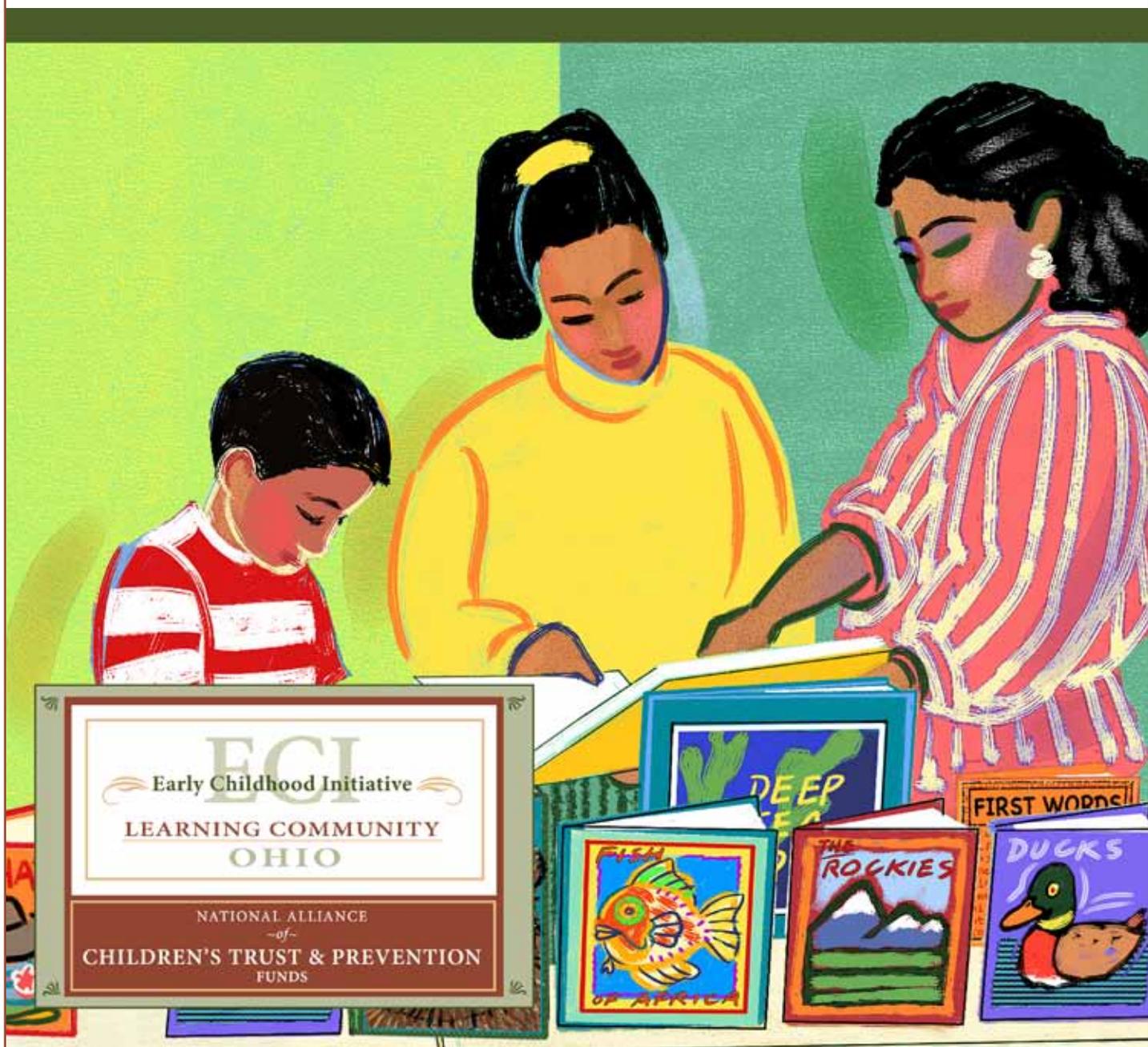


Strengthening Families and Parental Resiliency: Impact on School Readiness



The **National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds (Alliance)** holds the unique position of serving as the membership organization for state children’s trust and prevention funds. Children’s trust and prevention funds are the backbone of our nation’s infrastructure to support children and their families.

The Alliance leads a national **Early Childhood Initiative (ECI)**, which includes a 30-state Learning Community of state children’s trust and prevention funds and their partners, including parents and community members. Through this national initiative, the Alliance is focusing on strategies that strengthen families, build protective factors, promote individual growth, help systems be more responsive to families and children and strengthen communities’ capacities as safe and healthy environments.

The Alliance has engaged in collaborative partnerships with members of the ECI Learning Community and expresses appreciation to the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF)** for supporting the development of the valuable resources resulting from these partnerships. The DDCF improves the quality of people’s lives through grants supporting the performing arts, wildlife conservation, medical research and the prevention of child maltreatment, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke’s properties.

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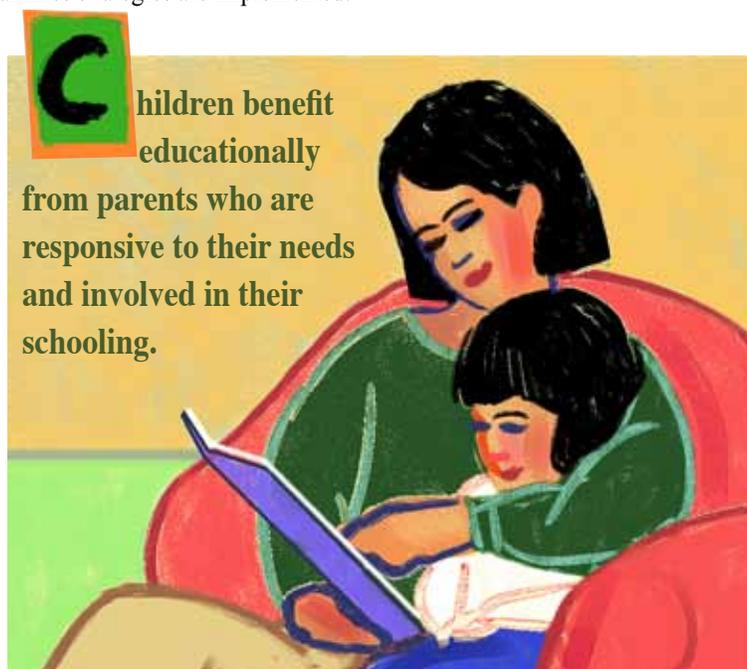
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Project Overview

Ensuring the preparedness of our young children to learn and supporting their successful transition to school has become an issue of critical importance for parents, teachers, community stakeholders and national legislators. The role parents play during this transition period has a significant impact on their children's success and readiness. Stable families are critical in providing continuity as children move between early childhood care and the education system. Strengthening Families (SF) employs protective factors that stabilize families, reinforce parental resources, support and build resiliency. With these protective factors in place, parents can be more prepared to support their child's successful transition to school.

Project Objective: The overall objective of *Strengthening Families and Parental Resiliency: Impact on School Readiness* was to determine the potential impact Strengthening Families has on improving school readiness for children through its support of parents and its involvement in early care and education programs. As a result of this project, we will begin drawing correlations between parental resiliency and school readiness of young children. Strengthening Families strategies focus on connecting parents to resources, supplying knowledge and information about child development and supporting parents in building social connections and trusting relationships. This results in parents being more resilient and responsive to the needs of their children. Children benefit educationally from parents who are responsive to their needs and involved in their schooling. Based upon this view, Strengthening Families contributes to the successful transition of children to kindergarten by ensuring parents are prepared and able to support their child's education. The change model on page 2 captures the impact anticipated regarding children's school readiness as Strengthening Families strategies are implemented.



