

# Smart Beginnings of Danville-Pittsylvania County

## Strategic Plan - 2010 - 2015

**Goal I:** *All young children will have access to high quality, evidence-based preschool experiences.*

*Identified problem to be addressed:* Effective early childhood professionals need a strong background in education and child development. Locally less than 20% of day care providers have a Bachelors or higher educational degree.

**Objective 1:** Increase the educational attainment of providers of early childhood education through the identification and abolishment of barriers to participation.

- Create a School Readiness Committee involving early care educators to promote high-quality programs, professional development and participation in the Virginia Star Quality Initiative.
- Determine and promote public and private sector funding sources to support professional development for early childhood teachers and para-professionals in early childhood education.
- Strengthen partnerships with local adult basic education programs and higher education institutions to support the learning needs of early childhood educators.
- Coordinate training and promotion for early childhood educators in early childhood education best practices, curricula, assessment, and elements included in the Virginia Star Quality Initiative.
- Promote the use of the Commonwealth of Virginia Early Childhood and Child Care Professional Development Career Lattice.

*Identified problem to be addressed:* The Virginia Star Quality Initiative was created to provide a consistent way to distinguish the level of quality in early education programs. Currently, local families are unable to make informed choices for child care and child care providers lack a standardized assessment of the quality of their services.

**Objective 2:** Increase participation by early child care centers in the Virginia Star Quality Initiative.

- Explore funding resources to provide incentives for participation by early child care providers in the VSQI.
- Implement a public awareness and communications effort targeted towards early child care providers and parents of young children that focuses on the elements included in the VSQI.
- Develop an evaluation plan to demonstrate improved impact high quality childcare has on children.

*Identified problem to be addressed:* Cost, not quality, is often the primary criteria for selecting a child care provider, which in turn impacts the bottom line of higher quality programs. Locally the cost for private day care facilities range from \$80 to \$125 per week, depending on the age of the child.

*Identified problem to be addressed:* High quality early child care and education provide an important foundation for children with special needs. Locally, few providers accept children with special needs.

**Objective 3:** Reduce barriers for families to ensure increased access to quality preschool experiences.

- Advocate for additional child care subsidies to offset the costs of quality early care and education for low and moderate income families.
- Explore public and private sector funding sources to create and implement a resource development plan to ensure universal access to high quality early education and care.
- Assess and advocate for specialized types of early education and care to ensure adequate supply of services to meet the demand at the infant, toddler and pre-school stages.

*Identified problem to be addressed:* Multiple family-school connections prior to a child's first day in kindergarten foster successful transitions. Locally, few transition activities are provided to assist the child and family with adjustment to kindergarten.

**Objective 4:** Ensure effective transitions from birth to kindergarten.

- Work with all preschool early care and education programs to assure that they are linked with kindergarten programs and that children's transition to kindergarten is managed through a formal process involving parents, preschool program providers and the school district's kindergarten educators.

**Goal II:** *Parents will be supported with the knowledge and awareness of best practices, proper child development, and community resources in order to serve as their child's best teacher and advocate.*

*Identified problem to be addressed:* A child's experience with oral language development and literacy, as early as the first months of life, begin a foundation for later reading success. Children living in poverty are much less likely to be engaged in literacy activities with their families. In Danville, more than 37% of families with children under the age of five live below the poverty level. In Pittsylvania county, more than 9% with children under the age of five live below the poverty level. In 2009, 33% of Danville children entering kindergarten and 14% of Pittsylvania County children entering kindergarten were identified through PALS as being at-risk for reading failure.

**Objective 1:** Increase the availability of resources for parents, appropriate for their education, interests, and needs.

- Connect and enhance various parent education and family support programs currently offered to identify gaps, disseminate best practices, expand services, and promote services to families.
- Based on parent input, create parent Resource Centers in multiple locations utilizing a variety of strategies, and addressing desired services and identified barriers.

*Identified problem to be addressed:* The family plays the most important role in a young child's life. Adults must recognize their role as the child's first and most important teacher. In a local parent survey, 32% of parents indicated babies are ready to learn between ages one to three years. Local providers of parenting educational programs indicate a lack of participants.

**Objective 2:** Increase the number of parents participating in educational opportunities.

- Create a Ready Families Advisory Council composed of parents of young children, representative of all sectors of the community, to provide on-going input into the planning and delivery of family support services for early childhood.
- Convene providers of parent education and family support programs to develop strategies to better disseminate information about programs and services to families with young children.

*Identified problem to be addressed:* In order to thrive in their first five years and be ready for sustained school success, children must receive early education and care givers of the highest quality. Forty (40) percent of local parents surveyed indicated they are currently using, or have used in the past two years, family or friends for their child care.

