



**Early Childhood Network**

*Ready Start* Washington Parish

Early Childhood Network

Blueprint

January 2024

(Last updated January 6, 2024)

## **Introduction**

Our network is an equal partnership of eleven entities. Our membership includes nine early learning centers, Head Start and the Washington Parish Public School System. Our network supports families with young children by providing quality early childhood educational experiences and services. Since 90% of brain development occurs before age five, it is critically important that the needs of our youngest learners be addressed prior to entering kindergarten.

Every child deserves access to a high quality early childhood education. Access should not be denied based on a child's zip code and economic circumstance. According to data provided by the LDOE, we are failing to address the needs of our at-risk birth to three-year-old children in the rural areas of the parish. Eligible families are unable to enroll in high quality early childhood education programs. Due to distance, lack of transportation, economic hardships and a lack of providers, these families are denied access to services they desperately need. Additionally, our data indicates that 26.2% of these children have special needs including significant developmental delays and have been classified as "at risk for academic difficulties." This is a major hardship for young families.

We are successfully meeting the needs of our four year olds through universal prekindergarten. We also serve children from birth to three through our partnerships with our privately owned early learning centers. In partnership with Eager Scholars, we are now serving 17 at-risk three year olds in a newly licensed classroom at Wesley Ray Elementary School in Angie. Our highly proficient childcare providers received publicly funded preschool development grant seats to serve children from birth to three. These children are able to attend quality programs in highly rated centers, but many are not. According to data from the Louisiana Department of Education we are providing services to less than 10% of the eligible at risk birth to three year olds in our network. We must have the ability to provide more desperately needed seats to the rural portions of our parish, as well as, expand services for all our families with young children. The majority of these families live below the poverty level, usually in single parent homes. These children need our support now. They desperately need our help to be prepared for success in kindergarten and beyond. The cycle of poverty in this parish can end in a generation, if we are committed to early childhood education.

**Vision: All children, birth to age five, residing in the Ready Start Washington Parish Early Childhood Network will enter kindergarten ready for success.**

**Mission: The mission of the Ready Start Washington Parish Network is to promote and develop educational and economic opportunities by providing quality developmentally appropriate early childhood care and education for children birth to age five so that each child enters kindergarten ready for success.**

## **Strategic Plan**

### **Goal 1:**

Quality early childhood care and education will be available throughout the parish meeting the critical need for services, particularly in the rural high poverty areas of the district.

Public/private partnerships and diverse delivery will be in place eliminating childcare deserts and waitlists.

### **Strategies:**

### **Resources:**

- As a network, we have a shared vision and commitment to providing the children of our district with quality early childhood educational experiences and supporting their families in choosing the program that best meets their needs. Our network has an advisory board with a clear vision to guide strategic planning as well as bylaws to provide structure.
- We have a significant number of community leaders who have been involved in supporting our network, as well as new potential members who have expressed their support.
- Our network is primarily rural, with the majority of families living at or below the poverty level. We are in contact with community leaders who understand the critical need for early childhood education and are working on several proposals including new partnerships with the faith based and medical communities.
- We have received an appropriation of \$500,000 under Act 120 of 2021 Regular Legislative Session. We also received a donation of land to support our plans to provide an early learning center in Thomas.

### **Existing:**

- We have created a new partnership with one of our childcare providers, to operate a facility at Thomas Elementary School. This project is now serving at risk children from birth to five. This area was formerly a childcare desert. We have the support of our elected officials as well as key leaders in that community and we hope to secure sources for additional funding outside the parish to support this work.
- We are developing community awareness and support for quality early childhood education. We have designed a new website exclusively devoted to early childhood care and education. We are promoting the website and increasing its functionality, as well purchasing additional advertising in a variety of formats
- A monthly newsletter is sent to all partners and made available to the public on line and at various locations throughout the parish.

### **Needed:**

- Establish public private partnerships in the Thomas and Angie communities; provide quality childcare and education services to at- risk children from birth to three and after-schools care to school aged children.
- Create public/private partnerships that support the opening of additional early learning centers adjacent to rural public high schools. These sites would provide childcare for young mothers who are in high school well as other children in the community desperately needing services.
- Improve family engagement throughout the network through targeted events designed to inform and engage families.

### **Performance Metrics:**

- In Thomas, we will provide quality childcare and education services to at- risk children from birth to three (60) and after-schools care to school aged children. (20 families) by the beginning of 2024-2025 school year.
- Three-year-old children will be provided with early child education and special education services in Angie through a public private partnership with an early learning center.
- When completed, this project will increase the number of at-risk birth to three-year old children receiving quality educational services by at least 100% in this portion of the network.
- By January 2025, we are able to demonstrate the critical need for childcare in the rural areas of the parish in a way that builds support for our mission locally and outside the community.
- The need for waitlists in the town of Franklinton will be eliminated or diminished as seats become available in rural areas.
- At least 150 children are enrolled in quality early learning centers by 2026 when birth to three early learning centers located on public high school campuses are operational.
- High school students can enroll in early childhood education courses and complete paid internships at early learning centers while earning college credits and certifications.
- Ready Start Washington will secure additional funding from non-profit organizations and local businesses to meet the childcare needs of young families by May 2025.

