Nine Pathways to Ready Schools

What is a “ready school”?

It can be defined as a school where children succeed. They progress in school and achieve the knowledge and skills that are required in a modern economy.

Ready schools may display the following characteristics. This is not a complete list of all the characteristics of good schools. It applies mainly to elementary schools.

1. Children succeed in school.
   The school promotes and supports healthy growth and development in five domains suggested by the National Educational Goals Panel:
   • Physical well-being;
   • Social relationships and emotional development;
   • Approaches to learning that incorporate cultural aspects of learning styles;
   • Use of language; and
   • Cognition, general knowledge and problem solving.
   At the same time, children acquire culturally relevant knowledge and skill sets necessary and valuable to the functioning of a modern economy.

2. The school environment encourages a welcoming atmosphere.
   • The school projects an open, child-focused, welcoming atmosphere.
   • It shows friendliness, respect, high teacher and staff morale, and the use of restrained and appropriate discipline.
   • The building and grounds are inviting and developmentally appropriate.
   • Children’s work is prominently displayed and bulletin boards contain family-oriented material.

3. Strong leadership exists at every level.
   • School leaders believe that all children can learn, teachers and staff can develop professionally, and all schools can meet or exceed state performance standards.
   • The principal has good management skills.
   • The school connects with and garners support from the superintendent, school board, and the state Department of Education.
   • In turn, the superintendent, school board, and the state Department of Education provide a coherent and appropriate set of policies and regulations.

4. The school is connected to early care and education.
   • The school works closely with early care and education (ECE) providers to improve the quality of ECE to help children get ready for school.
   • ECE and elementary school teachers communicate and coordinate with one another.
   • ECE and the school align their standards and curriculum at the local, district, and State levels.
   • The school participates in or provides transition activities for children entering pre-K or kindergarten, such as school and home visits, summer camps, and orientation sessions for parents.
   • The school gets assessment data from ECE providers to plan and individualize children’s learning.
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5. The school connects culturally and linguistically with children and families.
   • The school seeks to help children from all circumstances and backgrounds succeed.
   • The school uses culturally appropriate curricula.
   • Children and families are encouraged to share their backgrounds and experiences with other children and families.

6. There is a high level of parental involvement.
   • The school communicates with and involves parents in a wide range of activities, from providing information to engaging parents in policy and decision-making.
   • Special populations such as immigrants, refugees, and non-English speaking children and parents are included in all school-related activities.

7. The school forms partnerships with the community.
   • The school functions as a community center, drawing children and families from surrounding neighborhoods for multiple activities and purposes.
   • It partners with the community to provide opportunities and services to children and families, such as health screening and health services, courses in English and other languages, and instruction in GED preparation, computers, and parenting.

8. The school seeks out and uses assessment results.
   • The school uses assessments and their results to plan and tailor instruction to individual needs.
   • It has strategies in place to improve test scores and reduce achievement gaps.
   • The school ensures that testing is reliable, valid, and developmentally and culturally appropriate.

9. The school constantly seeks to improve its quality.
   • The school follows a written improvement plan that includes a strategy for maintaining its mission and goals over time.
   • It supports staff in professional development and consults with educational and non-educational experts for staff training and quality improvement.
   • Management uses evaluation data for decision-making.

How this list was compiled:
The SPARK Initiative Level Evaluation Team sought to develop a framework for describing ready schools. It reviewed several models from experts in the fields of early care and education and elementary education, other relevant literature, feedback from WKKF, the Resource Organizations, and the SPARK grantees.

This model was then tested and revised on the ground by visiting four model schools in diverse communities in Hilo, Hawaii, Albuquerque, NM, Cleveland, MS, and Atlanta, GA.