

Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network

Blueprint

Updated January 7, 2022

Introduction

The Rapides Early Childhood Network (RECN) has been in existence since 2013. As one of thirteen districts in the initial pilot to unify Early Childhood with the Louisiana Department of Education, the community network has grown in participation since the start with ten providers to all program providers in Rapides Parish.

RECN has worked hard to build a collaborative, supportive network that actively engages with various community partners. Since the onset, the top priorities for the community network have been to improve high-quality teaching and learning and access for our most vulnerable, high-risk children from birth to age four. The high quality is seen in the growth noted among all the program partners in our community network: child care, Head Start, and public Pre-K. Many resources have been allocated to programs to help them provide appropriate high-quality experiences for children. These resources include a Tier I curriculum, developmentally appropriate classroom materials, professional development, and mentoring/coaching. But too few children are being served in the birth to three population due to the lack of funding. Economically disadvantaged families that want their children to access quality early care do not have the means for affordable child care.

COVID-19 has impacted the child care sector significantly. While facing these challenges, Rapides Parish has made considerable progress in unifying and strengthening its early childhood program. Despite the pandemic, Rapides continues its commitment to increase early childhood classroom quality, expand access for economically disadvantaged families, and provide support to ensure children of Rapides Parish continue to learn and thrive.

In Rapides, the economically disadvantaged cohort average per age level is 1060. These children could be eligible for high-quality early care and education. The total varies slightly from Infants to Four-Year-Olds. The Economically Disadvantaged Cohort by age is as follows: Infants, 1082; One-Year-Old 928; Two-Year-Old 1072; Three-Year-Olds 1053; Four-Year-Olds 1163. Rapides Parish only serves less than 10-15 percent of the economically disadvantaged population birth to age three but serves over 90% of the four-year-olds sector. **The Data Kit Fall 2021 Dashboard** indicates Rapides Parish marks progress, but much work is needed. In the **Quality category**, the 2016-17 to 2020-21 Network CLASS Scores by Domain report an overall improvement of 1.02; the 2016-17 to 2020-21 Network CLASS Scores by Dimension: Pre-K report Positive Change of .62; the 2016-17 to 2020-21 Network CLASS Scores by Dimension: Toddler report Positive Change of .87; 2016-17 to 2020-21 Percent of Sites in Early Childhood Programs by CLASS Rating report Excellent 35.19, High Proficient 35.03, Proficient -28.89, Approaching Proficient -41.33, Unsatisfactory 0.0. In the **Access category**, Total Publicly-Funded Children by Age from 2016-17 to 2020-21 Infants Served increased from 54 to 79; Ones Served increased from 98 to 112; Twos Served decreased from 149 to 124; Threes Served decreased from 335 to 9; Fours Served decreased from 1409 to 1163.

Research studies show the first 2,000 days of a child's life set the foundation for language development and social-emotional skills. Quality early childhood education prepares children to be ready to learn on the first day of Kindergarten. **The Data Kit 2020-21** Percent of Kindergarten Students Demonstrating Readiness (DRDP) in Rapides Parish is marginally higher than the Louisiana average for those children that attended Public Pre-K and Kindergarten. The data shows that Rapides Parish is significantly higher when compared with Kindergarteners that did not attend Public Pre-K with the greatest disparity in

Language and Literacy Development at 34.7%, as compared to 16.3% and Cognitive Math at 21.9% as compared to 13.1%. Our goal is to close the gap and have every child in Rapides Parish enter Kindergarten ready for success; there is much work to do.

It is clear RECN is driven by the community's need to improve opportunities and inspire change for its youngest population by providing quality and quantity of seats in Rapides Parish.

RECN will expand its work to prepare the community for optimum outcomes so that more children will have access to quality early learning opportunities, and families will have the information they need to make the best decision for their children. The local community desires to leverage new dollars from foundations, corporations, and local, state, federal government to support early childhood education in Rapides Parish.

The blueprint outlines RECN's goals and strategies to increase the quality and quantity of seats in Rapides Parish.