Children benefit educationally from parents who are responsive to their needs and involved in their schooling.

The goal of **Strengthening Families Ohio** is to prevent child abuse and neglect by embedding the Strengthening Families Protective Factors (SF/PF) framework into the daily work of all individuals, organizations and systems that touch the lives of young children and their families. Working with child care professionals, child welfare professionals and community organizations, the **Ohio Children's Trust Fund (OCTF)** facilitates the integration of state prevention strategies to strengthen families within the early care and education and child welfare systems and engages parents and communities in building protective factors.

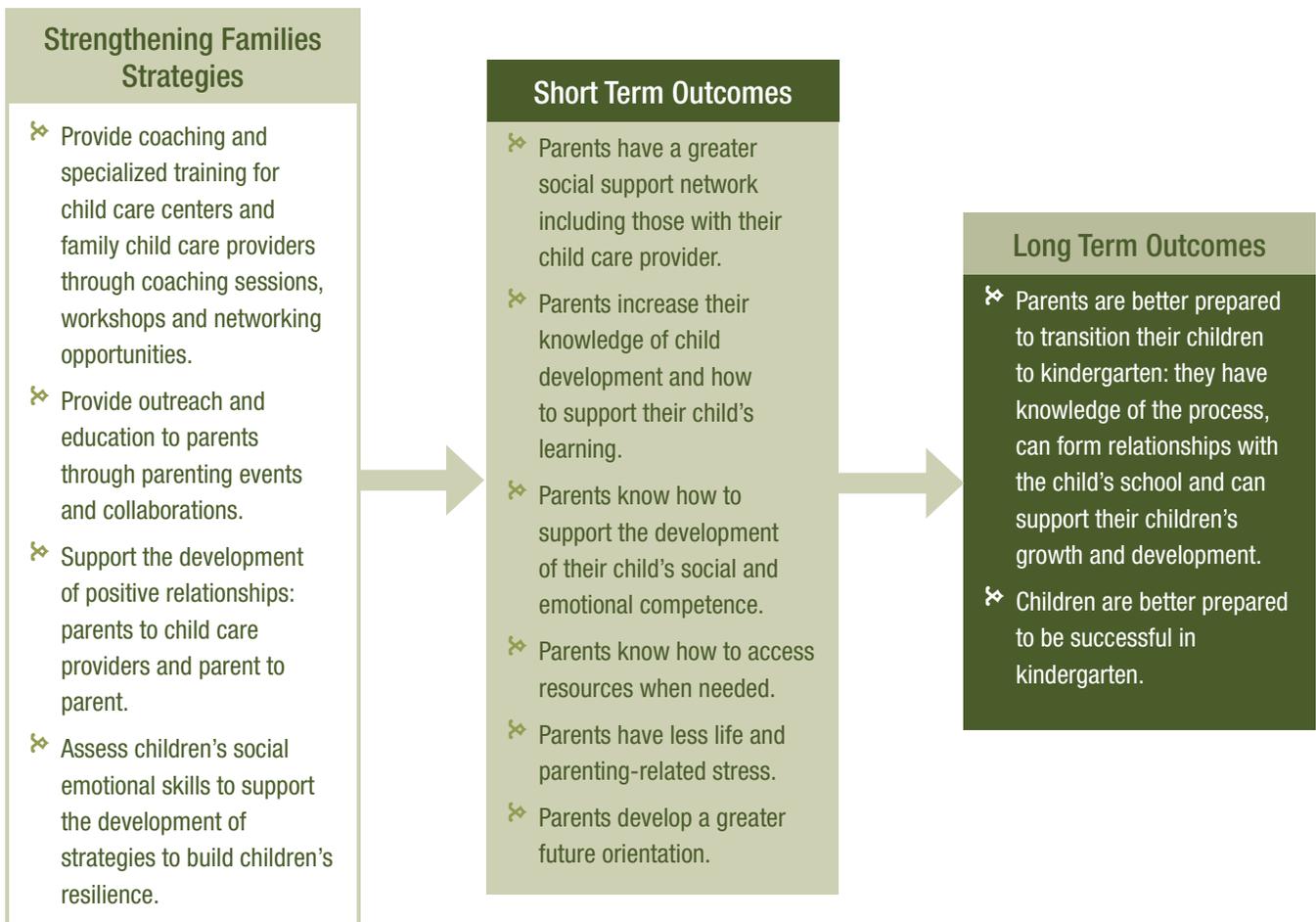
Our approach is simple: Engage collaborative partners within the early care and education, child welfare and community service sector in creating a child abuse and neglect prevention framework that shifts the focus of prevention efforts from family risk and deficits to family strengths and resiliency. Ohio's action plan includes the following three focus areas:

- ✦ Early care and education.
- ✦ Child welfare.
- ✦ Community serving organizations.

Project Summary: Existing research on parental impact on children’s school readiness was used as a foundation for the *Strengthening Families and Parental Resiliency: Impact on School Readiness* project. The review of this research led to the development of parental school readiness indicators for three factors which the research indicated contributed to children’s successful transition to kindergarten. These factors included the parent’s experience with their child’s preschool, the establishment of a plan for kindergarten they were comfortable with and parent’s confidence in their child’s readiness to learn and attend school. The Protective Factors Survey (PFS) was used as a reference in the development of a Parent School Readiness Indicator Survey (see Appendix). Surveys were administered to four parent groups. These groups represented parents whose children are enrolled in public preschools or child care and early education centers that are either implementing Strengthening Families or have recently enrolled in the Strengthening Families Initiative.

Responses from 48 parents were compared to determine if parents from programs implementing Strengthening Families are more prepared for their children’s transition to kindergarten than parents from programs where Strengthening Families had not yet been fully

Theory of Change Model



implemented. **The results of this comparison indicate that on two of the three school-readiness factors, parents from programs implementing Strengthening Families scored higher or demonstrated more change than parents from programs where Strengthening Families had only been introduced.** In addition, pre- and post-Protective Factors Survey results for 43 parents were analyzed to determine if parents involved in early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families demonstrated behaviors aligned with the protective factors. A few key findings of this comparison and analysis are as follows:

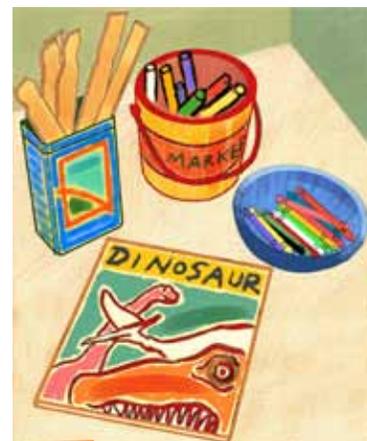
- ① Parents whose children were enrolled in the early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families were more prepared to send their children to kindergarten.
- ② Parents whose children were enrolled in the early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families were more confident of their child's ability to transition to kindergarten. These parents were also more confident in their abilities to support their child through this transition.
- ③ Results from the Protective Factors Survey indicated increased parental behaviors and resources aligned with the protective factors.

As a result of these findings, it can be ascertained that:

- ① Children enrolled in early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families will enter school more ready to learn with the skills and resources needed to support their learning.
- ② The Strengthening Families protective factors and program strategies influence parental school readiness indicators.
- ③ This project demonstrates the existence of a relationship between Strengthening Families and parents' preparedness and confidence in establishing a kindergarten transition plan and supporting children's readiness to learn.

Project Readiness and Partners: For the past several years, the Ohio Children's Trust Fund has actively participated in efforts to implement Strengthening Families within the state. These efforts have included both partnering and funding a plan from Hamilton County's Family and Children's First Council for 4C for Children and the Consortium of Resilient Young Children to implement Strengthening Families within the western neighborhoods of Cincinnati. 4C for Children, as a member of the Consortium, has served as the leader of this initiative.

