



**Active Citizenship: Democratic
Practices in Education**
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Session 85

Community partnerships:

**How local communities ensure that vulnerable children
are ready for school and schools are ready for children**

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SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIPS TO ASSURE READY KIDS



A school readiness initiative funded by the W.K.
Kellogg Foundation



DEFINITION OF AN INITIATIVE

- Multiple grantees
- A theory of change
- Networking meetings
- Project and initiative level evaluations

SPARK GRANTEES



Washington, DC

Florida

Georgia

Hawaii

Mississippi

New Mexico

North Carolina

Ohio

National Black Child Development Institute

Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, Miami

Smart Start/United Way of Atlanta

INPEACE, Honolulu

Children's Defense Fund, Jackson

New Mexico Children's Foundation, Albuquerque

Smart Start, Raleigh

Sisters of Charity Foundation, Canton

IMPORTANT DATES



Fall 2001

Spring 2002

Spring 2003

June 2003

May 2008

December 2009

January 2009

Initiative level evaluation begins

Planning phase begins

Planning phase ends

SPARK implementation

SPARK contracts end

Initiative level evaluation ends

Final networking meeting



THEORY OF CHANGE

**Key stakeholders in a community can come together
and form partnerships**

**For the purpose of getting children ready for school
and schools ready for children**

Using existing resources

And without creating new agencies or organizations



ORIGINAL CHARGE TO THE GRANTEES

- Build a local partnership made up of key stakeholders in the community
- Target 3-year-old vulnerable children, defined as: low-income, ethnic minorities, immigrants, refugees, and children with special needs
- Provide an assessment for each child, such as the Woodcock Johnson, PPVT, ASQ, and others
- Identify a “learning advocate” for each child
- Get children ready for kindergarten
- Follow children for evaluation purposes through second grade



SYSTEMS CHANGE

- Bring early care and education (ECE) and the public schools together
- Implement transition strategies that bring ECE and the public schools into alignment
- Change school culture
- Scale and sustain the programs post initiative



PARTNERS

Traditional

ECE providers

Public education

Head Start

Public health

Human services providers

Non-traditional

Clergy

Business

Parents

FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESULTS



Ready kids
Ready schools
Ready communities



READY KIDS

What does it mean to be ready for school?

According to the National Education Goals Panel (1995)

- Physical well-being and motor development,
- Social and emotional development,
- Approaches to learning,
- Language development, and
- Cognition and general knowledge.



READY KIDS

The Initiative Level Evaluation definition

School readiness encompasses a number of skills, including but not limited to:

- Literacy,
- Numeracy, and
- Behavior.



READY KIDS RESULTS

- Four grantees demonstrated that SPARK children performed as well as all children in the same schools as they entered kindergarten.
- Children in two grantee projects outperformed a matched sample of kindergarten children and one outperformed public school children in the same district.
- One grantee demonstrated academic readiness for the first grade.
- The evidence was strongest for children matching or outperforming comparison children in literacy or pre-literacy skills.
- Parent surveys supported the finding that children were ready for kindergarten because of family participation in SPARK sponsored transition activities.



READY SCHOOLS

- Thinking about transitions from home or pre-K to kindergarten as systems alignment.
- Alignment takes into account the relationships between ECE and the public schools, between ECE, the schools, and their place in the community, AND consistency in curriculum and standards.



READY SCHOOLS

- School readiness = ready kids and ready schools.
- Getting vulnerable children ready for failing schools will prohibit them from full participation in modern society.

READY COMMUNITIES



SPARK demonstrated that communities can come together, form partnerships and organize themselves around specific goals and objectives and, using existing resources, help vulnerable children and families get ready for school.



HOW DO PARTNERSHIPS BECOME READY COMMUNITIES?

Through three stages of partnership development:

- Independent
- Cooperative
- Interdependent



INDEPENDENT BEHAVIOR

- **Unilateral decision-making**
 - Grantee decides who gets invited to partner
 - Grantee sets the agenda and facilitates meetings
- **People getting to know one another**
- **Individual goals and objectives**
- **Communications without feedback**
- **Challenges**
 - Mistrust
 - Conflicting mental models
 - Complexity and technical solutions



COOPERATIVE BEHAVIOR

- Deciding to play
- Deal making and favors
- Goals and objectives are stakeholder-driven
- Relationships between 2-3 parties
- Challenges
 - Involve parents in a meaningful way
 - Involve non-traditional partners

INTERDEPENDENT BEHAVIOR



- Complex and permanent relationships
- Goals and objectives are partnership driven
- Data-driven decision making
- Children and families benefit
- Challenges
 - Scaling
 - Sustainability



WERE THE SPARK PARTNERSHIPS DEMOCRATIC?

- Was the process in which the partnerships got children ready for school and schools ready for children democratic?
- Democracy means rule of the people
- All members of society have equal access to power and all members enjoy universally recognized freedoms and liberties.

- Aristotle and others



LET'S CONSIDER

- Building organizations versus partnerships
- Positional leadership versus emerging leadership
- Services versus community development
- Parents as participants versus advocacy

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Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids

www.sparkkids.org

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