



Investing in School Readiness

READY!

News for Early Childhood Educators • Spring 2006

Opportunity Knocks, Thanks to the School Readiness Network



"If it can be done anywhere," says early childhood expert Sharon Lynn Kagan, "it can be done in Fairfax County."

Dr. Kagan spoke at the February 1 launch of the **School Readiness Network**, an innovative partnership bringing together area businesses, Fairfax County's Office for Children, the Fairfax County Public Schools, community organizations, family child care providers, child care center staff, and other advocates in a major effort to organize and fund improvements in early childhood education.

In today's better-informed school systems, Dr. Kagan said, leaders understand that getting a child ready for school requires a coordinated effort among professional staff, school, community, child, and family.

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Virginia's Smart Beginnings

As part of the newly created Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, the statewide Smart Beginnings initiative engages communities interested in making the most of children's early years.

Last year, Smart Beginnings awarded three \$500,000 grants to local partnerships working to enhance early care and education and school readiness for young children. Our community was the recipient of one of these two-year grants. The local partnership includes Fairfax County's Office for Children, Fairfax County Public Schools, Northern Virginia Community College, and Fairfax Futures. This project creates a new school readiness certificate for early childhood professionals, engages parents in their children's education, and creates a continuum of learning from infancy through grade 12.

To read about local initiatives around the state and to find out more about Smart Beginnings, you can visit www.smartbeginnings.org.

Ready! for Best Practices

Fairfax Futures is launching *Ready!* as a quarterly newsletter about early childhood education in Fairfax County. In *Ready!*, you will read about best practices and learn what people in child care, preschool, and public school communities are saying about school readiness.



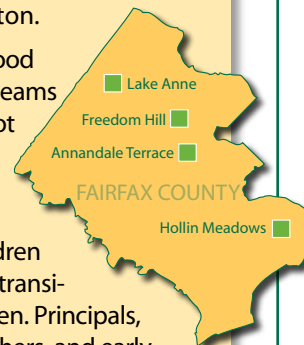
Four Neighborhoods Test a Team Approach

Collaboration is key to a pilot project that brings together child care programs and public elementary schools in four neighborhoods:

- ▶ Annandale Terrace, Annandale
- ▶ Freedom Hill, Vienna
- ▶ Hollin Meadows, Alexandria
- ▶ Lake Anne, Reston.

These neighborhood school readiness teams exchange and pilot test ideas for ways to better promote activities that help children and their families transition to kindergarten. Principals, kindergarten teachers, and early childhood professionals are in agreement that giving children experiences in following a daily routine, building self-help skills, and strengthening early language and literacy skills can go a long way in helping children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The pilot project is forging valuable relationships through visits by kindergarten teachers to child care programs and by child care center staff to kindergarten rooms. Families are also being encouraged by their child care programs to attend their neighborhood Kindergarten Orientation program.



Ready-to-use Resources

Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise (Rand Corporation)

Most early childhood educators appreciate that good child care can make a significant difference in how a child from a disadvantaged background performs in school. This study looks at reputable evaluations of 20 programs designed to “intervene” in the critical pre-K years and finds statistically significant benefits in at least two-thirds of the programs – that is, the results were not coincidental. With the right program, a disadvantaged child has a better chance of progressing through to high school graduation, without the need for special education and without repeating grades. The most effective programs seem to be those with well-trained caregivers. Furthermore, well-designed programs can produce economic benefits ranging from \$1.26 to \$17 for each dollar spent on the programs.

Why read this report? When someone asks why it’s worth it to spend more on early education, here are some good answers. The full report is 200 pages, but a very readable 20-page summary is free on the web.

www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG341/

Early Childhood Interventions, by Lynn A. Karoly, M. Rebecca Kilburn, and Jill S. Cannon, is funded by PNC Financial Services Group (a member of the Fairfax Futures **School Readiness Network**) as a part of its “Grow Up Great” school readiness campaign.

Starting Kindergarten in Fairfax County Public Schools

<http://www.fcps.k12.va.us/start/kindergarten.htm>

School readiness information for Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is a mouse-click away. There’s a host of valuable information available to help with transition to kindergarten, including a list of dates for all the kindergarten orientation events at each of the county’s elementary schools and a “find your neighborhood school” locator guide. Child care centers and family child care providers can help alert their families to the dates so they can participate in the kindergarten orientation program at their school.

These orientations are a great introduction to the kindergarten program and give parents and children a chance to visit a real kindergarten classroom and meet a kindergarten teacher. Child care providers and preschool educators can also make arrangements to bring small groups of children to these orientation events if parents are unable to participate.

The FCPS web site includes information about transportation, health certificate requirements, resources for parents, a typical day at school, and kindergarten curriculum.



Free Educational Events

April 22, 2006 Fairfax Futures Second Annual School Readiness Symposium

This year’s program, Terrific Transitions, will offer specific strategies to support children’s smooth transition from early childhood programs to kindergarten. Robert Pianta, early childhood expert, author, and professor at the University of Virginia, will provide the keynote address. Fairfax County Public Schools Assistant Superintendent, Instructional Services Department, Ann Monday, will moderate a panel discussion.

The symposium is made possible through a generous grant from the Freddie Mac Foundation. Additional support is provided by Capital One and PNC Financial Services Group through the **School Readiness Network**.