4C for Children, Children Inc. and Cincinnati Public Schools – all members of the Consortium for Resilient Young Children – are partnering with the Ohio Children's Trust Fund on this project. Four early childhood programs enrolled in Hamilton County's Strengthening Families Initiative (SFI) volunteered to participate in this project. The existing relationships with these programs assisted the project team in being able to meet the limited time frame of the project. In addition, knowledge of these programs' progress in implementing Strengthening Families, as well as existing relationships with parents and staff, provided an effective level of cooperation and awareness between the project and the programs.



The results of this comparison indicate that on two of the three school-readiness factors, parents from programs implementing Strengthening Families scored higher or demonstrated more change than parents from programs where Strengthening Families had only been introduced.

Literature Review

Recent research has shown that the skills and knowledge that children have upon entering school is predictive of later achievement. As a result, there has been increased focus on school readiness of children entering kindergarten, where school readiness is broadly defined to encompass both academic aspects of development, such as literacy and cognitive skills, as well as nonacademic aspects, such as social, emotional and physical health (RAND, 2006). Increasingly, however, the traditional concept of school readiness is being criticized for its disproportionate focus on a child's skill alone (Ramey & Ramey, 1999). Much of the research on school readiness does not consider the environmental or familial factors that impact the child's readiness or successful transition to school. A transition to school framework that incorporates these factors is now viewed as a more accurate depiction of how children become ready to learn (Baker and Little, 2004).



Children starting school ready to learn requires that attention be given to their transition to kindergarten. This transition should be viewed as a shared process experienced by children, families, teachers and the community—one that is influenced by the relationships that occur from preschool through kindergarten.

The importance of creating transitional practices and supports in order to sustain and build on children's social, emotional and academic competencies is mounting. Research suggests that the transition between early childhood and elementary school can be a crucial period in children's development (Pianta, Rimm-Kauffman and Cox, 1999). Early intervention research indicates that children's early gains fade as they move through primary grades. This decline may be attributed to the dramatic differences that exist between parental involvement, classroom organization and teaching styles in early education programs and in elementary schools (O'Brien, 1991). Children often have difficulty adjusting to classrooms where the rules, routines and atmosphere may differ from earlier experiences (Shore, 1998). Children starting school ready to learn requires that attention be given to their transition to

kindergarten. This transition should be viewed as a shared process experienced by children, families, teachers and the community—one that is influenced by the relationships that occur from preschool through kindergarten (Baker and Little, 2004).

The role families or parents take in preparing children for school can greatly impact the educational success and readiness of the child. Studies indicate that when parents are involved in their children's schooling, children achieve higher grades and better school attendance, they have more positive attitudes and behaviors, higher graduation rates and greater enrollment in higher education (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Findings also suggest that parents have strong feelings about their child's transition to school. Feelings of happiness, sadness and worry are the most common. These feelings are often tied to the child's excitement about school, the parent's perception of their child as a learner, anticipated separation between the child and parent and the parent's concerns about their child's relationships and social skills (Kreider, 2002). Equipping parents with classroom experiences, leadership and relationship-building opportunities, as well as access to information from a trusted source may have a significant impact on the parent's confidence and ability to support children during this time of change.

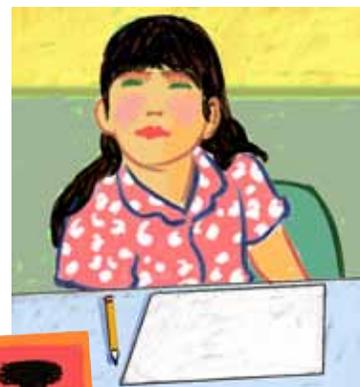
Kreider (2002) identifies four processes that help “ready” parents for involvement in their child’s kindergarten:

- 1 **Information and guidance:** Dissemination of information to parents; sharing ideas and knowledge about school readiness; kindergarten registration/options; and processes to manage the transition. Teachers and program staff who have established effective relationships with parents are perceived as a trusted source for information and advice.
- 2 **Leadership and learning opportunities:** Exposure to experiences in which the wisdom and practices of the parent are valued, parent opinion and input is sought, and home-learning activities are disseminated. As the knowledge and desires parents have regarding their children are valued, parents are more likely to develop and understand their role in supporting their child’s education.
- 3 **Strong patterns of involvement:** Invitation to volunteer in/visit the classroom, to join parent groups or attend family meetings before the onset of kindergarten. Exposure to positive experiences can be critical, especially for parents who have no previous experience enrolling children in school or who themselves had negative experiences in school.
- 4 **Trusting relationships:** Relationships built with early childhood teachers, parents and administrators can contribute to establishing future relationships. As parents experience success relating with teachers and other parents in an early childhood program, their confidence increases in being able to develop similar relationships in the school environment.

In addressing family or parent involvement, research supports that schools and early education settings can have a positive impact on children’s transition to school by reaching out and connecting with families. Transition research suggests that schools need to take a proactive approach to engaging and involving parents prior to the start of school. It is recommended that transition practices focus on: reaching out to establish relationships with parents and preschools; reaching back to establish links with families before the start of school; and reaching with the appropriate intensity and a range of practices (Baker and Little, 2004).

Research compiled by the Harvard Family Research Project indicates that early childhood programs may help set the stage for strong partnerships across families and between families and schools. Initial findings suggest that parents whose children are enrolled in early childhood programs are more likely to visit their child’s kindergarten classroom and are more likely to network with other parents (Kreider 2002).

Strengthening Families, an evidence-based child abuse prevention framework, employs seven program strategies designed to intentionally build partnerships between parents and early childhood educators and providers. An important factor in implementing the Strengthening Families approach is to convey the message that the early childhood program cares about the entire family. Supportive relationships formed between staff and parents are rooted in the common interest of the child’s well-being, nurtured by the genuine interest of the entire family and strengthened by the responsiveness and help offered by staff to parents when needed.



In addressing family or parent involvement, research supports that schools and early education settings can have a positive impact on children’s transition to school by reaching out and connecting with families.

Project Outcomes and Accomplishments

Tool Development: One accomplishment of the *Strengthening Families and Parental Resiliency: Impact on School Readiness* project was the development of a Parent School Readiness Indicator Survey. This survey served as the primary source of information regarding parental responses to preparing and supporting their child's transition to kindergarten. The following steps were taken in the development of this tool:

- ① A review of existing research on factors that support children's successful transition to kindergarten was explored. As a result of this review, it became clear that there were three factors that contributed to children's successful transition to school. These factors included: the parent's experience with their child's preschool, the establishment of a plan for kindergarten they were comfortable with and parent's confidence in their child's readiness to learn and attend school.
- ② For each of these three factors, measureable indicators were identified. These indicators aligned with the four processes identified by Krieder (2002) that help parents prepare their children for kindergarten – access and use of information and guidance, leadership and learning opportunities, strong patterns of involvement and development of trusting relationships.
- ③ Several existing tools, used to measure preschoolers' academic/cognitive assets and social and emotional competence, were used to help develop the language used in questions related to skills that contributed to children's readiness to learn and transition to kindergarten. Tools reviewed included the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment, the Protective Factors Survey and the Bracken School Readiness Assessment.
- ④ Once the tool was developed, it was reviewed by the SF Parent and Community Advisory group. This group provided feedback and recommended edits to the tool based upon their perception of how parents would respond to the various questions and indicators.

