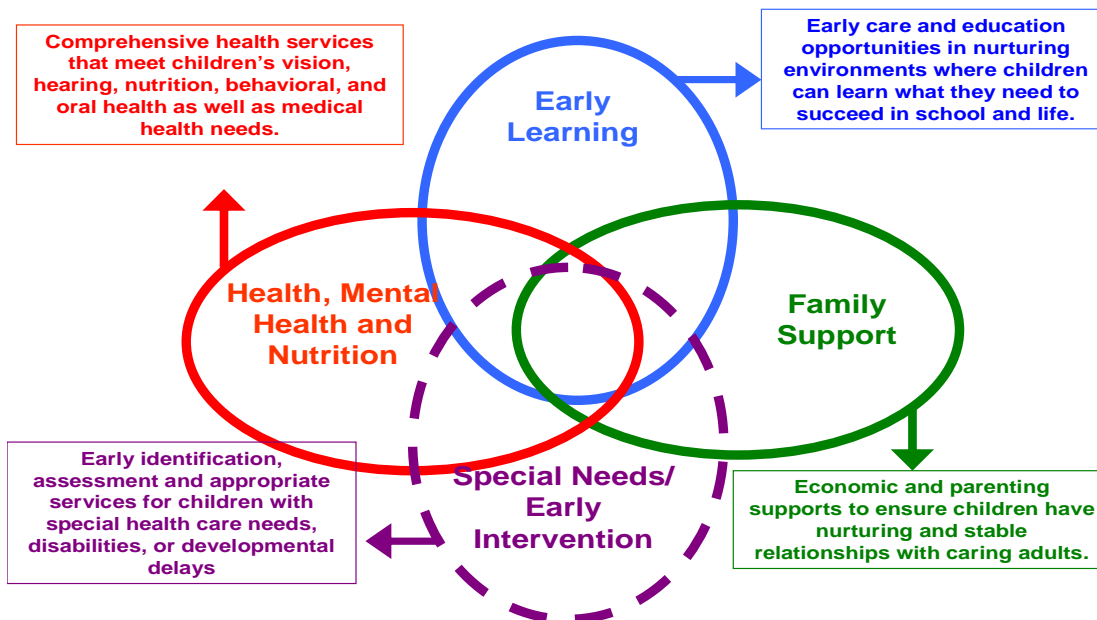
Children who are ready for school have the ability to follow directions and can work with others. They have an understanding of and familiarity with language and how it works such as phonemic awareness. They possess language skills appropriate to their developmental age/grade level. School success also gives children confidence in themselves as capable and competent learners. Without the tools to enter school "ready", a burden is placed on the family, schools and community.



SCHOOL READINESS depends upon how well we do at providing learning opportunities for young children. Children who have received high quality early learning opportunities from birth through 3rd grade, have the foundation for the language and literacy development needed for school success.

A robust and integrated early childhood system will contribute to assuring school readiness for New Mexico's children. Beyond a strong foundation in early learning, the system must include health, early intervention for children with special needs and family support. Children learn when they are physically and mentally healthy and when their families are involved in their education. Children also learn when any developmental conditions they may have are detected and addressed early; no child should reach school with an undetected developmental condition. Health, mental health, nutrition, early learning, family support and special needs/early intervention are the key components of a high quality early childhood system and must be available to all children if we expect to improve upon the well-being of New Mexico's children.

State Early Childhood Development System



Source: Early Childhood Systems Working Group, 2007. The Early Childhood Systems Working Group is a group of 12 national organizations examining early childhood systems issues. These groups include: The Alliance for Early Childhood Finance, The Build Initiative, The Children's Project, Center for Law and Social Policy, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Center Children in Poverty, National Child Care Information Center, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center, State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network, Zero to Three.

“JOINING HANDS”: Partnerships Work!

When families, schools, communities, towns, cities and the state come together to support the raising of happy healthy children who are ready to learn, effective, meaningful partnerships are formed. No one system, not the families, not the schools, not government nor communities can do it alone; we are all part of the solution.