May 22, 2006 Supporting Literacy in Early Childhood

Mo Willems, author of *Knufflebunny*, *Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*, and other beloved titles for children, will speak at an evening (adults only) program focusing on the important role that child care providers play in encouraging young children’s literacy and readiness for school. This special event is made possible by a generous grant from Capital One, a business partner in the **School Readiness Network**.

For more information, visit www.fairfaxfutures.org

Children in pre-kindergarten are 50% less likely to need special education services than children who had no pre-K. They are 25% less likely to be held back by the end of the third grade.

(Source: NYS Education Department, Experimental Pre-K Evaluation)

Transition to Kindergarten: What are the Issues?

Robert C. Pianta
William Clay Parrish professor of clinical and
school psychology
Curry School of Education
University of Virginia



The transition to formal schooling is a landmark event for millions of children, families, and educators. There are several reasons why the transition to kindergarten and the early grades of school is important.

First, the early elementary years, particularly kindergarten, are important in establishing competencies critical to children's school success and achievement. These competencies involve children's social and academic skills as well as parents' involvement in the education of their children.

Second, early childhood learning environments are quite different from traditional elementary school classroom settings. Early childhood settings provide support for both children and families, recognizing the very clear developmental differences between preschool-age children and school-age children. The entrance to kindergarten is a point of considerable change and transition for families, children and staff. It is precisely these differences that transition practices attempt to bridge and overcome.

Third, increasingly large amounts of public funds are now dedicated to educating young children with the intent of boosting their chances for success in elementary school and beyond. It is imperative to understand and shape the conditions under which public funds can be best used.

In addition, children's experiences prior to kindergarten are different now than they were a generation ago:

- Kindergarten classes are larger and children have to deal with more children and more adults than in preschool.
- There is increasing emphasis on formal instruction and the acquisition of skills.
- Maturity demands are greater, such as sitting still for longer periods of time, self-control and attention.
- Children usually ride the bus without parents and with bigger children for the first time.
- More children now attend pre-school or are enrolled in non-familial care settings that give them experiences with peers and classroom-like environments.

Policy changes are needed...[for] the development and implementation of transition practices that smooth the shifts between preschool, home, and school.

Excerpted from "Transition to Kindergarten," by Robert Pianta and Martha Cox, NCEDL *Spotlights*, No. 35, March 2002 (www.ncedl.org).

An AHA! Moment

Participants in the Institute for Early Learning workshops, offered by Fairfax County's Office for Children, are sometimes asked to describe a new idea or concept they learned. One participant immediately answered: "Water, water, water!"

Why water? This response came from an Institute workshop called Brain Gym. Developed by nationally acclaimed educators, Brain Gym focuses on activities that improve neural pathways through movement, thereby enhancing concentration, coordination, listening, memory, organizing, reading, and writing.

A key to better brain function is water, which increases electrical activity among cells and facilitates messaging throughout the nervous system. Water reduces stress by nourishing cells. It also improves concentration and memory. If you want to think, drink.

For information on Brain Gym and other workshops, visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc/Institute.htm.

Got an AHA! moment? Tell us about it at newsletter@fairfaxfutures.org.

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PNC Bank regional president Michael Harreld, another keynote speaker at the **School Readiness Network** launch, noted the scarcity of workers with the intellectual skills needed for the entry and mid-level jobs that PNC and other businesses are seeking to fill. He urged other companies to join PNC in supporting quality early childhood education as an investment in their future workforce.

PNC is one of 42 entities that have already joined the **Network**, to demonstrate support for quality early childhood education as key to Fairfax County's continued success. (See current list of **Network** Members below.) The **School Readiness Network** encourages the professional development of early childhood educators and helps them get information, training, and resources. The **Network** also provides opportunities for child care professionals and public school teachers and administrators to meet with one another and exchange best practices. To become a member of the **School Readiness Network** and to learn how the **Network** can benefit you and the children in your care, please visit www.fairfaxfutures.org.



News from the School Readiness Network

Helping Fairfax Get Ready!

Fairfax Futures was delighted to launch the **School Readiness Network** on February 1 at an event held at Capital One. The **Network** has already attracted 42 members and continues to grow.

The Freddie Mac Foundation has been a strong supporter of Fairfax Futures' initiatives and helped to formally launch the **School Readiness Network** and the *Ready!* Newsletter. "We welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with other companies, community organizations, public agencies, and the early childhood education community to support the school readiness of our county's youngest children," says Dean Klein, senior manager of community relations.

Notes Vera Steiner Blore, Fairfax Futures executive director, "We are greatly appreciative of the Freddie Mac Foundation's investment in our efforts and look forward to continuing to work together to help young children in Fairfax County achieve success."



*Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Gerry Connolly (far right), FCPS Superintendent Dr. Jack Dale and the Freddie Mac Foundation's Dean Klein welcome new business partners of the **School Readiness Network**.*



Fairfax Futures is dedicated to ensuring that our county's youngest children are well prepared to succeed in school and in life. In collaboration with partners across the county, we invest in early childhood education and school readiness by bringing attention and financial resources to sustain our region's future.

Created by Freddie Mac in 1991, the Freddie Mac Foundation (www.FreddieMacFoundation.org) is dedicated to opening the doors to hope and opportunity for children and their families. As one of the largest corporate funders in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, Freddie Mac and the Freddie Mac Foundation have invested nearly \$250 million in organizations serving the community.

Freddie Mac
Foundation

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