During the process of identifying parental indicators for children's school readiness, it became obvious that alignment existed between Kreider's (2002) identified processes and the Strengthening Families protective factors – concrete support in times of need, social connections and knowledge of parenting and child development. As a result, the Protective Factors Survey (PFS) was reviewed to determine the potential this tool may have on measuring parental impact on children's school readiness. Through this review, it was recommended that the PFS be used within this project as a means to compare parental responses between the two programs implementing Strengthening Families with the two programs recently enrolled in the initiative. The comparison would help in determining the impact the Strengthening Families protective factors have on parents preparing their children for kindergarten.

Survey Administration: The Parent School Readiness Indicator survey was administered in May 2011 as a one-time survey to parents, representing the four early childhood programs

selected for this project, whose children are to transition to kindergarten during the 2011-2012 school-year. This survey captured parental responses on a likert scale that enabled parents to choose an answer that best matched their perceptions, level of confidence and progress in carrying out or participating in specific activities.

The Protective Factors Survey (PFS) was administered in October 2010 as a pre-survey and again in May 2011 as a post survey to parents of children who were enrolled in the two programs implementing Strengthening Families (test sites). The PFS was administered in February 2011 to parents of the two early childhood programs recently enrolled in Strengthening Families (control sites). As time did not allow for a pre and post survey for two of the programs, it was determined that only the pre-survey results would be compared amongst the four programs involved in the project.

Parents were given both surveys by teachers or SF staff. Directions for completion were provided in writing and parents were encouraged to complete the confidential surveys and return them in the provided unmarked envelope. Some parents chose to complete the surveys upon receipt; others took the surveys home with the intention to complete and return the surveys. The results and time frame of the administration of these surveys is captured in Table 1 below.

Site Selection and Description: To assess the potential role Strengthening Families plays in impacting parents and their support of their children's school readiness, comparison groups

Table 1. Administration of Protective Factor Survey and Parent School Readiness Indicator Survey

Early Childhood Program	PFS Pre-Survey		PFS Post-Survey			Parent School Readiness Indicator Survey		
	Date	# Collected	Date	# Distributed	# or % Collected	Date	# Distributed	# or % Collected
Gamble Nippert YMCA Child Care	Oct. 2010	56	May 2011	49	26 or 53%	May 2011	20	13 or 65%
Westwood School preschool	Oct. 2010	39	May 2011	30	17 or 56%	May 2011	18	16 or 88%
YMCA Child Development Center West	Feb. 2011	19				May 2011	19	6 or 31%
Roll Hill School preschool	Feb. 2011	13				May 2011	22	13 or 59%
Programs Implementing SF 2 or more years, combined	Oct. 2011	95	May 2011	79	43 or 54%	May 2011	38	29 or 76%
Programs Recently Enrolled in SF 6 months, combined	Feb. 2011	32	NA - Not administered			May 2011	41	19 or 46%
Project – 4 sites combined	A total of 79 children within the 4 programs are to be enrolled in kindergarten during the 2011-2012 school year; 48 or 60% of the parents of these children completed the Parent School Readiness Indicator survey.							

Table 2. Early Childhood Programs Participating

Early Childhood Program	Program Type	# of Preschool Slots	SF Enrollment	SF Milestone Achievement*	Neighborhoods Served
Gamble Nippert YMCA Child Care	Child care and early education program	36 (3–5 year olds)	Active in SFI for 3 years	Met all milestones year 1, 2 and 3	Cheviot, Westwood, Green Township, Delhi
Westwood School preschool	Public preschool	40 (3–5 year olds)	Active in SFI for 2 years	Met all milestones year 1 and 2	Cheviot, Westwood
YMCA Child Development Center West	Child care and early education program	40 (3–5 year olds)	Recently enrolled in SFI – 6 months	On target for year 1	Cheviot, Westwood, Green Township, Delhi, Price Hill
Roll Hill School preschool	Public preschool	40 (3–5 year olds)	Recently enrolled in SFI – 6 months	On target for year 1	Westwood, Fairmount

* SF in Hamilton County sets five annual milestone markers for early childhood programs enrolled in the initiative. These markers are used to measure the program’s progress in implementing Strengthening Families.

Table 3. Parents Demographic Information

		Programs Implementing SFI 2 or more years, combined	Programs Recently Enrolled in SFI 6 months, combined
Gender	Male	16%	21%
	Female	84%	79%
Age	19 or younger	4%	4%
	20–25	16%	15%
	25–30	25%	37%
	30–35	26%	28%
	35–40	20%	0%
	40–50	4%	4%
	50 and older	5%	12%
Race	White	45%	44%
	African American	50%	56%
	Multi-Racial	2%	0%
	African Nationals	3%	0%
Relationship to Child	Parent	87%	65%
	Extended family	4%	12%
	Step Parent	5%	3%
	Guardian	4%	0%
	Foster Parent	0%	0%
	Unknown	0%	20%
Education Level	Some high school	0%	10.5%
	GED	6.9%	10.5%
	High school grad	17.2%	26.3%
	Some college	27.6%	31.6%
	Associates degree	17.2%	21.1%
	Bachelor’s degree	10.3%	0%

were established for this project. Decisions were made to compare two early childhood programs that had been involved with the Strengthening Families Initiative in Hamilton County for a minimum of two years to two programs that had been enrolled in the initiative for less than six months.

Early childhood programs enrolled in Strengthening Families for at least two years have:

- ✘ completed their SF assessment,
- ✘ developed and completed at least six strategies on their action plans,
- ✘ participated in at least two specialized trainings (including the Protective Factors),
- ✘ offered parents the opportunity to participate in parent cafés or education events,
- ✘ received classroom coaching and technical assistance, and
- ✘ collected outcome measures, including the PFS and SF Staff survey.

Programs enrolled in Strengthening Families for less than six months have:

- ✘ participated in one staff training on Protective Factors,
- ✘ begun the initial SF assessment and action planning process, and
- ✘ offered parents the opportunity to participate in parent cafés.

In addition, the following considerations were used to select the four early childhood programs:

- ① the program’s progress/success in implementing Strengthening Families,
- ② the type of early childhood program (public preschool, child care center, etc.),
- ③ the capacity of the program to serve preschoolers, and
- ④ the areas or neighborhoods served by the early childhood program.

Table 2 on page 8 describes the four early childhood programs selected to participate.

Table 3 captures demographic information of the parents from the four early childhood programs participating in this project, who responded to the surveys. Programs look similar except for a few variances. In the recently enrolled programs, parents are younger (56% vs. 45% under 30) and these programs also have a larger percentage of parents over the age of 50. In the programs implementing Strengthening Families, 75.8% of the parents had some college or graduated with a degree from college compared to 52.7% of parents in the recently enrolled programs. There was no analysis of these differences to determine if the variances impacted the data.

The Protective Factors Survey (PFS) was administered to the four participating early childhood programs as a pre-test. Comparison of the results demonstrated that on 14 out of 20 statements, parents from the two programs implementing Strengthening Families indicated a higher frequency or higher agreement to the statements than parents from the two programs recently enrolled in Strengthening Families. A few key findings from the PFS regarding parents involved in the early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families are:

- ✂ Behaviors and knowledge of resources and supports reported by this group of parents are more aligned with the protective factors than parents involved in the two programs recently enrolled in Strengthening Families.
- ✂ Support systems and connections are recognized more by this group of parents

Table 4. Comparison Results

Protective Factors Survey		Programs Implementing SFI 2 or more years, combined	Programs Recently Enrolled in SFI 6 months, combined
Part I Response: Always to very frequently to frequently	When we argue my family listens to both sides of the story.	93.0%	84.8% (9.63% less frequent)
	In my family, we take time to listen to each other.	93.0%	90.9% (2.33% less frequent)
	My family pulls together when things are stressful.	88.4%	87.9% (0.56% less frequent)
	My family is able to solve our problems.	90.7%	97.9% (3.21% less frequent)
Part II Response: Strongly to mostly agree	I have others who will listen when I need to talk about problems.	83.7%	66.7% (25.58% less agreement)
	When I am lonely, there are several people I can talk to.	83.7%	75.8% (10.51% less agreement)
	If there is a crisis, I have others I can talk to.	81.4%	72.7% (11.92% less agreement)
Part IV Response: Always to very frequently	I praise my child when he/she behaves well.	83.3%	81.3% (2.56% less frequent)
	I am able to soothe my child when he/she is upset.	90.5%	97.9 (2.96% less frequent)
	I spend time with my child doing what he/she likes to do.	71.4%	66.7% (7.14% less frequent)

than are recognized by parents involved in the two programs recently enrolled in Strengthening Families.