**Goal 2:**

Due to a shortage of qualified teachers, we will promote early childhood teacher education programs and provide access to high school dual enrollment opportunities. Due to ongoing teacher turnover and expansion, professional development will be provided to all childcare sites, Head Start and schools as a means of maintaining and increasing the level of proficiency at all sites.

**Resources:**

- Using Birth to Five funding we have provided targeted coaching and professional development through Teaching Strategies, Frog Street and Teachstone to improve effective implementation of the curriculum and assessment. We have also focused on improving instructional strategies at all sites.
- We forged partnerships to promote early childhood teacher education opportunities for high school students.
- Classrooms at all sites are using high quality curricula and assessments.

**Progress to Date:**

- We have collaborated with Northshore Technical College and our learning centers to offer one Early Childhood dual enrollment course and paid internships for high school students this summer.
- New teachers have received on- site coaching from the Washington Parish School System as well as group coaching sessions on the GOLD assessment, The Creative Curriculum, and CLASS.
- Network teachers, assistant teachers, paraprofessionals and coaches have attended group professional development events focusing on the improvement of instructional strategies.
- Principals, assistant principals, literacy coaches, Head Start coaches, and childcare center owner-directors have been trained in the CLASS assessment tool and have become reliable observers.

### **Needed:**

- Additional funding to support continued professional development targeting improvement in instructional strategies. Additional curriculum materials will need to be purchased as the network serves more children.
- Dual enrollment opportunities for high school students need to be available to meet the workforce demand for qualified teachers.

### **Performance Metrics:**

- By June 2024, an early childhood dual enrollment course and paid internships at early learning centers will be available to high school students.
- By May 2024 instructional strategies will be, proficient or highly proficient at all network sites as measured by local and third party CLASS observations.
- High quality curriculum materials for newly created classrooms will be in place.

### **Goal 3:**

Ready Start Washington Parish Early Childhood Network will increase the number of at-risk birth to three- year- old children enrolled in early care and education programs by at least 25% and have a developmental screener in place to identify children with special needs as early as possible.

### **Resources:**

- As a network, we have a shared vision and commitment to providing the children of our district with quality early childhood educational experiences and supporting their families in choosing the program that best meets their needs.
- We have a governance structure that supports this goal.
- The Washington Parish School System provides special education services to three-year-old children at our four network childcare sites and Head Start. Children age four and older receive services at the district schools. We work closely with Early Steps to coordinate services to children from birth to two.

### **Progress to date:**

- We are working with Regina Coeli and our private childcare partners to develop strategies to meet the need for services in the eastern portion of the parish.
- We are sharing risk assessment data with network partners, elected representatives, business leaders, and the community as a whole.
- We have built a diverse advisory board and fundraising committee of community leaders to support our mission.
- In partnership with Eager Scholars, one of our early learning partners, we have opened a classroom at Wesley Ray Elementary School in Angie that has been licensed to serve 17 three- year old children. The Washington Parish School System and Eager Scholars Early Learning Center with the support of all network partners, are now providing seats for at risk three year old children at Wesley Ray Elementary School in Angie, using combined resources and funding provided by the Ready Start Grant.
- Through the use of preschool development grant funding (PDG and B-3) more birth to three children than ever before have access to high quality early childhood programs providing families much needed support and resources. Over 80 children aged birth to three are now enrolled. Many of these students are infants and three new infant classrooms are now open.
- We have trained three administrators in the implementation of the Ages and Stages Developmental questionnaire.
- We hold child development screenings to identify at risk three-year-old children twice a year.
- We have collaborated with Northshore Technical College and our learning centers to offer one Early Childhood dual enrollment course and paid internships for high school students this summer.

### **Needed:**

- Funding will be needed to sustain these program.

### **Performance Metrics:**

- We will continue to provide seats for three-year-old children at Wesley Ray Elementary School for the 2024-2025 school year. We strive to secure sustainable funding for the future.
- Provide access to quality early childhood care and education for birth to three year olds in the Pine/Thomas community and Angie in 2024-2025.
- Increase the number of at-risk birth to three-year-old seats by at least 25% August 2026.
- We will expand the implementation of the Ages and Stages questionnaire at all sites and provide supporting professional development in 2024-2025.



#### **Goal 4:**

Conduct intentional outreach and support for families at every level of the educational process and ensure that families have the support they need to access all available resources.

#### **Resources:**

- We have trained teachers in all prekindergarten classrooms to assist parents in administering the Ages and Stages developmental assessment.
- We have trained two staff members as Early Childhood Guides.
- Through the workforce data we have collected, we have discovered gaps in family engagement that must be addressed.

#### **Progress to date:**

- We have held one major community event to engage families in the early education process and determine their needs as well as address obstacles to early education access.
- We created an informational display to promote the network and its services at the parish fair.
- In the process of conducting focus groups to address network workforce issues, we have engaged with diverse stakeholders throughout the parish.

#### **Performance Metrics**

- Support and resources will be provided to families through informational campaigns and at enrollment events. This will be accomplished through targeted community wide events and social media campaigns.
- Access to quality early education programs and supporting resources will increase enrollment at all sites in 2024-2025.
- At the site level, parents will meet with administrators and teachers frequently to discuss their child's growth and development.
- Family friendly events will be held throughout the network to inform and engage parents in the early learning educational process. Increased family involvement and teacher/parent partnerships will support children's growth and development and improve kindergarten readiness.

#### **Needed:**

- Funding will be needed to sustain these programs.