

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER: PRIORITIES FOR SCHOOL READINESS

*“A framework for making a
measurable difference
in Calhoun County”*



**Success By 6 Coalition
United Way of East Central Alabama**



FOREWORD

United Way Success By 6 is an initiative of United Way of East Central Alabama introduced to Calhoun County in October 2008. The initiative has four focus areas which include Public Awareness, School Readiness, Parent Education and development of an Early Learning Coalition, also referred to as the Success By 6 Coalition. The goal is for this coalition to be made up of a multi-sector network of individuals and organizations whose main focus is to promote school readiness in Calhoun County.

Preceding this initiative was the work done by the “Blueprint for School Readiness” workgroups led by Gail Piggot and the Alabama Partnership for Children through a grant from the Community Foundation of Calhoun County. Many of the indicators used to develop the following framework can be found in the “Blueprint” plan and are a direct result of the work accomplished by that initiative.

Since introducing the Success By 6 initiative to the community, representatives from our area school systems, private child care providers, health care advocates and providers and the local non-profit community have been meeting, under the banner of Success By 6, to continue work on a unifying plan with vision, priorities and strategies to make a measurable difference in our children’s school readiness and vitality of our community.

The Success By 6 Coalition believes that we must continue to develop a plan that will produce measurable outcomes based on the following three conditions:

1. Learning Begins at Birth

The early years are the most critical years to a child’s brain development and growth. Much of the brain’s structure and function are developed by the time a child reaches the age of three. Children that grow up in stressful environments that are not nurturing and enriching will start out behind their peers and stay behind. Starting early means starting on time.

2. Investing in Quality Early Learning is an Economic Development Strategy

Investing in early childhood development is proven to have a greater economic impact on a community than any other project. In fact, the rate of return on investment in early childhood development is better than the rate of return in the stock market. Quality early learning reduces crime rates, teenage pregnancy, welfare dependency, job training costs, special education costs and grade repetition. Quality early learning increases success in school, graduation rates, workforce readiness, job productivity and community engagement. Investing in early childhood development makes economic sense.

3. Ready Children need Ready Families, Ready Services, Ready Schools and Ready Communities

Many institutions interact with young children and their families before they enter kindergarten. School readiness is not only about the skills and experiences a child has acquired before entering school, but also about the service providers and community institutions that ensure those experiences are nurturing and enriching. For our children to be ready for school, our community needs to be ready to prepare them for success.

Putting the Pieces Together: Priorities for School Readiness

INTENDED USE

This framework is intended to prioritize the next steps of the United Way Success By 6 initiative and the Success By 6 Coalition. It is a map to help move our community forward in ensuring that all children, ages birth to six, in Calhoun County will be healthy, well-cared for and ready to succeed in school and life. Ultimately, this framework provides a tool for strategic planning, coordinating efforts and measuring progress.

It is intended to be used by public and private agencies, funders, local governments, schools, coalitions, businesses and partnerships to contribute and participate in a larger collaboration by building an effective and accountable system of support for our community's young children. It provides guidance to encourage the public and private sectors to move toward this goal.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Putting the Pieces Together: Priorities for School Readiness is guided by the following key principles:

- School readiness is critical for the children of all families living in Calhoun County, regardless of income, education, race, religion, geographic location, ethnicity, language or disability.
- Preventive approaches are more economical and effective than costly remediation later during life.
- This framework is owned by the community and was created by gaining consensus from a multi-sector coalition meeting in roundtable forums.
- This framework builds on the foundation of the “Blueprint for School Readiness” work and other accomplishments in the early childhood field in Calhoun County.
- Collaboration across the community and across sectors is necessary to avoid duplication of efforts and to support family access across the community.
- An implementation and accountability structure will accompany the framework to ensure its effectiveness.

GET INVOLVED

There are many ways for members of our community to be involved. Individuals, groups, organizations, businesses, schools, and governments can help advance and implement this framework and work of the Success By 6 Coalition. Because our children are our future, this work directly affects each of us. To speak with someone about how you can be involved, please call the United Way office at (256) 236-8229 or visit us online at www.LiveUnitedCalhoun.org.

PRIORITY #1: READY FAMILIES IN READY COMMUNITIES

A mother's limited educational level and being born to a single mother are two of the most powerful predictors of poor outcomes. The earliest relationships developed in a caring environment of nurturing and protection are critical to any child's future success. Providing pre-natal support through mentoring and advocacy will prepare mothers to be an effective parent and ready our children for school.

Indicator: Mother's Education Level - % of births to mothers with less than 12th grade education level

Baseline: 13% of first births are to teens below 12th grade
20.8% of children are to mothers with less than 12th grade
26% of adult population with less than high school diploma

Indicator: Births to Teens and Single Mothers - # of births to teens, % of births to unmarried women

Baseline: 10% of all births are to mothers 10 to 19 years old
27.5% of all births are to unmarried women
20% of households are single-parent homes (Anniston)

Indicator: Vulnerable Families - % of children with two parents in household

Baseline: 33% of all families are headed by a single parent
35% of children under six are living with a single parent

EMERGING STRATEGY: Development of "Another Grandmother" initiative. Through this program, a trained mentor will work with pregnant teens and at-risk mothers as soon as they are identified through school counselors, the medical community, Health Dept., etc. Mentor's will help the soon-to-be-mother gain access to all available services; provide emotional support; provide education on parenting and child development; provide guidance on choosing a child care provider; and provide any other support that will promote the child's development and ensure he or she is ready for school and success in life.