Relationships formed through Joining Hands Teams between and among community, state, schools and families are the basis for sustainable partnerships. Joining Hands Teams collaborate within their communities to structure a continuum that helps young students feel comfortable, confident, eager to learn, and able to achieve their greatest potential.

The Joining Hands Framework is guided by eight principles: communication; equal partners and joint decision makers; comprehensive and responsive services; families as partners; knowledge and skill development; respect for culture and home language; developmentally appropriate practice; and, assessment of partnership effectiveness.⁷

By adopting the eight principles, participating systems (schools, families, and communities, state) will begin to address mutual concerns in a consistent manner. Guided by these principles, the dream of assuring that all New Mexico's children grow into adults who are ready for life is a possibility.

Evaluation findings demonstrate that, in NM SPARK Joining Hands sites:

Ready Kids

Children who enter kindergarten ready and enthusiastic to learn do better right from the start!

- **NM SPARK** children enter kindergarten ready to learn:
 - Showing significantly higher 'kindergarten readiness' scores on KDPR (total, math, and language),
 - Needing less targeted literacy intervention,
 - Reaching benchmark by the end of their kindergarten year,
 - Showing decreased 'chaos' during the first month of schools (NM SPARK children more settled and ready)

Ready Families

Families who are engaged in their children's education is key to school success.

- Parent participation in their child's education has increased.
 - Parents are participating in more school activities.
 - Policies requiring parent participation in decision making are in place in more schools.

Ready Schools

Preschool can prepare children for school but if the schools are unable to help them make the transition to school, big gains can be lost.

- % of preschool children who attend kindergarten has increased.
- Preschool and kindergarten teachers participating in transition teams in preparation for children beginning kindergarten has increased.
 - More teachers are receiving transition training.
 - More sharing of child preschool records is occurring so that kindergarten teachers can pick up where the child's preschool learning left off.

Joining Hands Teams ...

foster communication among adults and institutions to ensure children's needs are met at every stage in their development. These partnerships are the key to joining together to create local solutions to local problems.

- Membership in Joining Hands Teams has increased.
- Joining Hands Teams report improved communication and joint decision-making over the four years of SPARK.



Bringing Joining Hands to scale is the priority of the Leadership for Ready Schools Team (LRST). Making Ready Children and Ready Schools a reality takes the leadership that the LRST brings. We know that Joining Hands is working in communities and it is now time to spread the model throughout New Mexico.

“The Leadership for Ready Schools Team is charged with developing and supporting policies, systems and financing to establish Joining Hands as New Mexico’s framework to bridge and create partnerships in order to deliver the promise of Ready Schools for Ready Kids.”

LRST Charge 2007



What will it take to bring Joining Hands to scale in New Mexico.

Bringing Joining Hands to scale in New Mexico requires strategic action in New Mexico communities as well as at the state level. The LRST has adopted two key strategies along with a plan of action specifically directed toward accomplishing growth and sustainability of Joining Hands.

- I. **Initiate Partnerships & Collaboration** - Creating and supporting robust Joining Hands sites in communities will help to grow effective partnerships throughout New Mexico. Building from the foundation that SPARK Joining Hands sites have established, creating teams throughout New Mexico communities is needed.

- II. **Align the Early Childhood Systems**
The Early Childhood System includes early education and child development programs funded and administered at the state level. The LRST systems alignment strategy is focused upon addressing funding and policy trends in responding to the needs of “all” New Mexico’s children. This strategy promotes exploration of policy, programmatic and funding opportunities that can be leveraged to support growth and sustainability of Joining Hands throughout the state. The strategy of aligning systems begins with building a foundation, a shared understanding of the barriers families and their children experience because systems are not aligned.

Meeting current and future challenges will take enrolling key policy, education and business partners in becoming part of the solution. This is particularly important at a time when federal funding for children’s services are decreasing requiring the state and communities to become more resourceful in meeting the educational and health needs of children. In New Mexico, early childhood federal expenditures decreased by 12% between 2003 and 2007 while state expenditures increased by 8% to make up the difference.⁸ Funding decisions made by policy makers must be well-informed and be strategic so that they have the greatest impact supporting children and their families.