- ✦ Children’s social and emotional competence are supported more by this group of parents than are supported by the parents involved in the two programs recently enrolled in Strengthening Families (refer to comparison results in Table 4 on page 9).

Conclusions from these results indicate that parents involved in the early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families for at least two years:

- ① Have increased skills and resources that support their resiliency.
- ② May be more available to focus on children’s needs as they have resources and supports to deal with stress and crisis.

Results and Lessons Learned

Strengthening Families and Parental Resiliency: Impact on School Readiness served as an initial review of parental indicators that influence children’s school readiness. Project results were determined by comparing the survey responses from two early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families for at least two years to the responses from two programs recently enrolled in Strengthening Families for six months. The purpose of the comparison was to determine whether a connection could be made between parent resilience – defined by social connections, access to resources and knowledge of child development – and parent’s preparedness, ability and confidence in supporting children’s

transition to kindergarten and the parent’s assessment of the child’s readiness to learn. As survey responses for this project were collected from a small sample size (n=48), generally accepted statistical analyses cannot be applied to the data. However, comparison of the responses can be used to provide directional learning regarding parental school readiness indicators influenced by the implementation of Strengthening Families within early childhood programs.

Results

The Parent School Readiness Indicator survey is divided into three categories of questions: Pre-School Experience, Kindergarten Preparedness and Parental Confidence. These categories align with school readiness research that identifies three factors that contributed to children’s successful transition to school. These factors include the parent’s experience with their child’s preschool, the establishment of a plan for kindergarten with which the parent was comfortable and a parent’s confidence in a child’s readiness to learn and attend school.

Pre-School Experience: Results compiled from the four early childhood programs demonstrated little difference on the pre-school experience questions. The questions in this category measured the frequency of parental involvement in the preschool and the parent’s perception of the preschool



teacher's relationship with the child and the parent. Parent responses to the survey questions indicated that overall parents:

- ✂ **participated in preschool activities and interacted with preschool teachers at a similar frequency,**
- ✂ **talked to preschool teachers about topics relevant to their child and his/her progress at similar frequencies and**
- ✂ **perceived their child's preschool teachers as aware, understanding and responsive to the child and the parent.**

Though overall the responses indicate that parents from the four programs had similar preschool experiences, results did indicate that parents from the programs implementing Strengthening Families talked to other parents within the preschool more frequently than the parents from the other two programs. Conclusions from these results indicate that:

- ① Strengthening Families had little impact on the parents' preschool experiences.
- ② Strengthening Families focus on building social connections of parents increased the frequency by 47 percent in which parents talked to other parents within the early childhood program.
- ③ Similar curricula, classroom structures and teacher credentials and training within the two Cincinnati Public School preschools and the two YMCA Child Care programs created similar preschool experiences for parents.

Kindergarten Preparedness: Comparison of the results demonstrated that on 11 out of 13 indicators, parents from the two programs implementing Strengthening Families had completed or almost completed tasks related to the kindergarten plan at a higher rate than parents from the two programs recently enrolled in Strengthening Families. This second set of questions measured actions parents had taken to develop and follow through on a plan for their child to attend kindergarten. Indicators that demonstrated the largest difference between the two groups were related to attending open houses or orientations, arranging for after school care, looking into available kindergarten programs, visiting the kindergarten and meeting with the kindergarten teacher. Comparisons further indicated that on two out of 13 indicators, parents from the four early childhood programs demonstrated little difference. These two indicators were related to completing the child's immunizations and arranging for transportation to and from kindergarten (see charts on page 12 relating to Q#12 and Q#13).

Conclusions from these results indicate that:

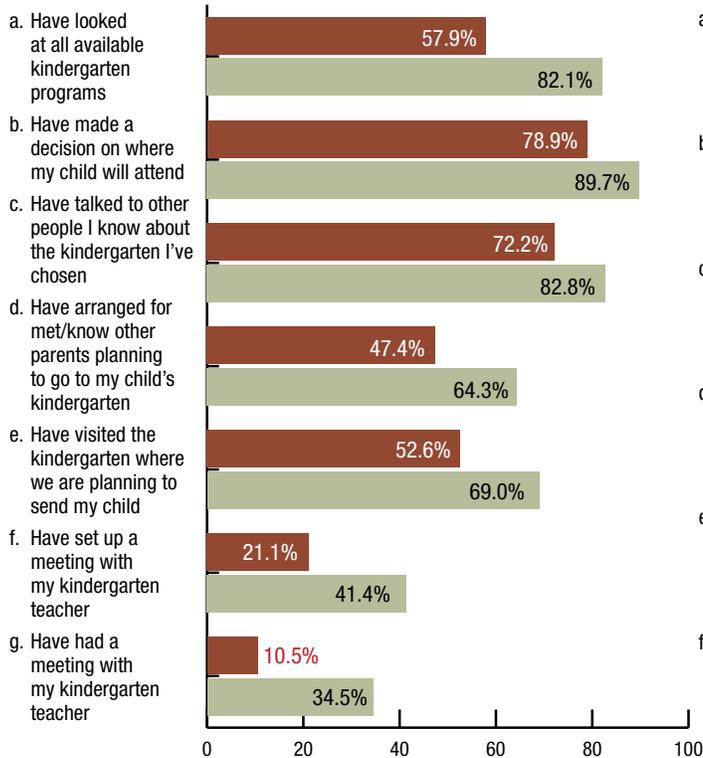
- ① Parents whose children are enrolled in early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families are better prepared to send their children to kindergarten.
- ② Children enrolled in early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families will transition more successfully to kindergarten as plans are in place to support this transition.
- ③ The Strengthening Families protective factors and program strategies influence parental school readiness indicators.

Parent School Readiness Indicator Survey

CONTROL (%) (Roll Hill, YMCA-West) TEST (%) (Westwood, YMCA-Gamble Nippert)

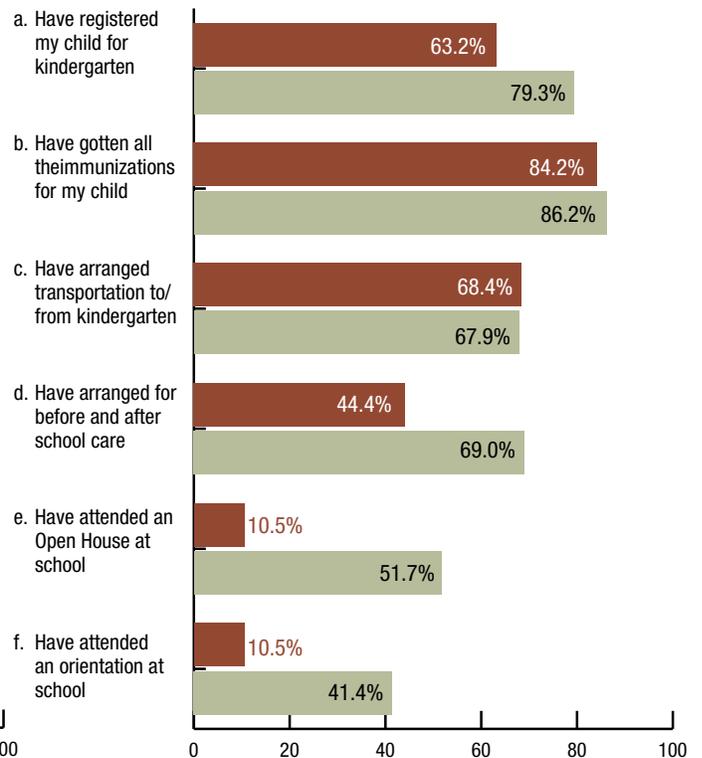
Q#12. “Which of the following activities have you completed or plan to complete?”

