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Implementation of the READY! for Kindergarten Program

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Statement of Need

Research has shown that nearly 50 percent of Minnesota children entering kindergarten are not well prepared with the skills necessary to be successful in the kindergarten curriculum (MinneMinds, 2014). This gap in kindergarten readiness creates an achievement gap causing students to face significant hurdles to academic achievement (MinneMinds, 2014) which are hard to improve over time. Investment in parent-focused early childhood education programs has been shown to create the heaviest gains for children across a wide range of outcome measures and is a critical step in ensuring that children are prepared for success in school (Neville et al., 2013).

About the Agency

The Nobles County Integration Collaborative (NCIC) is a non-profit collaboration of six school districts in the Minnesota counties of Jackson, Murray and Nobles and is a participant in the Achievement and Integration Program. "The mission of the Nobles County Integration Collaborative...is to promote students success and community acceptance of differences by providing opportunities for students, families and staff from diverse backgrounds to learn from and with one another" (NCIC, 2013).

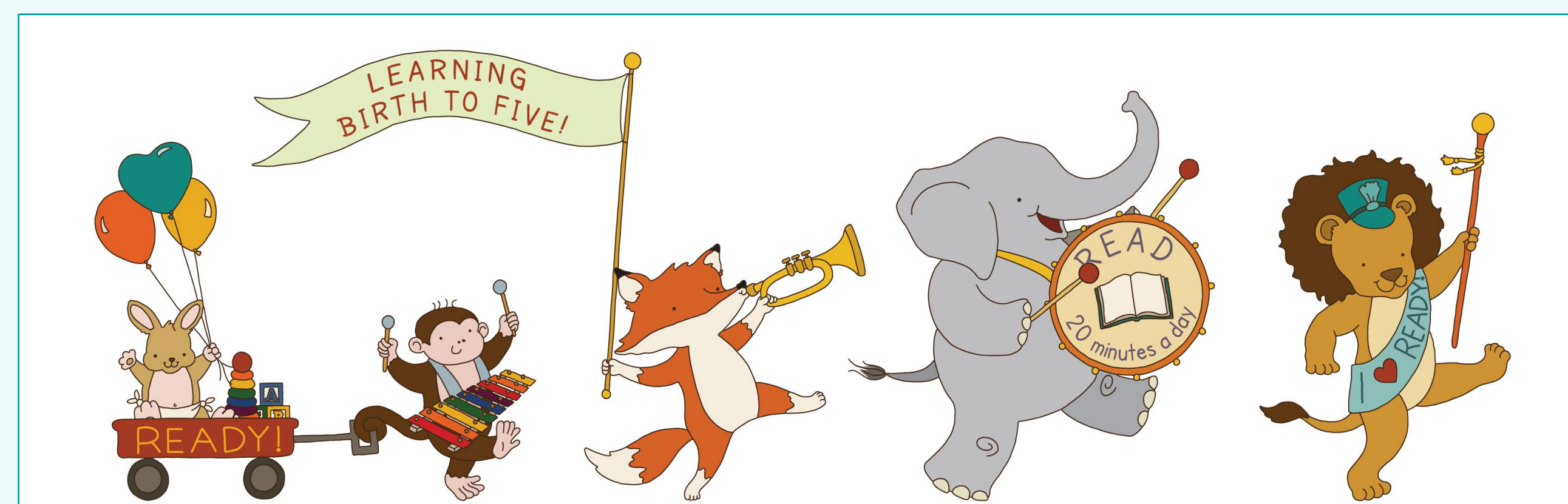
What is READY! ?

READY! for Kindergarten is a research-based program developed in 2002 by the Children's Reading Foundation. The READY! for Kindergarten program offers classes for parents, providing "age appropriate targets, trainings, and tools to encourage pre-kindergarten activities in the home" (READY! for Kindergarten, 2014, para.3).

Methodology

The intention of this capstone project was to pilot the READY! for Kindergarten program in districts served by the NCIC, providing a tool to help reduce the academic achievement gap.

First, a thorough literature review was conducted, including consultation with the lead READY! for Kindergarten researcher to research the effectiveness of the READY! for Kindergarten program. Second, community outreach presentations were created and presented in several school districts and community settings. Third, READY! for Kindergarten materials were ordered and facilitator training was completed via DVD and online resources in preparation for the pilot program.



TARGETS

- Focus on 3 interconnected areas of development: Language & Literacy, Math & Reasoning, and Social & Emotional
- Age appropriate goals, called "targets" are the framework for each session

TRAINING

- Parents/caregivers meet in 90-minute sessions, packed with information and demonstration of activities they can enjoy at home with their child
- Parents choose which activities they will use at home based on their values and culture, as well as their child's interests and abilities

TOOLS

- Each family is given high-quality materials to take home and use in intentional play with their child
- Parents become confident using everyday tools and experiences to engage their child's curiosity

The Pilot Program

Community outreach for the pilot program included meetings with representatives from all 6 districts, a presentation at the NCIC annual meeting, the creation and distribution of fliers and postcards, as well as newspaper submissions. Program planning including location of meeting spaces, on-site needs and childcare arrangements were done in consultation with district representatives.

The pilot program using READY!'s Spring 3-4 year old curriculum was conducted in three school districts: Fulda, Southwest Star Concept and Worthington. A total of 30 parents and 34 children attended the sessions. Following the review of the pilot program and consultation with district representatives, an implementation guide was created as a resource for NCIC as they seek to expand the program.

Recommendations

- Encourage READY! teacher-sharing between districts, particularly in smaller districts.
- Optimal class size is 8-10 parents. Registration should be limited to allow for discussion and relationship building.
- Seek the review of curriculum by Kindergarten teachers from each district.
- Continue session focus on building secure attachment within family relationships before concentrating on developmental and academic achievement.
- Further discussion should take place by NCIC staff regarding focusing sessions on relationship/community building and acculturation or offering sessions in multiple languages.
- Further research is needed regarding other avenues of providing culturally responsive sessions (i.e. home visiting, inclusion of READY! in Adult Basic Education classes)

References

References are available from author upon request.