Vision: Every child in the Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network is prepared to enter Kindergarten. In turn, more children are positioned for success in the early elementary grades and beyond.

Mission: The Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network will develop new strategies to increase access to and improve the quality of publicly funded early childhood care and education starting from birth through age four.

Strategic Plan

Goal 1: Create and maintain an advisory board of community leaders to promote and support the Ready Start Early Childhood Network.

Strategies:

- Identify and map community leaders of local and parish government partners, non-profit partners, and for-profit partners, research partners, faith-based partners, grass philanthropy partners, and grassroots community leaders.
- Create and develop an advisory board through communications and relationship building that will support RECN as it seeks funding and increased community awareness whereas
- Create the advisory board structure so that the Rapides Parish School District Early Childhood Education serves as the governing body.
- Maintain Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network Advisory Board Bylaws.
- Steering Committee and Executive Advisory Board review and backfill gaps in the advisory board as terms expire. The nomination process will follow the mapping community leader's guidelines established at the onset of the creation of the advisory board.

Resources:

- **Existing:**
 - Department of Louisiana Ready Start Network documents
 - LDOE materials
 - Advocacy and Communications Solutions training and materials
 - Website development consultant to improve communications and community resources
 - Guidelines organized under Louisiana House Bill 676 to create the Early Childhood Care and Education Commission and pilot programs for community early childhood care and education networks.
- **Needed:**
 - Committee members will represent all program partner types to provide oversight to the advisory board and serve as a conduit between the community network and the advisory board.
 - A marketing campaign will be developed and implemented to communicate the network's vision, mission, and purpose to the local community and stakeholders, thereby building new relationships and empowering hope for a better future for young children from birth to age five.

- An ongoing review process of the approved bylaws to ensure the board’s work reflects the governing body's purpose, structure, organization, and general membership.

Performance Metrics:

1. The Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network Advisory Executive Board will review the Bylaws during the first quarter of each year to ensure work aligns with the community's current needs. The review is to occur in the first quarter of each year.
2. The Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network Bylaws will be presented to the Advisory Board the following month of the Executive review.
3. The RECN Advisory Board to assist in creating a community marketing campaign to heighten the awareness of the RECN initiative. The campaign was introduced in July 2020 and reviewed in the year's first quarter after that.

Goal 2: Increase birth to age three access to quality early childhood care and education through public and private funding opportunities.

Strategies:

- Analyze currently shared and leveraged funding to maximize resources within programs and across the community.
- Identify braiding and grant opportunities from local resources and options to increase seat allocations for birth to age three at-risk children.
- Create a scalable, sustainable model with a targeted need approach to allocate resources to meet gaps in services for economically disadvantaged children birth to age three.

Resources:

- **Existing:**
 - Funds are braided for four-year-olds in the community network, including the use of LA 4, 8(g), Title I, and local funds.
 - A risk model is already in place for four-year-olds that denotes high-quality teaching and learning and access for over 90 percent of families desiring a quality learning experience for their four-year-olds.
 - The LA B-3 Report is available from the Early Childhood Care and Education Commission with recommendations for providing early care and education to the state’s most vulnerable, in need children and their families.
 - Louisiana State Education Department Media Kit data report.
 - Utilization of the COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grant and the 2021 Supply Building and Access Expansion Grant.
- **Needed:**
 - Research existing grant opportunities for implementing high-quality birth to three programs.

- Develop local community options and solutions for increasing access for economically disadvantaged families choosing to enroll in a quality learning experience for their children birth to age three.
- Create a risk model for children birth to age three that is aligned to LA B-3 and the successful LA 4 program already in existence in Rapides.
- Complete a needs assessment of the availability of slots within existing programs to determine sustainability and access to quality early care.
- Complete research that identifies the needs, barriers, and recommendations to recruit and retain the workforce for Type III early learning centers.
- Create an Advisory Site Location Committee to research and identify additional early childcare site locations to provide additional seats for children birth to age three.