% of Parents mentioning... “Completed/Almost finished”



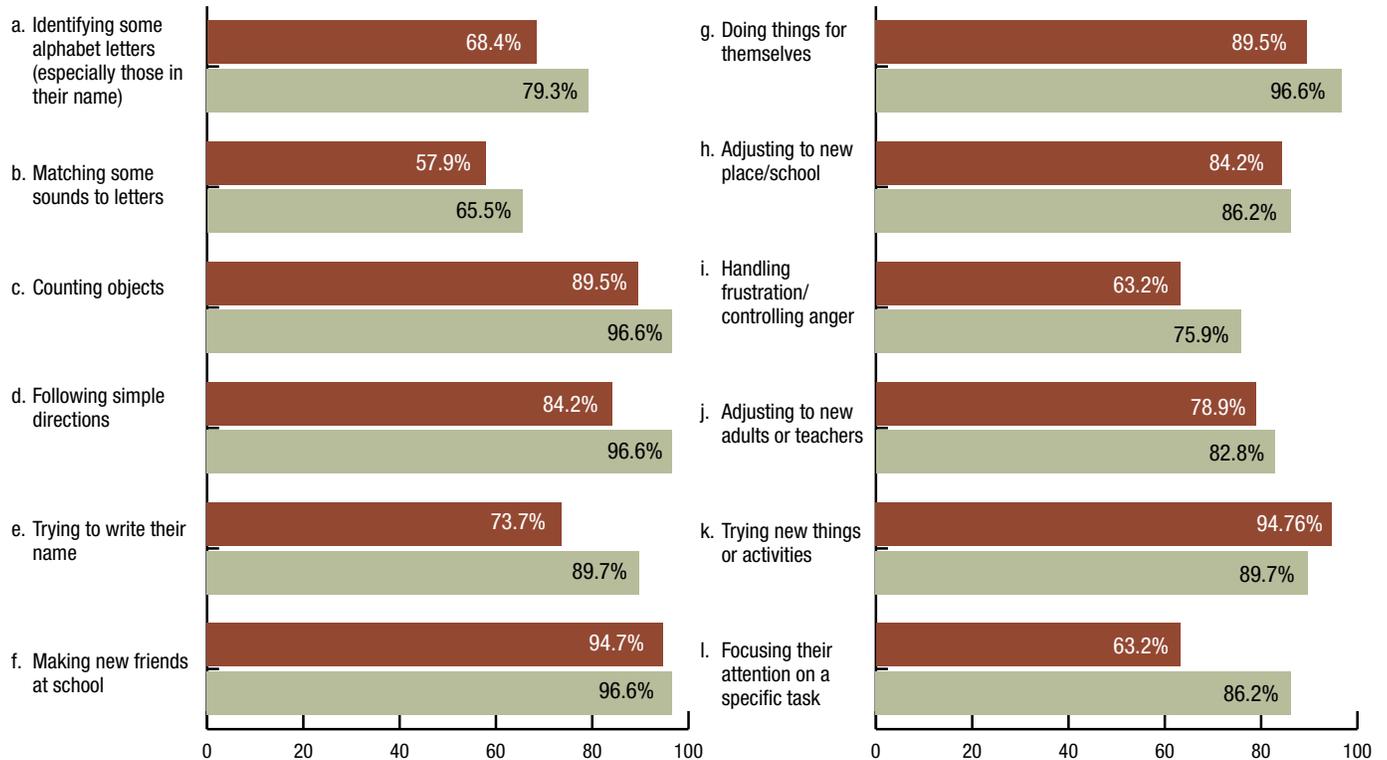
Q#13. “Which of the following activities have you completed or plan to complete?”

% of Parents mentioning... “Completed/Almost finished”



Q#14. “How would you rate each skill in terms of how ready you think your child is for kindergarten?”

% of Parents mentioning... “Extremely/Very ready”

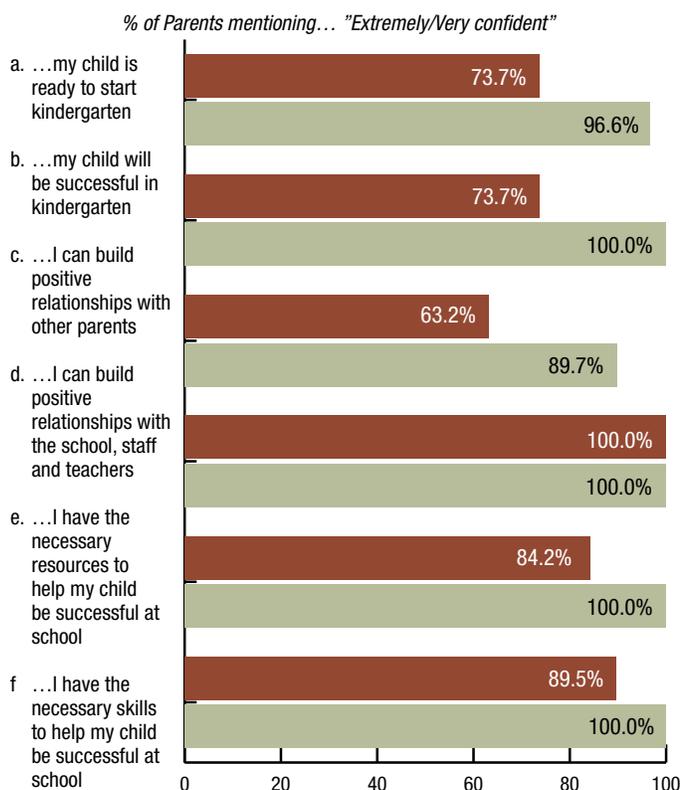


Parental Confidence: Comparison of the results demonstrated that on eight out of 12 indicators, parents from the two programs implementing Strengthening Families perceived their child as extremely ready or very ready for kindergarten based upon skills acquired at a higher rate than parents from the two programs recently enrolled in Strengthening Families. This final category of questions measures the parent’s perception of their child’s readiness for kindergarten, their confidence in their child’s ability to manage the transition and the confidence in their own ability to support their child’s move to kindergarten. Indicators that demonstrated the largest difference between the two groups were related to the child’s ability to focus on tasks, trying to write their name, following simple directions and handling frustration/anger. Comparisons further indicated that on four out of 12 indicators, parents from the four early childhood programs demonstrated little difference. These four indicators were related to the child adjusting to the new school and new teachers and the child trying new activities and making new friends.

Regarding parent’s confidence to support their child’s transition to kindergarten, on three of these four indicators parents from the two programs implementing Strengthening Families reported at a higher rate that they were extremely confident or very confident in their abilities compared to the parents from the other two programs. Lastly, 96.6 percent of the parents from the two programs implementing Strengthening Families were extremely confident or very confident that their child was ready for the transition with 100 percent of this same group of parents reporting that they were extremely or very confident that their child would be successful in kindergarten. The parents from the two early childhood programs recently

enrolled in Strengthening Families reported a rating of 73.7 percent on both of these indicators (see charts relating to Q#14 and Q#15).

