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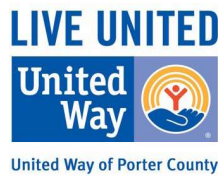
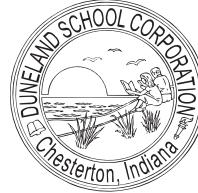
Porter County School Readiness Program Manual

FULL
STEAM
AHEAD

Powered by



School Readiness Partners



Materials used in this manual are built on the Indiana Department of Education foundations for early learning and kindergarten readiness.

HTKS materials from Peabody Research Institute. *Get Ready to Read!* evaluation provided by Pearson.
STEAM Curriculum licensed from Regina Davis via teacherspayteachers.com

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Welcome!

Dear Community Leader:

Our commitment to a better Porter County is to provide the resources necessary to give those most in need a better quality of life.

In recent years, we began to see a learning gap arise for children not prepared for kindergarten learning and beyond. Our work began with local school and community leaders to implement programs that tried to fill this gap. As we worked, we discovered that the problem was greater than we could continue to solve alone.

To meet the growing need, we reached out to ArcelorMittal to help fill the gap. They agreed to support our current efforts and assist in program expansion. This manual is just one of the many results of that support. This manual's purpose is two-fold:

- It is a guidebook for early childhood learning program assessment protocols and measurements. This standardized research practice will be implemented in pre-kindergarten programs throughout Porter County to understand the true impact of early childhood learning on a child's future.
- It serves as the operational manual for the United Way Kinder Camp program. A 15-day summer camp program that provides a foundational school experience to prepare children for kindergarten. Thanks to ArcelorMittal support we are able to double the size of our 2017 camp.

As we move forward in this endeavor, we look for other kindergarten readiness programs to join us in our efforts to measure the impact of the current learning landscape and help our residents to have a successful learning career.

We could not provide this program without the support of our partners. Thank you, ArcelorMittal, Hilltop Neighborhood House, Duneland YMCA, Parents as Teachers, Porter County school corporations and Purdue University Northwest for supporting us in this endeavor. And, a special thanks to Donna Battista, kindergarten teacher at Valparaiso Community Schools, and Mary Jane Eisenhauer, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at Purdue University Northwest, for their endless hard work and dedication to early learning in Porter County.

Sincerely,



Kim Olesker

President & CEO



Porter County School Readiness Program

The Beginning

In the Porter County school districts, many children arrive unprepared for the first day of kindergarten, lacking social, behavioral and basic learning skills. These children, many from low-income families and in underserved communities, have not attended a school readiness program because of limited affordability, accessibility or awareness about such programs.

Studies show young children who have explicit support to develop important social, physical and cognitive skills are better prepared for the demands of elementary school (e.g. Graziano, Slavic, et al., 2014).

Since 2014, United Way of Porter County, Parents as Teachers, Portage Township Schools and Valparaiso Community Schools have led the charge to fill the learning gap by offering a high-quality, early learning experience that builds on the foundations of science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) to help these children succeed. Designed for 4 to 5 year-olds with the most need in the community, this early childhood school readiness program provides a positive first school experience to promote a life-long love of learning.

The program incorporates two delivery methods: 1) school-year and 2) summer school. The segments are built as stand-alone components to meet educational needs at different points in time.

- The school-year program Ready, Set, Kindergarten (RSK) is provided by Parents as Teachers of Porter County. This program meets one half-day per week in elementary schools throughout the county. It is offered in the school year prior to entering kindergarten at their future home school. RSK follows the assessment protocol outlined in this manual and offers a similar STEAM-focused curriculum from September to May.
- The summer school program, United Way of Porter County Kinder Camp, will be fully discussed beginning on page 31.

Since 2014, the program has served less than half the need in the current two school districts, Valparaiso and Portage. To address the unmet need, we are working to sustain and expand the program in the existing school districts and into Porter County's other 5 school districts.

In 2016, we began partnering with year-round kindergarten readiness programs, such as Hilltop Neighborhood House and Duneland YMCA, to measure Porter County's early learning landscape. We are also working with the school districts to look at long-term impact of all partner programs.

“In Indiana we work together so that every child can develop to his or her fullest potential – socially, emotionally, physically, cognitively and academically. Through growth in all of these domains, the child will become a healthy, capable, competent and powerful learner.”

–Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee, 2014

Full STEAM Ahead

STEAM = Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Mathematics

Through the exploration of the STEAM concepts, young children increase conceptual knowledge and strengthen social and emotional skills, including executive functions, all of which are critical for later school success. STEAM experiences include nature exploration walks, take-home activities, sensory stations and creation stations, such as building blocks and Legos. STEAM is the new STEM.

Through developmentally appropriate experiences, purposefully designed learning environments, and high quality interactions with adults, children develop confidence and skills in academic learning as well as important social and behavioral functions to be successful in life and an asset to the community. The learning environment, experiences and interactions with adults and peers in a STEAM-oriented program are intentionally designed to promote growth and learning for children as they enter kindergarten.

Pre-K program goals and outcomes should include:

1. Improve child's cognitive skills – recognition of letters, pre-reading skills, concepts such as numbers and colors, book-knowledge and vocabulary.
2. Improve child's school behavior skills – turn-taking, manipulating materials, listening to a story and self-help skills.
3. Improve child's social development skills – conversing with peers and adults, being independent, keeping hands to self, sharing and listening.
4. Improve parenting practices — learning how to observe your child in an education environment, implementing at-home assignment requirements and taking a leading role within the child's learning environment.

Program outcomes should align with the Indiana Department of Education's Academic Standards and the Indiana Early Learning Standards. Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards serve as a guide in subject areas and critical social-emotional competencies. STEM and STEAM learning and functions in the Foundations focus on:

- **Early Reading:** alphabet awareness, phonological awareness, concepts of print and comprehension.
- **Numeracy:** counting, cardinality, written numerals, quantity and comparison.
- **Computation and Algebraic Thinking:** mathematical structure and patterning.
- **Data Analysis:** classification, data collection, organization and description.
- **Geometry:** spatial relationships and space analysis.
- **Sense of Self:** self-awareness, confidence, identification and expression of emotions.
- **Science:** properties of objects, characteristics of living creatures and plants.
- **Engineering:** solving problems using the engineering design process.
- **Self-Regulation:** executive functions such as impulse control, planning and emotional regulation.
- **Building Relationships:** social development and engagement with others.
- **Initiative and Exploration:** initiative, self-direction, interest and curiosity as a learner.
- **Attentiveness & Persistence:** focus on a specific activity and persistence to complete tasks.

The Value of Family Engagement in Early Learning

Families are the child's first teacher. Studies reveal that when primary caregivers are more engaged during their children's early years, children show improved literacy achievement, stronger social skills and decreased negative behaviors (e.g. El Nokali, Bachman, and Votruba-Drzal, 2010) that support great learning success later in life.

Program family engagement happens when there is an ongoing, mutually respect partnership between families and program providers. It is important for providers to be intentional and mindful in establishing a respectful rapport to create a positive environment in which the child will thrive.

A child's growth and development does not occur in isolation. Families, teachers and schools share the responsibility of helping a child succeed. Here are some recommendations for effective family engagement: ¹

- Establish an atmosphere of acceptance. Celebrate the diversity of the program participants. Translate materials into native languages and encourage program staff to interact with families outside of school.
- Create a welcoming environment. Greet children and families at the school entrance. Post photographs of the children in the environment.
- Invite ongoing communication through a variety of channels. Ask families their preferred mode of communication.
- Build a balanced family-school partnership. Include families in decision-making about their child's learning as well as the program.
- Offer families resources to connect the learning at home with the in-school learning. Send activities and materials home.
- Commit to outreach with families. Provide opportunities to meet with families outside of the school, including home visits or program-focused meetings at a community setting.
- Provide resources and referrals. Support families' need for information about health and family services, child care and transportation.
- Provide parenting and adult education classes to support a two-generational model of participation in education.
- Establish and reinforce program standards that emphasize culturally-sensitive, evidence-based family engagement practices.

For more information related to Kinder Camp family engagement, see page 38.

¹ Halgunseth, L.C., Peterson, A., Stark, D.R., Moodie, S. (2009). Family engagement, diverse families, and early childhood education programs: An integrated review of the literature. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/research/FamEngage.pdf>

Porter County School Readiness Assessment Guidelines & Protocols

The following guidelines, protocols and procedures are for all participating Porter County School Readiness partners.

The goal of this section is to provide all early childhood school readiness partners with materials to help assess the early learning landscape in Porter County. These assessments are designed to assess the following outcomes:

Short-term goals and outcomes:

1. Improve child’s cognitive skills.
2. Improve child’s school behavior skills.
3. Improve child’s social development skills.
4. Improve parenting practices.