Lead Agency: United Way of East Central Alabama

Partners: School Systems, Health Department, Medical Community, DHR, Churches & Faith-based Community, Cheaha Regional Head Start, Family Links, Inc., Child Care Providers, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Business Community, Colleges

Outcome Measurements: Follow-up with Workforce Survey by Partnership for Children; post-test data on parents served; comparison through STI data from participating schools for kindergarten children who received program services versus those who did not.

PRIORITY #2: READY SERVICES IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Working families need access to dependable, high quality child care, and children benefit from developmentally appropriate programs with a commitment to high quality experiences. In a variety of settings, children can benefit from programs that are staffed by well-educated, caring teachers who provide a language-rich experience based on children's developmental levels.

Indicator: Children Enrolled in Early Education Programs - # of slots available in quality programs; % of preschoolers (age 3 and up) enrolled in high quality programs

Baseline: 1,459 children (3 & up) are enrolled in preschool
1,469 children (3 & up) are in kindergarten
74% of subsidy children are enrolled in center care
15% of subsidy children are enrolled in licensed homes
11% of subsidy children are enrolled in informal care

Indicator: High Quality Child Care Programs - % of child care programs nationally accredited or demonstrating high quality through an objective measure

Baseline: 0 child care center NAEYC accredited
1 family child care homes NAFCC accredited
2 Head Start programs NAEYC accredited

Indicator: Access to Child Care Subsidies - % of eligible children under six receiving child care subsidy or other financial assistance/scholarships

Baseline: 558 children are in the child care subsidy program, and
160 (+) are on the waiting list (funding needed)

EMERGING STRATEGY #1: Track and support efforts to increase the % of licensed child care providers in the community. In Calhoun County, there are more unlicensed child care providers than licensed.

EMERGING STRATEGY #2: Empower parents and employers. Parents need access to more information on area child care providers before making decisions on where to enroll their children. The community also needs to be educated on what to look for when choosing a child care provider.

EMERGING STRATEGY #3: Support child care provider training by TCRC Child Care Central which includes on-site, hands-on experience and school readiness curriculum.

Putting the Pieces Together: Priorities for School Readiness

EMERGING STRATEGY #4: Support an increase in child care subsidies by connecting with other Success By 6 initiatives and the Alabama School Readiness Alliance (ASRA).

Lead Agency: Family Links, Inc. (focusing on strategy #1)

Partners: SHRM, Child Care Central, DHR, Child Care Providers, United Way Success By 6 Coalition Members, Churches & Faith-based Community, Business Community

Outcome Measurements: An increased number of licensed providers; increased awareness in identifying quality child care; an increased level of subsidies; and increased participation and impact in helping ASRA achieve its strategic goals.

PRIORITY #3: READY SCHOOLS

Because schools are accountable for the progress of children once they enter kindergarten, schools need to support efforts to enhance a child's school readiness. The transition into kindergarten and first few grades often lay the foundation for success or failure in school. Schools can provide leadership and guidance for a better transition to improve the likelihood of early success, and schools are uniquely situated to share key data about kindergarten readiness.

Indicator: Language Readiness - % of children proficient on DIBELS

Baseline: 20 to 30% students below benchmark (2005 Anniston)

Indicator: School Success - 1st grade retention rates; % of children with reading and language proficiency by grade 3; special education enrollment rates

Baseline: 7% of all first graders enrolled are retained
11.9% students enrolled in special education

EMERGING STRATEGY: Continue to build and support transition teams. Work is currently being done to engage early childhood partners in participating in community transition teams. These teams share vital information on each individual child to ensure success in transitioning from preschool programs to kindergarten.

Partners: School Systems, Child Care Providers, Cheaha Regional Head Start, United Cerebral Palsy Center, Family Links, Inc., United Way Success By 6 Coalition Members

Outcome Measurements: Continued increase in students' test scores and reading levels along with strong development of physical, emotional and social skills.

Putting the Pieces Together: Priorities for School Readiness

UNITED WAY SUCCESS BY 6 COALITION MEMBERS

Amy Stone, Chair Quintard Mall	Kelly Mumper Child Care Central
Sheila Ball Anniston City Schools	Maggie Burn Owens YMCA of Calhoun County
Paula Clark ALL Kids	Sabrina Robinson Child Care Central
Becky Cox Calhoun County Schools	Sabrina Scales Jacksonville State University
Sharon Hay PHS Child Development Center	Jennifer Sims Anniston City Schools
Mary Klinefelter Anniston City Schools	Stephanie Stamps Family Links, Inc.
Robin Mackey Family Links, Inc.	Jennifer Swafford JSU Office of Continuing Education
Kim McNally Cheaha Regional Head Start	Eula Tatman Community Foundation of Calhoun County
Michael Morrison Sable Community Center	Cindy Williams Gadsden State Community College

DATA SOURCES FOR BASELINES

The data contained in this framework was originally used in the *“Blueprint for School Readiness” Summary of Community Planning* report. The following is a list of sources for this data. Unless otherwise stated, data is for Calhoun County.

- 2000 US Census
- 2004 Kids Count Data Book
- 2005 Community Counts, Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham and Region 2020
- 2005 Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Needs Assessment (Dr. Don Bogie, AUM)
- AL Early Intervention System
- AL Dept. of Children’s Affairs, Head Start Collaboration, CPC, and School Readiness
- AL Dept. of Human Resources (unpublished CAN data, child care data)
- AL Dept. of Public Health, Center for Health Statistics on line and PRAMS Survey
- AL State Dept. of Education
- AL Substance Abuse Indicators (Dept. of Public Health)
- AUM Center for Demographic Research
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
- University of Alabama, Center for Business and Economic Research