Q#15. “Please rate how confident you feel YOU are for each of the following descriptions?”



Conclusions from these results indicate that:

- 1 Parents whose children are enrolled in early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families are more confident in their ability to support their child’s transition to kindergarten.
- 2 Children enrolled in early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families are more ready for school and are more likely to be successful in kindergarten per their parents’ perceptions.
- 3 The Strengthening Families protective factors and program strategies influence parental school readiness indicators.



his project demonstrated the existence of a relationship between Strengthening Families and parents' preparedness and confidence in establishing a kindergarten transition plan and supporting children's readiness to learn.

Protective Factors Survey: Comparison of the pre and post surveys completed by the parents from the two early childhood programs implementing Strengthening Families indicates that:

- ✦ five out of five statements in Part I, related to parental resilience, showed an increase in frequency on the post surveys.
- ✦ six out of six statements in Part II, related to social connections and access to resources, either showed the same or increased agreement on the post surveys.
- ✦ three out of three statements in Part III, related to knowledge of parenting and child development, demonstrated a positive change on the post survey.
- ✦ four out of six statements in Part IV, related to children's social and emotional competence and development, either remained the same or showed increased agreement on the post survey.

In conclusion, the PFS results for the parents involved in the two programs implementing Strengthening Families indicated increased parental behaviors and resources aligned with the protective factors. The results from the Parent School Readiness Indicators survey further indicated that these parents were more prepared to support children's school readiness and transition to kindergarten. It can therefore be ascertained that this project demonstrated the existence of a relationship between Strengthening Families and parents' preparedness and confidence in establishing a kindergarten transition plan and supporting children's readiness to learn.

Lessons Learned

Through the process of developing, implementing and analyzing the Parent School Readiness Indicators survey, the following are lessons that may be beneficial in efforts to replicate this project or conduct further school readiness studies:

Effectiveness of tools/surveys. Results gleaned from the Parent School Readiness Indicators survey, developed as a part of this project, demonstrate that the tool is effective in measuring parental impact on school readiness. The steps taken to develop this survey clearly benefitted the overall success of the project. These steps include:

- ① Review of school readiness and kindergarten transition research.
- ② Review and comparison of existing school readiness tools.
- ③ Input from parents on the language and purpose of the tool before administration.

Sixty percent of the surveys provided to parents of the four program sites were completed and returned. This high response rate demonstrates the success of the following collection strategies:

- ✦ Program sites selected for the project had an existing relationship with the Strengthening Families Initiative and its staff.
- ✦ Strengthening Families coaches were visible and present at pick-up time to ask parents to complete the surveys.
- ✦ Parents were provided unmarked envelopes to return the surveys which supported the assurance of their confidentiality.

In addition, decisions were made to collect the Parent School Readiness Indicators survey at the end of April. This decision was based upon the school calendar and offering of kindergarten selection and registration activities. The collection time at the end of April, ensured parents would have had opportunities to begin and complete the process of planning for kindergarten before completing the survey.

Challenges with the tools/surveys. Based upon the review of existing research, some results from the Parent School Readiness Indicators survey varied from what was expected. It was anticipated that the preschool experience would have varied more amongst the four selected early childhood programs and that the programs implementing Strengthening Families would have yielded higher ratings than the other two programs. It is assumed that this occurred due to similarities between the programs' curricula and teachers credentials. Administration of this tool to a broader more diversified audience may be helpful in determining the cause of these results.

In addition, it was assumed that high scores on the Parent School Readiness Indicators survey would correlate to the following protective factors on the PFS: concrete support in times of need, social connections and knowledge of parenting and child development. However, the scores from the four selected early childhood programs were very similar in these areas. Upon review of the responses, it was noted that on numerous questions, the responses from the four program sites were very high during the pre-survey administration. This allowed for little change to occur between the pre and post survey. Further administration or review of other administrations may be helpful in determining these results. One possible reason for such high ratings on these questions may be related to the use of language and whether it is socially sensitive to detect change. The other reason may be related to trust and whether parents will disclose differently when trust has been established with the surveying organization or program.

Finally, due to the five-month period limitation to administer the research project, a limited number of parents were able to participate in the project which created a small sample size.



Conclusion

This research project shows that Strengthening Families provides the framework, strategies and training to positively impact children’s school readiness through its support and engagement of parents. The results of this project support a need for further studies that will be able to more fully determine the specific strategies and interventions delivered by Strengthening Families that impact parents’ preparedness to successfully transition their children to school. We need to build on these promising results, implementing the Parent School Readiness Indicator survey and the Protective Factors Survey on a regional or statewide basis. Reaching a larger pool of individuals will also allow us to better test the correlation between the Protective Factors Survey and the Parent School Readiness Indicator survey.

In addition, it was our hypothesis that once parents’ immediate needs are met through social networks, relationships and resources, they have less stress and a greater future orientation that allows them to focus on their children (their development, social emotional competence, transition to kindergarten, etc). This research project seems to support this premise. An opportunity to further research this hypothesis would further support the benefits incurred by parents and children as a result of the Strengthening Families framework.

Lastly, it should be noted that the results achieved through this project are based upon the implementation of the Strengthening Families program strategies — enhanced by trainings, technical assistance and classroom coaching. There were no additional interventions offered to staff at the four early childhood programs regarding interactions with parents related to kindergarten readiness. These results may support an opportunity to develop a measure to capture the strategies employed by early childhood teachers and providers that lead to this type of parental response.

Broader Implications

School readiness is in the national spotlight following the Federal government’s announcement of the \$500 million Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) for states. There is now unprecedented support and awareness about the importance of supporting children’s healthy growth and development across all domains. There is also a growing national movement toward P-3 reform to create a more seamless, high quality and accountable system of “pre-school” early care and learning experiences and Kindergarten to grade three education.

Within this dynamic national dialogue, the role of families cannot be overemphasized, though it perhaps is not receiving the attention it deserves. Research supports the widely familiar School Readiness Equation that equates Ready Children with Ready Families, Ready



Schools, Ready Communities, and Ready States. The Strengthening Families approach has been used in a variety of early childhood settings to identify small but significant changes in programmatic practice, helping to create an environment that builds parental protective factors to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect and promote children's optimal development. The focus on parental protective factors provides a proven set of strategies and a powerful framework for more intentionally bringing families into the School Readiness Equation.

The Ohio ECI Collaborative project offers important evidence of the positive impact of the Strengthening Families approach to parental "readiness" factors.

Most importantly, the Strengthening Families programs showed success in helping parents to cultivate the skills, relationships and proactive tendencies that they will need to be strong advocates for their children throughout their school careers. In light of the anticipated federal grant opportunity that will prioritize improving high quality early learning experiences for at-risk children to raise the level of school readiness, this new evidence comes at a critical moment for informing state innovation and reform efforts.

A decade ago, 17 states began the process of identifying School Readiness Indicators, aligned with the readiness equation, by which to measure meaningful progress toward positive outcomes for young children. States continue to search for effective Ready Families indicators, but as the Ohio project suggests, the Strengthening Families approach identifies small but significant changes in programmatic practice that are measureable and yield positive outcomes. The Parent School Readiness Indicators Survey is the first of its kind to identify and measure what parents need to know and be able to do to support their children's school readiness. Policymakers and researchers should prioritize continued support for research into the design, content and delivery of this survey as part of a comprehensive approach to measuring school readiness.

