



Children entering kindergarten vary in their early experiences, skills, knowledge, language, culture, and family background. Teachers report that 48% of children beginning kindergarten struggle with the transition to school. Through the *“Passport to Kindergarten”* initiative, Smart Beginnings Rappahannock Area is facilitating a **connection** among early learning centers, preschools, kindergarten staff, and parents to foster the kindergarten transition process.

A Community Transition Steering Committee, comprised of school and community agency leaders, retired educators, and representatives from early learning centers, is developing a community-based program to promote continuity from birth to kindergarten. Collaboration among the key players is fundamental in developing and implementing successful transition practices. The Community Transition Steering Committee meets monthly and sets the direction for the activities that take place.

Smart Beginnings Rappahannock Area is using *“Ready Freddy”*, an evidence-based program from the Office of Early Childhood at the University of Pittsburgh. The Ready Freddy model for quality transition is supported by research on parent engagement, attendance, and social emotional readiness. The core purpose of quality transition is to develop a positive pattern of relationships and behaviors that research demonstrates lead to future school success.

For the first time in our region, *“Passport to Kindergarten”* is working to “bridge the gap” between preschool and kindergarten. Child care center teachers, kindergarten teachers, and community agency/higher education staff are engaging in professional development activities to help promote continuity of services, build relationships among preschool and kindergarten teachers and community agency/higher education staff, help to define specific transition activities, and maximize resources across programs and agencies.

The Community Transition Steering Committee officially kicked off the *“Passport to Kindergarten”* program in the spring of 2013 by co-sponsoring a Regional Kindergarten Enrollment Day with the five area school divisions. Using various communication and marketing strategies, 706 children were registered for kindergarten. The 2nd Annual Regional Kindergarten Enrollment Day took place April 8, 2014 with 890 children registered. In a Smart Beginnings survey conducted in the fall of 2013 with parents in the four pilot elementary schools, only 34% attended a special Regional Kindergarten Enrollment Day. Awareness is key!

The second collaborative activity with the five area school divisions was a *“Ready Freddy”* Back-to-School Orientation. “Elementary schools that actively involve families and communities through positive communication and activities significantly increase attendance and decrease chronic absence.”¹ Being present on the first day of kindergarten sets the stage for school success.

¹Schulting, A. (2008). Promoting parent-school relationships during the transition to kindergarten. *The Evaluation Exchange*, 14(1&2), 8.

In August 2013, SBRA joined members of the Community Transition Steering Committee and 100 community volunteers to celebrate rising kindergarten children in four pilot elementary schools as they entered their respective school for orientation. From the same survey mentioned above, parent responses yielded positive results. At least 95% of participants perceived the orientation to be of high-quality, characterized by well-organized, prepared, and competent staff and volunteers, who promoted excitement with their child about attending kindergarten. Most participants (approximately 85%) also said their child was less apprehensive about the first day of school. Plans are in motion to work with one elementary school from all five school divisions in the summer of 2014. Several will be new schools and the others have requested our assistance for one more year.

The *“Passport to Kindergarten”* Professional Development Sub-Committee surveyed and conducted a focus group with preschool and kindergarten teachers to learn how to create a sense of continuity in children’s lives and equip families with the information that they need to help prepare their children for school success. The committee’s emphasis is to ensure that early childhood educators have the skills and knowledge necessary to do the job right. As a result, SBRA hosted a fall *“Meet and Greet”* in October 2013 with both groups to begin a collaborative effort to invest in transition practices that build coherence across early childhood settings and show promise as a means of supporting children’s adjustment during early schooling. Through our partnership with the University of Mary Washington, a research study is underway to provide an opportunity for preschool and kindergarten teachers to visit each other’s classrooms. In addition, a focus on kindergarten transition will be highlighted at the 14th Annual Regional Early Childhood and Child Care Conference on May 17 (sponsored by The Childcare Network, Germanna Community College, and Smart Beginnings Rappahannock Area). For the first time, kindergarten teachers will be invited to attend.

The Data Collection Sub-Committee is pursuing baseline data to support our efforts. In addition to the parent survey conducted in the fall, a *“Ready Freddy”* Snapshot Survey was developed and used during the recent Kindergarten Enrollment Day. Additional surveys are being designed for future use.

The partnership with our business community in transitioning children to kindergarten is critical. Business has a clear economic stake in the future of our youngest citizens; we need a well-educated, team-capable, problem-solving, and job-ready workforce. Investments in young children set tomorrow’s employees on a path to meet these demands. The connections from preschool to reading proficiency to high school completion — a bare-minimum requirement in today’s economy — could not be clearer.

Passport to Kindergarten is framed around a community model of transition that accounts for the influence of multiple learning environments and stakeholders. Widespread use of high-quality transition practices will be implemented – those that begin before the start of kindergarten, include individualized communication with families and children, and involve a collaborative effort among and between the different adults (families, teachers, and community providers) and institutions in the children’s’ lives.

Supporting early childhood education is a **SMART INVESTMENT** with a **PROVEN RETURN**.

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Success Story:

The *Passport to Kindergarten* initiative has brought so many wonderful, committed, and passionate people together from community agencies and the school divisions to generate, implement, and evaluate a kindergarten transition plan that suits the needs of our community.

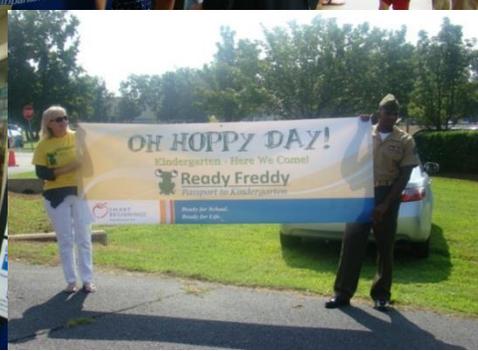
Our success story focuses around the strategic partnership we developed with our four pilot elementary schools, identified by the superintendent in four of the five school divisions. In December 2012, SBRA invited the principal and a kindergarten teacher to a workshop that introduced the “*Ready Freddy*” program. A collaborative team – composed of SBRA staff, the school principal, and kindergarten teachers – was then established in each school nearly 6 months before the Back-to-School orientations took place in August 2013. Members of the team met and communicated regularly to identify the school needs related to the transition of kindergarten students to their respective schools on the first day.

Through this collaboration, the team formulated programmatic changes to apply within their own school. Each school then implemented various transition practices geared to the specific needs of the families. In addition to the families, teachers, and principals; community volunteers played a key role in the transition process related to welcoming the children and families to the schools. Each Back-to-School Orientation took on a life of its own.

Comments from two principals and a kindergarten teacher (below) reveal the success, enthusiasm, and importance of building an effective, cohesive transition plan. All four elementary school principals stepped “out of the box” to hold a kindergarten “Back-to-School” orientation separate from the rest of the grades. They acknowledged a shift in approaches and expectations as a result of the collaborative process. As a consequence, relationships among the principal, kindergarten teachers, and families started out more positive and supportive.

This approach views the quality of the collaborative process and the relationships among the school, families, and community as a “step” in the right direction in helping children start school on the “right foot!”

Our 2013 community celebration



**THANK
YOU!!!**