Long-term goals and outcomes:

1. Increase science and math skills and prepare for future continual learning success by looking at mid-year kindergarten test results and beyond.
2. Increase third-grade reading skills by looking at third-grade reading assessments.
3. Increase parent engagement by looking at parent engagement survey data.

For long-term goals and outcomes, United Way of Porter County and Purdue University Northwest will work with Porter County school districts to evaluate in-school test data.

If there are questions, program partners should contact United Way of Porter County at 219-464-3583 or info@unitedwaypc.org.

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Visit UWPCSTEAM.org for more information and to download materials.

Assessment Guidelines and Protocols

Overview

Assessment in early childhood environments is a serious undertaking. It is important to evaluate program effectiveness as well as children's growth and development. Guidelines and protocols must be established to assure proper assessment practices and to generate accurate and useful results. The well-being of the child is the primary concern, so safeguards must be in place to provide a positive experience for all participants.

This section of the manual provides an overview of recommendations, guidelines, assessment protocols and the assessment tools along with associated scripts and scoring sheets. Please review the guidelines and protocols thoroughly before engaging in any assessment activities.

Recommendations

- Obtain consent from the guardians and child before administering assessment.
- Allow the child to remove themselves from assessment at any time or to refuse participation.
- Keep the experience as short as possible.
- Administer the assessment in a one-to-one setting.
- Assure that the child is familiar with the environment and the administrator of the assessment. The teacher typically administers the assessment. If the child does not know the administrator, plan to conduct warm-up activities.
- Encourage and reinforce the child's efforts throughout the assessment experience.

Guidelines

This is a synthesis from early childhood education research experts in the field. For a full list of sources, see the references section.

- Assessment **MUST** be age and developmentally appropriate. Assessing young children is very different from assessing older children. Young children construct knowledge through experimental, interactive and hands-on ways. Express learning and assessment of young children's learning must be done using authentic experiences in a natural environment rather than traditional paper and pencil methods.
- Use a variety of assessments which address the development of the whole child. Young children develop in all domains: physical/motor, psychosocial, cognitive, language and literacy. Use assessment tools that measure more than academic or cognitive development. Multiple sources of information should be considered while making an assessment.
- Understand the purpose for the assessment. Assessments are used to support children's learning, identify special needs, evaluate a program and monitor trends. Select assessment tools to meet a specific purpose. Assessments of young children should not be overly or unnecessarily used.
- Select valid, reliable and fair instruments. Utilize assessment tools that are high quality and have been established as accurate and reliable for use with children. High stakes assessments (i.e. ISTEP) should not be administered until at least grade 3.
- Allocate adequate time for high quality assessment practices. Administering individual assessments takes time. Educators should plan time for assessments and take care not to disrupt the child's regular activities.

- Consider the uneven growth patterns of young children. Individual children’s development is rapid, uneven, episodic and influenced by the environment. Use assessment tools which respect the backgrounds, environmental factors and contexts in which the assessment is administered.
- Assess the program in addition to the children. The learning environment, quality of instruction and teacher-child interactions greatly impact children’s learning outcomes. Ensure that these factors are evaluated, too.
- Value parents as an important source of assessment information. Engage families because they often have key information to share about the child which can be helpful when conducting assessments.
- Follow ethical guidelines regarding the use of assessments. Communicate the purpose, timeline and use to parents and staff. Professionals who conduct assessments should be trained to use the protocols and appropriate methods, including confidentiality.
- Align assessments to the state’s early learning and development standards. The Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards are the guidelines for developmentally appropriate content and skills. Any assessments used should be aligned to the Foundations.

Assessments

Three assessments have been vetted as valid, reliable and useful instruments to evaluate the impact of partner programs on a child’s kindergarten readiness. These specific assessments follow the guidelines for developmental appropriateness, variety, validity and reliability.

1. **Get Ready to Read!** – screens early print knowledge and linguistic awareness abilities.
2. **Head Toes Knees Shoulders (HTKS)** – measures inhibitory control, working memory and attention focusing. (see page 12)
3. **Behavioral Observation Checklist** – monitors social and emotional attributes.

Note: Prior to administering assessments an IRB release form must be filled out for every child. IRB release form is found online at UWPCSTEAM.org.