



Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids



A program initiative of the
NEW MEXICO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

September/October 2004

WHAT is READINESS?

In New Mexico the SPARK project has the opportunity to help people start thinking about ... what does it mean to have "Ready Kids"; and, what does it mean to have "Ready Schools"?

The NM SPARK project is suggesting people in communities get together to discuss these questions. Here are some other questions to think about....

- *What are ready kids to you?*
- *What do ready kids need to know?*
- *Do ready kids need health screenings?*
- *What do teachers of ready kids need to know?*
- *What does a ready school do?*

WHAT is a LEARNING ADVOCATE?

A working definition of a Learning Advocate includes: A parent, or other guardian, who is a voice for the child until the child can voice for him/herself. The Learning Advocate seeks answers about their child's learning and education, seeks resources to meet the child's unique needs and interests, helps move the child forward by knowing, listening to and supporting the child. A Learning Advocate respects, cares for, and nurtures the child through an intentional process that builds upon the child's strengths.

WHAT is T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® NEW MEXICO?

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® New Mexico is an education and compensation project that helps people working in early childhood settings to go to college, work toward their associate degrees in early childhood education and receive bonuses as they complete each year of schooling. The scholarships, which are available to NM SPARK early childhood programs, pay most of the cost of tuition and books, reimburse for paid release time from work, offer a travel stipend each semester and compensate teachers with bonuses at the end of each successful year of college work. NM SPARK is funding 25 scholarships this year.

NM SPARK IGNITES SIX SITES

The Presidential election season, the New Mexico State Fair, Chile Roasting and the beginning of a new school year are all September activities that have New Mexicans taking an active part in their communities.

NM SPARK, an Initiative of the New Mexico Community Foundation through grants from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, McCune Charitable Foundation and Daniels Fund, also has people involved in their communities.

SPARK Projects work within the systems of public elementary schools and child development early learning centers.

In New Mexico six communities are engaged in the project: Albuquerque, Doña Ana County, Española, Hobbs, Laguna, and San Juan County.

NM SPARK has five goals to enhance the way communities work together to better transition their children into kindergarten. These include:

1. Family Engagement
2. Early Childhood and Elementary School Collaboration
3. Early Childhood Best Practices
4. Elementary School Best Practices
5. Policies at all levels that inform the goals.

These goals fold into the overarching goals identified by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for the National SPARK Project which emphasis alignment of systems, assessing 3 year olds and having a 'Learning Advocate' for the children enrolled in SPARK programs. New Mexico is among 8 other states to participate in the National SPARK Project including Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio and Washington, DC.

Each site in New Mexico has a local coordinator and a local council that facilitate the articulation of these goals. Grants to the participating NM SPARK Sites include funding for parent engagement activities and professional development of early childhood teachers, elementary school early-childhood teachers, and parents. The professional development is designed by the local councils based on community needs.

NM SPARK is working to incorporate Joining Hands, T.E.A.C.H.® Early Childhood NM, Project F.L.E.C.H.A. (Family Leadership for Education, Culture and Healthcare Access), and Policy Leadership training with the Human Needs Coordinating Council in our Learning Circles.

Within each site there are also "Joining Hands Teams". These JH Teams include staff from a child development center and elementary school that look to develop grass roots partnerships that build strong relationships. Joining Hands has eight guiding principles to assist in this process.

This year is a very important year for NM SPARK. We are engaging our communities in conversations around being learning advocates for their children, good transition activities for children and families, developing a definition of readiness and what that might mean. We are encouraging schools and community leaders to think about what readiness means to them and the importance of appropriate early childhood.

We look forward to a great year and hope our early childhood knowledge SPARKS you to learn more about the early years.

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Other New Mexico Community Foundation *news*...

NMCF Grants \$1,190,460 to New Mexico Non-Profit Organizations in Latest Round of Grant-making

At its recent meeting, the Board of Directors of the New Mexico Community Foundation awarded \$1,190,460 to some 90 non-profit organizations throughout the state.

Grantees included Albuquerque Public Schools, New Mexico Forum for Youth in Community, New Mexico College Awareness Coalition, NM PIRG, Southwest Research & Information Center, NM Community Development Loan Fund, People Living Through Cancer, PB & J Family Services, Enlace Comunitario, Cuidando Los Niños, NM TEACH, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps., Santa Fe New Music, Music from Angel Fire, Las Cumbres Learning Services, Rio Grande Restoration, Renewable Energy Partners of NM, Sustainable Communities, Inc., Self Help, Inc., The Life Link,

Dove Learning Center/NMSU, Colonias Development Council/Columbus Child Care Center, Child & Family Services of Lea County, Mesilla Valley Youth Foundation/Court Youth Center, Community Action Agency of So. NM, Jardín de los Niños, Carlsbad Mental Health Assoc., Tobosa Developmental Services... *just to name a few!*

Grants in this round supported activities of non-profits in the areas of early childhood education, arts, youth development, healthcare, environment, emergency need, civic engagement, economic development, and non-profit capacity building.

In 2003, the Foundation awarded over \$2.5 million in grants, and expects to exceed \$3 million in grant-making during 2004 making it among the largest grant making organizations in New Mexico.