

school readiness doesn't cost



it pays

**The early years are the most important learning period in a child's life.** Ninety percent of a child's brain growth happens by age five. We have only these few precious years to have the greatest influence on his or her future success – because readiness for kindergarten tends to predict success in school and higher achievement and satisfaction in life.

**In Maryland,** a child who is fully ready for school consistently shows the skills, behaviors, and abilities needed to do kindergarten work. To determine readiness, kindergarten teachers use the Maryland State Department of Education's kindergarten assessment, called the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR).

**Ensuring all children's school readiness – "ready by age five" –** is the mission of Ready At Five: a statewide public/private non-profit organization dedicated to seeing that every Maryland child receives the support and resources necessary to enter school ready to succeed. Ready At Five creates innovative school readiness programs; provides professional development for early care and education practitioners; galvanizes communities to support early care and education; and raises awareness about what works.

## An investment that pays rich dividends

### Educational dividends

The relationship is clear: Children who start kindergarten with high levels of school readiness are more likely to succeed academically, right up into high school. According to data from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), children who are fully school-ready in kindergarten are eight times more likely to get an "advanced" ranking on the third-grade Maryland School Assessment in reading and math than those who start kindergarten with significant skill deficiencies.

### Economic dividends

This may surprise you: Not only does investing in children's school readiness generate the workforce Maryland depends upon, but economist Arthur Rolnick has shown that an investment in early care and education earns a 16% financial rate of return for a community -- through fewer grade retentions, reduced need for special education, lower dropout and criminal activity rates, and a higher likelihood that a child will grow up to be a productive employee and taxpayer. That's good for children, for families, and for Maryland's economy.

## What we're doing works

Ready At Five has made great strides in helping more children throughout Maryland become school-ready. In the past two years:

- Ready At Five expanded our "Learning Laboratories" – programs that pioneer highly-effective practices in early care and education – to more communities and jurisdictions. We added a Vocabulary Improvement and Oral Language Enrichment through Stories (VIOLETS) Read Aloud Program and a parent-child Learning Party series. And we combined efforts with the Howard County Public School System to better transition children into kindergarten.
- Ready At Five's much-anticipated annual School Readiness Symposia continued to grow, providing breakthrough knowledge and research from national experts to inform thousands of Maryland educators and early childhood professionals on how to increase school readiness in young children.
- Ready At Five provided professional development to hundreds of early educators, school staff, and community partners, in multiple jurisdictions, through its *Cultural and Linguistic Competence: A Curriculum for Early Care and Education*, developed by Ready At Five and the National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University. The groundbreaking curriculum addresses the school readiness needs of children and families whose first language is not English.

“The return on investment from early childhood development is extraordinary, resulting in better working public schools, more educated workers and less crime. Any proposed (list of) economic development (policies) should have early childhood development at the top.”

Arthur J. Rolnick, Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank

## ready for school ready for life

- Ready At Five introduced the Institute for First Teachers, an intensive professional development training in which elementary school staff help early educators to effectively strengthen the learning of young children. Seven Institutes have served 150 early educators caring for more than 3,000 children.
- Ready At Five created and distributed more than 40,000 copies of our much-anticipated annual *Getting Ready* issue briefs that summarize and explain the yearly statewide and jurisdictional MMSR data on children's school readiness.
- Ready At Five built new partnerships with local school systems, businesses, local management boards, nonprofits, health care professionals, Maryland's library system, teachers, and other child advocates. Ready At Five also took a leadership role in coordinating the work of committees and joint initiatives on early care and education.
- Ready At Five created and distributed, in Spanish, English and Korean, vital and helpful print and online resources used by tens of thousands of parents and educators to strengthen children's school readiness. These highly-acclaimed publications include *Parents Matter*, *ParentTips*, the *School Readiness Activity Card Set*, and other valuable school readiness tools.



### The proof is in the progress

- 73% of Maryland kindergartners were school-ready in 2008-2009, a 24-point increase since 2001-2002.
- School readiness has steadily improved among children of all ethnicities in Maryland since 2001-2002.
- Since 2001-2002, Maryland kindergartners' readiness for school in math and science has increased remarkably: to 67% (up 27 points) and 54% (up 30 points) in 2008-2009.
- *Education Week* ranked Maryland's public schools number one in the nation for 2009, recognizing its early childhood education efforts, including early learning standards, assessment of school readiness, and interventions before and during kindergarten.

But we must keep moving forward and we must do it now. Every child in Maryland deserves to be fully ready to start school. Ready At Five has now set our sights on:

- Expanding our School Readiness Symposia to address such crucial and emerging topics as engaging in a dialogue about different early childhood curricula, dealing with the achievement gap affecting young African American males, and helping communities develop specific strategies to close this achievement gap.
- Expanding our Learning Laboratories into additional jurisdictions.
- Exposing more early educators and community partners to the Cultural and Linguistic Competence curriculum trainings and Learning Party training-of-trainers sessions.
- Extending the Institutes for First Teachers into more jurisdictions.
- Enhancing our Learning Party curriculum in additional content areas.
- Producing a Learning Laboratory Tool Kit to help community leaders and educators to launch and manage their own Learning Laboratories and bring proven best practices to their localities.
- Convening a statewide Business Leader Summit on Early Childhood Investment.
- Developing new partnerships with businesses, organizations, agencies and institutions to support planning and policies that enhance Maryland's early care and education system.



Your investment is the key to the rewards. We have made great progress, but we have much more to do. Please help Ready At Five to make school readiness a reality for all of Maryland's children.



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