**Objective 3:** Provide information to assist parents in recognizing and requesting high quality child care services.

- Develop and implement a parent awareness campaign that describes the elements of high quality child care, the VSQI, and ways to access high quality care.

**Goal III:** *Health care, early intervention, and other systems that serve young children will succeed in earlier detection, access expansion, and more effective responses to ensure healthy child development and school readiness.*

*Identified problem to be addressed:* Children without health insurance are less likely to receive primary and preventive health services, less likely to have special needs identified and addressed in a timely fashion, and more likely to experience poor overall health. In 2007, there were 900 children in Danville and 1350 in Pittsylvania County eligible for FAMIS (Family Access to Medical Insurance Security Plan) but not enrolled.

**Objective 1:** Increase the number of eligible children enrolled in insurance programs.

- Convene providers of family support services to develop a comprehensive plan that promotes the eligibility and process for enrolling children in available insurance programs and addresses barriers identified by the Ready Families Advisory Council.

*Identified problem to be addressed:* Poorly nourished children often have a delay in motor and cognitive development and are more vulnerable to chronic illness. Thirty-three percent of local physicians surveyed identified obesity as one of the major health concerns they see in patients 0 – 5 years.

**Objective 2:** Reduce the number of overweight and obese young children.

- Train and support child care providers in integrating activities that expose children to moderate physical activity and good nutrition within an appropriate early childhood development approach.
- Provide family friendly information and resources to help low-income families overcome the challenges that contribute to poor nutrition and limited physical activity.
- Advocate for community efforts that promote good nutrition and physical activity throughout all neighborhoods.

*Identified problem to be addressed:* Mental health services are essential to identifying and addressing young children’s behavioral and social issues prior to entering school. In 2007, 2.8% of Danville children under age 6 and 2.4% of Pittsylvania County children under age 6 were identified as in need of special education services. Area mental health services for children are very limited.

**Objective 3:** Raise awareness concerning child development to include social, emotional and behavioral issues.

- Coordinate training, support and consultation on infant and early childhood social, emotional, and behavioral issues to early education and care providers.
- Advocate for increased funding for mental health services for young children.
- Conduct an awareness campaign to inform parents of early childhood mental health issues.
- Expand access to effective behavioral health care through primary care settings.

*Identified problem to be addressed:* The earlier children with a disability or developmental delay are identified and provided with appropriately designed services and supports, the greater gains a child will make in their educational and social development. Local early intervention professionals indicated a need to increase by 25% the number of local children identified as in need of early intervention services. Lack of knowledge by physicians and early child care providers regarding screening tools for developmental delays results in many children going undetected.

**Objective 4:** Increase the percentage of children identified as in need of early intervention services.

- Support efforts of family service organizations to expand services for improving birth outcomes and early parenting experiences.
- Provide information to families about the importance of a “medical home” for all children.

- Coordinate training of early care educators in the screening guidelines that promote healthy development and early detection of special needs.
- Explore opportunity to pilot a model program that implements welcome newborn visits, universal screening, parent information, and coordination of services in a local healthcare facility.
- Identify new venues for conducting developmental screenings that reach very young high-risk children.
- Identify funding resources to build capacity for providing additional early intervention services.

*Goal IV: The many sectors of Danville and Pittsylvania County will work together to ensure children's school readiness becomes and remains a top priority.*

**Objective 1:** Create and maintain a governance and operational structure that is representative of the community to oversee the success of Smart Beginnings and help fuel a broader movement to support Danville and Pittsylvania county's youngest children.

- Maintain a cross-sector Leadership Council to serve as a governing board for Smart Beginnings, providing general oversight and leadership on resource development, and policy and advocacy.
- Ensure By-Laws reflect the work of the Leadership Council and the coalition.
- Maintain an effective committee structure that identifies and selects lead organizations who will support and assist in the implementation of Smart Beginning's Strategic Plan.
- Create a Ready Families Advisory Council, composed of parents of young children, representative of all sectors of the community, to provide on-going input into the planning and delivery of family support services for early childhood.

**Objective 2:** Develop area wide campaigns to help the general public understand the importance of and take part in supporting young children's school readiness.

- Develop a campaign that highlights the roles all members of the community can play in promoting children's school readiness.
- Develop and implement a program that encourages employers to publicly support school readiness through specific actions that benefit employees.

**Objective 3:** Strengthen linkages with community initiatives to address broader community needs that impact the stability of families.

- Partner with community initiatives that address transportation, housing, safety, adult education, employment, substance abuse and economic security.

**Objective 4:** Actively advocate for early childhood services.

- Identify and support advocacy strategies that support early childhood services, utilizing statewide and local early childhood groups and individuals.

**Objective 5:** Regularly measure, track, and report on the progress of Smart Beginnings to understand its impact on the community.

- Produce an Annual Report to measure and track progress indicators of the activities undertaken by Smart Beginnings.