These strategies are designed to weave the principles Joining Hands partnerships into the fabric of the early childhood development system in New Mexico. Building from the foundation we have in place in the current system and on the successes of SPARK Joining Hands sites, the LRST action plan will move Joining Hands to the next phase.

New Mexico SPARK Leadership for Ready Schools Team Action Plan: KEY STRATEGIES

I. Leadership for Ready Schools Team Action Steps to Initiate Partnerships and Collaboration

<i>Outcome</i>	<i>What will be done?</i>	<i>How will it be done?</i>
<i>A. Sustain Joining Hands in communities</i>	<u>Training:</u> To sustain efforts in current Joining Hands sites, the LRST is promoting supports and/or incentives for sites to convene "Better Together" training and sustainability plans for on-going operation.	
<i>B. Provide opportunities to expand Joining Hands throughout the state</i>	<u>Funding:</u> The LRST is exploring Transition Grant funding for Joining Hands teams through the Public Education "Kindergarten – Third Plus" program or other public school improvement fund monies.	
	<u>Funding:</u> LRST is promoting broad funding for Transition Coordinators that will use Joining Hands principles as a key tool phased into all New Mexico school districts.	

II. Leadership for Ready Schools Team Action Steps to Align Early Childhood Systems

<i>What will be done?</i>	<i>How will it be done?</i>
<i>A. Promote Early Childhood Legislation</i>	<u>Early Childhood Teacher Professional Development:</u> The LRST is promoting legislation to fund Joining Hands training to be delivered through the New Mexico Universities or Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance Programs.
<i>B. New Mexico Public Education Department Policies</i>	<u>Include Joining Hands in Title I of the Education Act:</u> Title I of the Education Act requires schools to facilitate effective transition for children from preschool to kindergarten. The LRST is working with the New Mexico Public Education Department to promote the adoption of the Joining Hands principles as a core component of Title I transition and parent engagement practices for all Title I and preschool programs. This action has the potential for expanding Joining Hands statewide in every New Mexico school as Title I is a federal mandate.
	<u>Family Involvement Policy:</u> The LRST is working with the New Mexico Public Education Department to adopt a Family and Parent Involvement Policy. The policy is to include the establishment of a Parent Advisory Council, an agenda for family engagement and a Parent Tool Kit.
	<u>Early Childhood Teacher Licensing Policies:</u> The LRST is championing the adoption of the Joining Hands principles in the Public Education Early Childhood Licensing Syllabus.
<i>C. New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department Policies</i>	<u>Early Childhood Provider Licensing Policies:</u> To encourage Joining Hands in all early learning settings statewide, the LRST is working with the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department to include Joining Hands Principles in Early Childhood Development Program Licensing Standards.
<i>D. Support the Statewide Early Childhood Policy Agenda</i>	<u>Early Childhood Action Network Policy Agenda:</u> Working with the Early Childhood Action Network, the LRST is supporting legislation to: Create a Statewide Family Partnership Policy and to Promote the needs of young children through an Early Childhood Public Awareness Campaign.



End Notes

¹ *Kids Count Data Book, State Profiles of Child Well-Being*. Anne B. Casey Foundation. 2006.

² *Kids Count Data Book*, Ibid.

³ Swanson, Christopher B., *Learning and Earning*, pg. 1, Diplomas Count. Volume 26, Issue 40. 2007.

⁴ Anas, Brittany. *Degrees' value adds up*. Knight Rider Tribune Business News. Washington: November 8, 2006.

⁵ *Early Childhood Children's Budget*. New Mexico Early Childhood Action Network. 2007.

⁶ *Kids Count Data Book*, Ibid.

⁷ Lovelace, B., Rankin, M., Rivera, O., Sullivan, A., Joining Hands Strategies for Successful Transition. NM Comprehensive Head Start/K-3 Transition Project, NM Children, Youth and Families Department.

⁸ *Early Childhood Children's Budget*. Ibid.