The findings suggest that the Strengthening Families approach is worth serious consideration as an important and fundamental aspect of a comprehensive state early childhood development system. There are already examples of states that have adopted systemic changes to expand the reach and impact of the Strengthening Families approach and Protective Factors framework, including incorporation into state Quality Ratings and Improvement Systems, professional standards and core competencies, and training and professional development offerings. States are also using the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment to help programs improve practice and measure their collective progress toward implementation and positive outcomes. With the Ohio study, we now have evidence to suggest Strengthening Families' importance and relevancy to kindergarten transitions as well.



Literature

Holly Kreider (2002). *Getting Parents "Ready" for Kindergarten: The Role of Early Childhood Education*. Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) Harvard Family Research Project.

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RAND Education and documented in *School Readiness, Full-Day Kindergarten, and Student Achievement: An Empirical Investigation*, by Vi-Nhuan Le, Sheila Nataraj Kirby, Heather Barney, Claude Messan Setodji, and Daniel Gershwin, MG-558-EDU, 2006, 78 pp.

Henderson, A., & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Appendix

Parent Survey: Background Information

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Over the past few years your child's child care center or preschool has been involved in the Strengthening Families Initiative. This initiative is designed to assist early childhood programs in supporting the well being and resiliency of parents, caregivers and their children.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of our efforts, Strengthening Families is seeking feedback from parents and caregivers whose children are transitioning to kindergarten next year. The following survey will ask you about:

- A) YOUR experiences while your child attended pre-school
- B) YOUR experiences planning for your child to attend kindergarten
- C) YOUR opinions about you and your child's readiness to attend kindergarten

We are requesting that you take a few minutes to complete this brief survey. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential as your name will not appear on the survey. Thanks so much for taking the time to complete these surveys. (Please contact Carolyn Brinkmann at 4C for Children 513-758-1314 with any questions regarding this survey)

1. How many children do you currently have living at home?

- None 1 2 3 4 5 or more

2. How many of these children have already attended kindergarten?

- None 1 2 3 4 5 or more

3. How many children do you currently have enrolled in pre-school?

- None 1 2 3 4 5 or more

4. Which of the following pre-schools do you currently have a child enrolled?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Roll Hill | <input type="radio"/> YMCA-West |
| <input type="radio"/> Westwood | <input type="radio"/> Other |
| <input type="radio"/> YMCA-Gamble Nippert | <input type="radio"/> Do not have any children enrolled in pre-school |

5. How many years have you had a child enrolled in this pre-school?

- Less than 1 year 1 to 2 years 3 to 4 years Longer than 4 years

6. Will this child be attending kindergarten next year?

- Yes No

7. What is the last grade of education that you have completed?

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Some
High School | <input type="radio"/> GED | <input type="radio"/> High
School
graduate | <input type="radio"/> Some
college | <input type="radio"/> Associate's
degree | <input type="radio"/> Bachelor's
degree | <input type="radio"/> Master's
degree |
|---|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|

A. Parent Survey: Pre-School Experience

A. These first few questions are about YOUR experiences as a parent, while your child has been enrolled in pre-school.

8. About how often, would you say, have you participated in the following activities, while your child has been enrolled in pre-school?

	Daily	Several times a week	Several times a month	Several times throughout the year	Not yet	Do not plan to do
a. Have read to my child at home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Have visited my child's pre-school classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Have helped/attended an event at my child's pre-school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Have talked with parents from my child's pre-school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Have talked to my child about what they do at school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. About how often would you say, your child's pre-school teacher and you have talked about:

	Weekly	Monthly	Several times this year	Once this year	Not yet	Do not plan to do
a. ...the goals for your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. ...your child's progress in learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. ...how to prepare your child for kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. ...your child's development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. ...things you can do at home with your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. ...what your child is good at	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. ...challenges that your child may have in pre-school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? "I feel my child's pre-school teacher..."

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
a. ...knows me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. ...respects my opinions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. ...knows my child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. ...respects my child's needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. ...has worked with me to solve problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. ...has had good communication with me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? "Overall, I feel my child..."

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
a. ...has learned a lot in pre-school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. ...is ready for kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B. Parent Survey: Planning for Kindergarten

B. These next few questions are about YOUR experiences as a parent, in planning for your child to attend kindergarten.

12. Which of the following activities (related to planning for kindergarten), have you completed or plan to complete?

	Completely finished	Almost finished	Somewhat finished	Plan to do, but not yet	Do not plan to do
a. Have looked at all available kindergarten programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Have made a decision on where my child will attend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Have talked to other people I know about the kindergarten I've chosen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Have met/know other parents planning to go to my child's kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Have visited the kindergarten where we are planning to send my child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Have set up a meeting with my kindergarten teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Have had a meeting with my kindergarten teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Have shared information about my child with my kindergarten teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Which of the following activities (related to getting your child ready to attend kindergarten), have you completed or plan to complete?

	Completely finished	Almost finished	Somewhat finished	Plan to do, but not yet	Do not plan to do
a. Have registered my child for kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Have gotten all the immunizations for my child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Have arranged transportation to/from kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Have arranged for before and after school care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Have attended an Open House at school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Have attended an orientation at school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C. Parent Survey: Child Readiness for Kindergarten

C. These last few questions are about how well you feel you and your child are ready for kindergarten

14. How would you rate each of the following skills in terms of how ready you think your child is for kindergarten.

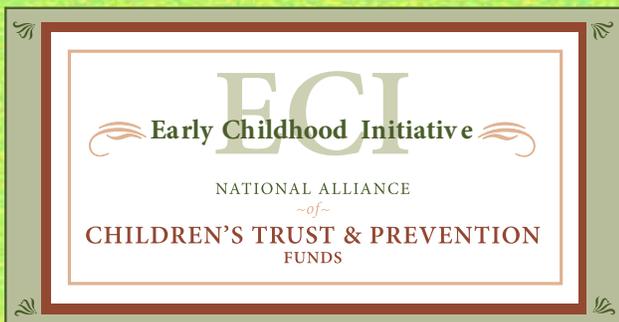
	Extremely ready	Very ready	Somewhat ready	Not very ready	Not at all ready	Don't Know
a. Identifying some alphabet letters (especially those in their name)	<input type="radio"/>					
b. Matching some sounds to letters	<input type="radio"/>					
c. Counting objects	<input type="radio"/>					
d. Following simple directions	<input type="radio"/>					
e. Trying to write their name	<input type="radio"/>					
f. Making new friends at school	<input type="radio"/>					
g. Doing things for themselves	<input type="radio"/>					
h. Adjusting to a new place/school	<input type="radio"/>					
i. Handling frustration/controlling anger	<input type="radio"/>					
j. Adjusting to new adults or teachers	<input type="radio"/>					
k. Trying new things or activities	<input type="radio"/>					
l. Focusing their attention on a specific task	<input type="radio"/>					

15. Please rate how confident you feel YOU are for each of the following descriptions. "I feel confident that..."

	Extremely confident	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Not very confident	Not at all confident	Don't Know
a. ...my child is ready to start kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>					
b. ...my child will be successful in kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>					
c. ...I can build positive relationships with other parents	<input type="radio"/>					
d. ...I can build positive relationships with the school, staff and teachers	<input type="radio"/>					
e. ...I have the necessary <u>resources</u> to help my child be successful at school	<input type="radio"/>					
f. ...I have the necessary <u>skills</u> to help my child be successful at school	<input type="radio"/>					
g. ...the school will be welcoming to me and my child	<input type="radio"/>					

THANKS FOR YOUR TIME AND SHARING YOUR OPINIONS!

This document is part of a series of resources that were developed as a result of the Alliance's partnership with states. All are available at no cost. To see the full array of resources developed, please visit the Alliance web site at www.ctfalliance.org/collaborativeprojects. You may also contact the Alliance at info@ctfalliance.org.



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