

School Readiness in Northeast Tennessee 2022-2024



Presenters

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- Dr. Nancy Dishner, President and CEO, Niswonger Foundation

Relationship to the First Three Goals of the STRONG ACC

- **Great Beginnings** - Infants are born at a healthy birth weight and unexposed to substances, reside in safe, stable, nurturing environments and have at least one parent/caregiver equipped to be their first teacher.
- **Thriving at Five** - 5 year olds are physically, socially and emotionally healthy and ready to learn.
- **Early Grades Success** - By the end of 3rd grade, students are demonstrating reading and math skills.

Relationship to the first goal of the Bright Start NETN Strategic Plan

- Goal #1: Increase the percentage of economically disadvantaged 3rd graders on-track in reading and math by 15 percentage points in the region by 2025. (25% to 40%)

Why we identified School
Readiness as our Goal...

Project Design

- Goal/Strategy of Bright Start NETN
- Ballad CHI grant funding to the Niswonger Foundation
- Niswonger Foundation formed the working group and designed the strategic plan
- 2 years to plan and implement with accountability to Ballad CHI
- Summer/Fall 2024 all school districts are screening
- Goals and action steps at end of presentation for your reference

Create a Goal and Action Steps

- The goal was established to have 75% of LEAs agree on using the same school readiness screening measure.
- Action steps were created to be the leading indicators. These action steps focus on the recommendations of the working group but allowed for differentiation by each LEA.
- Everything was planned and executed by the working group including collaboration, autonomy and a clear direction.

Building Trust and Ownership is Essential

- There was a foundation of trust with the Niswonger Foundation and CER.
- We had to build trust within the working group and with the external partners, especially prior to data collection from the screener.
- Districts had to have ownership of this project:
 - Importance of readiness definition
 - Importance of using a screening tool
 - Selecting the screening tool
 - Aligning on how and WHEN to give the screening
 - Using the data in multiple ways to support students, parents, teachers, administrators, and external partners

Essential to Build Strong Collaborative Processes

- **Select a LEAD organization** with responsibility for the project.
- **Support the working group** (Example: Sharing their communication plan for the school readiness definition.)
- **Guide the districts** in creating teacher-centered review teams.
- **Unite external partners** to support the work.

Backbone Organizations are Helpful

- Brings together the BIG picture - strategically aligned with the goals and efforts of other community organization.
- Leverages the strengths, experiences and successes of many community partners.
- These partnerships keep the focus on the overarching goal of having a educated, healthy and thriving economy and region.
- This one took “a village.” The work could not have been accomplished without partnership.

Question and Answer

Goals and Action Steps (For reference)

Goals 22-23

1. Establish a working group with one representative from each of the 18 school districts that will meet 4 times from September-May.
2. Inventory current practices around Kindergarten readiness/screening.
3. Engage stakeholders in information gathering and planning.
4. Identify national best practices in screening for Kindergarten readiness.
5. Develop a strategic plan with a vision for region-wide implementation and consensus building around the best and most successful practices in assessing Kindergarten readiness.

Goal 1: Establish a Working Group

- The working group represents all 17 districts from the First TN region and Jefferson County
- The working group met 4 times throughout the year (September, December, February, and April)
- Dr. Nancy Dishner, Niswonger Foundation oversees the working group
- Dr. Tony Dalton, Hamblen County Schools and Dr. Mia Hyde, CER assist with the project

Goal 2: Inventory Current Kindergarten Screening Practices

- A wide variety of screeners are currently being used across the districts
- Some districts do not use a screener at all
- Most give the Brigance (8)
- Many use their universal screening tools (such as Easy CBM, Aims Web, STAR Early Lit/Math, Dibels/mclass)
- Many have created their own (6)
- Several use teacher observation (4)
- Some use a combination of these measures

Goal 3: Engage stakeholders in information gathering and planning

- The working group met regularly with Kindergarten teachers in their district to share key insights from the meetings and to gather feedback
- The working group also shared information with other supervisors and the Director of Schools
- The Niswonger Foundation shared an update on the progress of the group with leadership at the Foundation as well as with Directors of Schools

Goal 4: Identify national best practices in screening for Kindergarten readiness

- We worked with the Regional Education Laboratory of Appalachia to use their “Ask an Expert” offering
- REL Appalachia provided information on:
 - **Inventory:** What evidence about reliability and validity exists for screeners that districts in the region are currently using to assess kindergarten readiness? Are other reliable and valid screeners not currently in use in the region available?
 - **Screener design:** What are the characteristics of valid and reliable kindergarten readiness screeners including which domains they assess and how they are administered?
 - **Implementation:** What are promising strategies for training and supporting educators to reliably administer kindergarten readiness screeners? What are best practices for using kindergarten readiness screening data?

Screener Data Samples

- Members of the working group collected a 5% data sample from their current screener
- This practice helped them to:
 - Identify areas of strength and areas of need in their current screener
 - Identify which skills are assessed and which ones are not assessed
 - Identify how the screener data is used in the district and if that is an effective use of the data
 - Identify how the screener data is communicated to parents and other stakeholders and how that process can be improved

Screener Presentations

Based on the findings from the REL Appalachia Ask an Expert report and the findings from the data sample, we chose to learn about the following screeners:

1. ESGI
2. TS Gold
3. BDI
4. Bracken
5. Brigance

We selected Bracken and Brigance to move forward for further review.

