

Executive Summary

Why We Need an Action Agenda

The first few years of life shape a child's ability to learn, relate to others, and be successful in school. Children who are ready for kindergarten tend to do better throughout their school career. Children who are *not* ready are more likely to fail or repeat grades, need special education classes, and/or drop out. Schools in King County do not keep records on the readiness of entering kindergarteners, but teachers and school officials confirm national studies showing that many children come to school unprepared.

In 2003, more than 120 agencies, organizations and people from across King County helped to develop *An Early Childhood and School Readiness Action Agenda*. Its aim is to improve school readiness dramatically throughout King County. The Action Agenda: (1) focuses efforts and funds on effective actions; (2) works to coordinate services and fill gaps; (3) combines countywide coverage with subregional focus; (4) will measure progress; and (5) provides ways for everyone concerned with children and families to participate.

The Action Agenda

Based on research and best practices and guided by a common vision and set of values, the Action Agenda provides a plan and the next steps to improve school readiness over the next five years. The Action Agenda sets out four countywide goals.

Goals

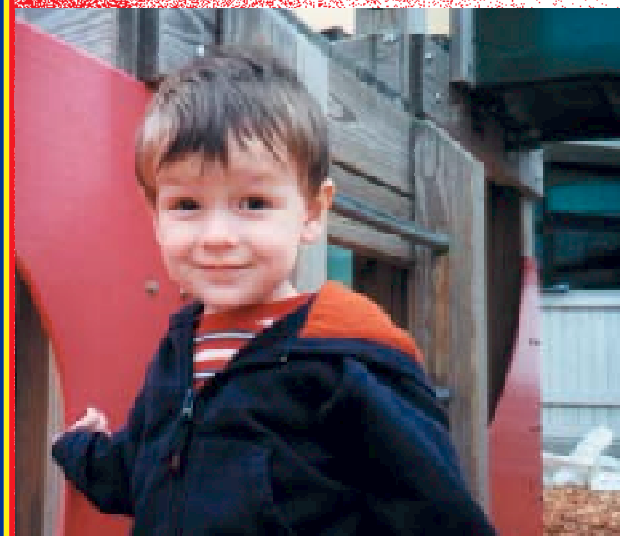
- **Nurturing:** Children have strong bonds and nurturing relationships with their parents/guardians and other significant adults in their lives.
- **Prevention/Early Intervention:** Children and families most in need of services to help their development get high-quality, affordable and culturally competent services early.
- **Early Care and Education:** Children and families have access to high-quality, affordable and culturally competent early care and early education.
- **Successful Transitions:** Children are prepared, from infancy, for a successful transition into school by the adults in their lives, working in concert with their communities and schools.

Cultural competence is one of the shared values that shaped the Action Agenda. It is essential to these goals in order to support the development and learning of all children. Cultural competence is central to all the Action Agenda strategies.

Strategies

The Action Agenda includes countywide and subregional strategies. The Family and Child Early Support (FACES) groups in the four subregions endorse all four countywide goals. Each group created a plan for the goal areas most important for its subregion:

Vision: All children in King County will enter school prepared to reach their full social, emotional, physical and academic potential. Schools will welcome children and their families, and support the learning success of all entering students.



Nurturing

- **Countywide:** (1) Raise public awareness about how the nurturing relationships a child has with parents and caregivers affect that child's success in school and in life. (2) Increase the resources that parents and caregivers can tap to create the best possible early environment for the child. (3) Increase adults' knowledge of and skills in child development and early learning.
- **South King County:** Ensure that programs based on family support principles are located near families and are culturally competent.
- **East King County:** Create a culture in the community that provides support and resources to parents, guardians and other caregivers.
- **Seattle:** Engage diverse community organizations and leaders in learning about the services for family support to help them provide better referrals to families.

Prevention/Early Intervention

- **Countywide:** Ensure that families can find the high-quality, affordable and culturally competent services they need to help them assess their children's development, and to address problems as early as possible.
- **North King County:** Raise the awareness of physicians, caregivers, families and trusted advocates about the importance of early intervention for children with special needs.
- **South King County and Seattle:** Engage diverse community organizations and leaders in learning about culturally competent prevention, early intervention and assessment services to help them provide better referrals to families.

What Comes Next

The Action Agenda is a plan for community action. *SOAR, helping children reach for the sky* is championing the Action Agenda and the countywide plan. *SOAR*, formed through the union of Project Lift-Off and the United Way of King County Children's Initiative, is a community partnership to improve the success of children and youth (birth to 18 years) in life and in school. *SOAR* has convened Action Teams of community partners and is galvanizing people to action toward the countywide Action Agenda goals. The *FACES* groups are championing their subregional plans. Measurement of the Action Agenda's work includes a population-based, countywide measure of school readiness, and progress measures for the countywide goals.

Organizations, local governments and individuals across King County—many of whom helped to shape the Action Agenda—are now moving the Action Agenda goals forward by aligning their programs, collaborating in projects and helping to garner new resources.

Early Care and Education

- **Countywide:** (1) Improve the quality of early care and education that children receive from: early childhood educators (including child care providers), and family, friend and neighbor (FFN) caregivers. (2) Involve everyone who is concerned about children (birth to six) in building toward a system of early education and comprehensive preschool in King County and Washington that is high quality, culturally competent, affordable and accessible to all children and families.
- **North King County:** Provide high-quality training and opportunities for networking for all the diverse adults who care for young children.
- **Seattle:** Improve the quality of early care and education programs by increasing the number of accredited programs and early childhood teachers who have or are working toward an early childhood credential or degree.

Successful Transitions

- **Countywide and Seattle:** Educate and motivate all the adults in children's lives to take steps every day to help: (1) children develop the skills they need for school, and (2) schools be more ready for all children and their families.
- **North King County:** (1) Engage the adults in children's lives in working together to help young children learn. (2) Educate adults about the early years in a child's development. (3) Help parents help their children gain early literacy skills. (4) Provide culturally competent information about early childhood development, early education and parenting.
- **East King County:** (1) Increase communication between the schools and all parents and guardians. (2) Increase the knowledge of parents, child care providers, schools and community members about the early years in a child's development.