Performance Metrics:

1. The number of at-risk births to age three slots for early care and education will increase as funding becomes available through local community endeavors. The measuring tool will be the Louisiana Media Kit data report.
2. The quality of early care and education experiences for children birth to age three will improve, as seen through the Louisiana Early Childhood accountability system results. The measuring tool will be the Louisiana Media Kit data report.
3. Develop a strategic plan to address the early child care workforce issues and address the need for additional seats in Rapides Parish by October 2022.

Goal 3: Create and maintain a Rapides Early Childhood Network website independent of the Lead Agency.

Strategies:

- Collaborate with a local advertising agency to develop, maintain, and promote a plan for branding the Rapides Early Childhood Network to create a community network website.
- Create and maintain a local resource clearinghouse for families with young children to serve as a one-stop-shop with information, available resources, and contact information for children's programs in the community.

Resources:

- **Existing:**
 - A community resource guide shared with families of four-year-olds.
 - Coordinated enrollment campaign events in the community that acquaint families with children birth to age five of the resources and opportunities for enrollment of the local early care and education programs.

- **Needed:**
 - Continued efforts to maintain a marketing campaign to inform the community of the Rapides Early Childhood Network, opportunities available for families, the vision/mission of the community network, and information for supporting the programs for children birth to age 5.
 - Create and sustain a local resource clearinghouse for families with young children that serves as a one-stop-shop with information, available resources, and contact information for children's programs in the community.

Performance Metrics:

1. The Rapides Early Childhood Network branding and website development will be fully established and operational by March 1, 2020.
2. The local resource clearinghouse for families will be updated monthly as additional data is available.

Goal 4: Create a Community Marketing Campaign to heighten community support through fundraising efforts.

Strategies:

- Develop and execute a marketing campaign to inform the Rapides Early Childhood Network community, opportunities available for Rapides Parish families, the vision and mission of the community network, and information for supporting the programs for children birth to age 5.

Resources:

- **Existing:**
 - Department of Louisiana Guidebooks and media materials.
 - Advocacy and Communications Solutions training and materials.
 - Children’s Funding Project resources.
- **Needed:**
 - Develop a timeline and execution plan for a RECN marketing plan fundraising campaign to support and heighten the efforts of RECN.
 - Identify resources to create a RECN campaign, soliciting the Advisory Board's assistance in drafting and executing the plan.

Performance Metrics:

1. Create an Advisory Board committee to assist in developing the fundraising marketing campaign. Committee to begin its collaborative efforts in December 2020.
2. Schedule roll out of marketing campaign by July 2021.
3. The Advisory Board will roll out a School Readiness Tax Credit Campaign to heighten community support and improve financial giving by July 2021, then introduce Phase II of the campaign by March 2022.

Goal 5: To develop and implement a Leadership Cohort to empower program partners in the Rapides Early Childhood Network with helpful business and education leadership practices to improve the quality of early care and education for children birth to age five.

Strategies:

- Create and conduct a community network program partner needs assessment with current business and educational leadership practices.
- Research local options for developing and implementing an appropriate business leadership course for community network program partners.
- Develop a timeline utilizing program partners to implement a leadership program that includes best practices in improving business acumen and early care and education leadership.

Resources:

- **Existing:**
 - Mentoring and job-embedded coaching with program partners to improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning.
 - Professional development opportunities focused on on-site and classroom high-quality growth related to teacher evaluation, student assessments, and a Tier 1 curriculum.
 - Local Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate program available for community network lead teachers to complete CDA credentialing process.
- **Needed:**
 - Local options and collaborative partnership in developing and implementing an applicable business leadership course for community network program partners.
 - Timeline to implement a leadership curriculum that includes best practices for improving business acumen and early care and education leadership.

Performance Metrics:

1. Complete and review the Type III Early Child Care education needs assessments that identify business and leadership training practices by May 2022.
2. Develop a training timeline that includes instruction from business partners and educational institutions to address the needs of the early child care learning centers by August 2022.
3. The first successful cohort for the business leadership course for program partners will commence in September 2022.