Definitions of School Readiness

- The working group collaborated on two definitions of school readiness.
- We created one for educators and one for caregivers and community members.
- These definitions were finalized in Fall 2023

Goal 5: Develop a strategic plan with a vision for region-wide implementation and consensus building around the best and most successful practices in assessing Kindergarten readiness

- The working group developed a strategic plan that has been revised and finalized.
- This plan will take effect in August 2023 and will be complete in May 2024.
- This plan allows the working group to develop protocols of best practice and then allows the district teams to refine those for the context of the district.

Goals 23-24

1. To finalize a definition of school readiness for educators and caregivers and community.
2. To review and select a common school readiness screener.
3. To create a budget for purchasing and administering the common screener.
4. To develop best practices on how and when the screener will be administered; how the screener data will be shared with parents, teachers, and other stakeholders; and how the data will be used as an indicator of community health.

Working Group Members

| | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Bristol City | Rachel Walk | Hawkins County | Hope Malone |
| Carter County | Betsy Oliver | Johnson City | Amanda Fenner |
| Cocke County | Kathy Holt | Johnson County | Angie Wills |
| Elizabethton City | Myra Newman | Kingsport City | Suzanne Lewis |
| Greene County | Misty Mercer | Newport City | Sandra Burchette |
| Greeneville City | Stacy King | Rogersville City | Kelley Russell |
| Hamblen County | Tony Dalton | Sullivan County | Cathy Nester |
| Hancock County | Breanna Nichols | Washington County | Cindy Hayes |
| Unicoi County | Patience Erwin | | |

Kindergarten Demographics

| District | Number of Kindergarten students in your district | Of that total, how many are Black or African American? | Of that total, how many are Hispanic or LatinX? | Of that total, how many are white? | Of that total, how many are more than one race? |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Bristol City | 281 | 2 | 11 | 230 | 35 |
| Carter | 348 | 6 | 14 | 315 | 11 |
| Cocke County | 302 | 7 | 4 | 277 | 14 |
| Elizabethton | 166 | 3 | 6 | 146 | 10 |
| Greene County | 447 | 2 | 21 | 409 | 12 |
| Greeneville City Schools | 224 | 25 | 30 | 160 | 57 |
| Hamblen | 810 | 49 | 278 | 448 | 0 |
| Hancock County | 68 | 0 | 1 | 66 | 0 |
| Hawkins County | 455 | 1 | 7 | 421 | 14 |
| Jefferson County | 466 | 3 | 42 | 428 | 28 |
| Johnson City Schools | 544 | 87 | 85 | 352 | 64 |
| Johnson County Schools | 140 | 2 | 7 | 130 | 0 |
| Kingsport City Schools | 549 | 70 | 0 | 453 | 53 |
| Newport | 87 | 9 | 4 | 75 | 5 |
| Rogersville City | 60 | 5 | 2 | 53 | 3 |
| Sullivan County | 568 | 15 | 5 | 542 | 12 |
| Unicoi County | 151 | 2 | 17 | 131 | 0 |
| Washington County | 566 | 13 | 22 | 504 | 17 |
| Total | 6232 | 301 | 556 | 5140 | 335 |

Goal 1: To finalize a definition of school readiness for educators and caregivers and community.

The Kindergarten Readiness Working Group worked together to create a definition of school readiness that can be used for educators, caregivers, and the community. The school districts created a plan for using communicating this information with internal and external stakeholders.

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Goal 2: To review and select a common school readiness screener.

The Kindergarten Readiness Working Group created district teams comprised of Kindergarten teachers and other key stakeholders to review the screening tools. We created a common rubric for reviewing and scoring the tools. The BRIGANCE Early Childhood Screens III was selected. It is used to accurately screen skills that are critical predictors of school success, including physical development, language, academic/cognitive, self-help, and social-emotional skills. The assessments are aligned to early learning standards and TN State Standards for children from birth to age 6. Results provide both norm and criterion referenced outcomes. Online data management allows for meeting reporting requirements with normed data and include parent observation forms and involvement resources for early learning.

Goal 3: To create a budget for purchasing and administrating the common screener.

- Each school district created an individual budget for planning purposes.
- The vendor provided the group with a discount on the screening tool components, including the online student management system.
- A combined budget was created for a total cost of the project for three years.

Goal 4: To develop best practices on how and when the screener will be administered; how the screener data will be shared with parents, teachers, and other stakeholders; and how the data will be used as an indicator of community health.

- Most of the school districts are giving it in the summer or fall during staggered start
- Most will have teachers or assistants trained to give the assessment
- Most will have teachers or assistants enter the data from the assessment
- Most of the school districts are thinking about how they will communicate the data to internal and external stakeholders, including parents. Once the assessment is given, they will create a process for doing this.
- All of the school districts agreed to share their screening data with the Niswonger Foundation.