

# *Quality Preschool Systems Introduction*

*Decades of research tell us that the first years of life are crucial to the development and functioning of the brain. It confirms that what children know and can do when they start school helps determine their success in the classroom, in the workplace and throughout their lives. Yet, nearly one-third of the Ohio children entering kindergarten each year are not prepared to succeed as learners (School Readiness Solution Group, 2006).*

Continued discussion related to early childhood programming has highlighted the current issue of school readiness. While a discussion on school readiness is not new, many early education and care programs as a result of these discussions are considering what school readiness means for their program and what they can do to support a strong start for children in their programs. Preschool programs, as a result, have continued to see increased focus on the importance of early learning experiences for young children, increased accountability for the outcomes achieved by children in their programs, and the establishment of many state requirements to support school readiness initiatives. While these changes and mandates have posed new challenges for preschool programs, more importantly as a state, we have begun to understand what must be in place to ensure a successful early learning system for all children.

The Office of Early Learning and School Readiness has moved the state forward in achieving an effective early learning system through state initiatives such as the Early Learning Program Guidelines. Establishment of the guidelines presents preschool programs with considerations for ensuring quality services and supports are provided to children and families. In order for programs to address the goals the state has established for an early learning system, implement the Early Learning Program Guidelines, and support other state initiatives and requirements, programs must have in place a quality preschool system to address the changes of today, tomorrow, and years to come.

During the 2007-2008 school year, the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness is requiring preschool special education programs to engage in a year long planning process for implementation of the Early Learning Program Guidelines. As part of these requirements, programs will be expected to establish a leadership team to guide the planning process for next year. Establishment of a leadership team for preschool special education programs will put in place the opportunity to address a program's preschool system from foundational considerations to practices being carried out in the classrooms and supports offered to children and families.

## Elements of Quality Preschool Systems

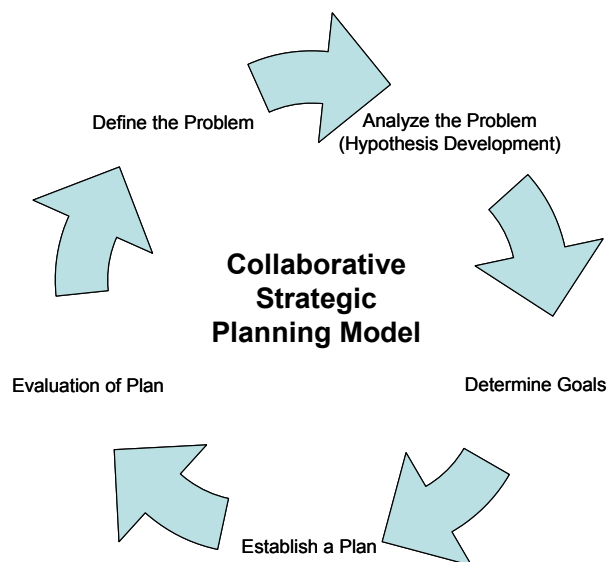
Within preschool programs, effective support for improvement entails the consideration of the following systems principles:

### *Representative Leadership Team Is Established*

- A leadership team is in place to plan, support, and monitor implementation of the preschool system
- The team is comprised of essential key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, administrator, related service providers, school age representatives, community members, families) to incorporate critical perspectives and ensure change is possible
- Families are viewed as an integral part of the system
- Community partnerships are established to ensure a representative leadership team
- Leadership team develops a preschool system focus within the context of the program/district's vision

### *Collaborative Planning Process*

- Leadership team engages in a systematic planning process comprised of the following steps
  - Step 1: Analysis of the current system is conducted to determine the gaps between the system in place and the desired outcomes
  - Step 2: Hypothesize why the gaps exist
  - Step 3: Goals are developed to target improvement within the current preschool system
  - Step 4: An action plan for supporting improvement and achieving the targeted goals is outlined
  - Step 5: Evaluation procedures are defined to measure progress towards targeted goals and ensure continued support and monitoring of improvements to the preschool system
- The result of the collaborative planning process is the development of an action plan that guides the work of the leadership team and stakeholders



### *Data/Documentation Based Decision Making*

- A systematic process of data/documentation collection has been organized to gather information about the child, classroom, program, and the overall preschool system functioning
- A systematic process for reviewing and interrupting data/documentation has been established
- Data/documentation is used to influence the decisions made within the preschool system
- Scope of the data/documentation collected is comprehensive and encompasses a meaningful and purposeful focus for the leadership team and stakeholders.

### *Comprehensive Curriculum Framework*

- Academic and developmental needs of all children are supported by focusing on the critical areas of learning (e.g., math, science, literacy) and development (e.g., adaptive, motor, communication)
- Preschool program has a high-quality curriculum framework identified and implemented including the following four components: Assessment, Scope and Sequence, Activities and Instruction, and Progress Monitoring
- A tiered model of instruction and support are in place to address the dynamic and unique needs of children
- Children's interests and individualized needs are addressed within the curriculum framework
- Families are involved in supporting the academic and developmental needs of their children

### *Ongoing Professional Development and Support*

- The goals and vision for professional development are aligned with the preschool program's action plan and priorities, in addition to state and federal initiatives
- Professional development should have a whole program focus incorporating administrators, teachers, families, and paraprofessionals within the preschool program
- Embedded opportunities for learning are in place to allow for continued problem solving, practice with support and feedback, and time to reflect on the effectiveness of practices and services offered
- Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for educators to work together

### **Beliefs of Quality Preschool Systems**

*All Children are Born Ready to Learn*

*Environments Matter*

*Relationship are Influential*

*Communication is Critical*

