



Rapides Early Childhood Network



Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network

Blueprint

February 13, 2020

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 now include all program providers in Rapides Parish.

RECN has worked hard to build a collaborative, supportive network that actively engages with a variety of community partners. The top priorities for the community network have been since the onset to improve high-quality teaching and learning, and access for our most vulnerable, high-risk children birth to age four. The high quality is seen in the growth that has been 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 in which 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. At risk families that want their children to access quality early care do not have the means for affordable child care.

In Rapides, the at-risk cohort is 1212 children for every age level that could be eligible for high quality early care and education. Rapides Parish only serves less than 10-15 percent of the at-risk population birth to age three but serves over 90% of at-risk four-year olds. **The Data Kit November 2019 Dashboard** indicates Rapides Parish marks progress, but much work is needed. In the **Quality category**, the 2015-16 to 2018-19 Network CLASS Scores by Domain report an overall improvement of .78; the 2015-16 to 2018-19 Network CLASS Scores by Dimension: Pre-K report Positive Change of .40; the 2015-16 to 2018-19 Network CLASS Scores by Dimension: Toddler report Positive Change of .82; 2015-16 to 2018-19 Percent of Sites in Early Childhood Programs by CLASS Rating report Excellent 8.2, High Proficient 34.9, Proficient 5.4, Approaching Proficient -45.8, Unsatisfactory -2.7. In the **Access category**, Total Publicly-Funded Children by Age from 2016-17 to 2018-2019 change is 114, Infants Served increased from 54 to 62; Ones Served increased from 98 to 122, Twos Served from 149 to 202, Threes Served from 335 to 350, Fours Served from 1409 to 1423.

Research studies show the first 2,000 days of a child's life sets 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 2018-19 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 and is significantly higher in Rapides Parish when compared with Kindergarteners that did not attend Public Pre-K with the greatest disparity in Language and Literacy Development at 74.2% , as compared to 55.2% and Cognitive Math at 75.1% as compared to 57.3%. Our goal is to close the gap and have every child in Rapides enter Kindergarten ready for success; there is much work to do.

It is clear that 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 is an outline of 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, and 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 at birth through age four.

Strategic Plan

Goal 1: Establish formal local governance for the Rapides Early Childhood Network community to guide decision making and adherence to public meeting laws.

Strategies:

- Identify RECN members to serve as Steering Committee.
- Create a RECN Steering Committee that serves as RECN's financial management to include any amendments to the state plan, including budget revisions following the state guidelines; and blueprints of the program.
- Outline the RECN Committee governing process for the Ready Start RECN Advisory Board.

Resources:

- **Existing:**
 - The Rapides Early Childhood Network Leadership Team has been in place since 2015. The Steering Committee will consist of members of this team.
 - Regular monthly meetings focus on the work being done in the community network to improve quality, access, and teacher-student interactions. There is a climate of trust and collaborative relationships among all program partners.
 - 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:**
 - A steering committee will be formed from the membership of the Rapides Early Childhood Network. Committee members will include representation of all program partner types to provide oversight to the advisory board and serve as a conduit between the community network and the advisory board.
 - Along with the creation of a local community advisory board, bylaws will be written and approved by the board that reflects the purpose, structure, organization, and general membership of the governing body.

Performance Metrics:

1. The Steering Committee will be named before the first official advisory board meeting in January 2020. The Steering Committee will meet at least one week in advance of the monthly advisory board meeting to set the agenda.
2. Steering Committee develops a process for accessing, collecting, and disseminating information. Procedures for selecting members for the Advisory Board are in place following the stated guidelines.

Goal 2: Create an advisory board of community leaders to promote and support RECN.

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.
- Create Ready Start Rapides Rapides Early Childhood Network Bylaws.

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 include representation of 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 to the local community and stakeholders the vision and mission and purpose of the network, thereby building new relationships and empowering hope for a better future for young children birth to age five.
 - Along with the creation of a local community advisory board, bylaws will be written and approved by the board that reflects the purpose, structure, organization, and general membership of the network.

Performance Metrics:

1. The Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network Advisory Board will have the first official meeting in January 2020.
2. The RECN Advisory Board to assist in creating a community marketing campaign to heighten the awareness of the RECN initiative. Campaign to be introduced by July 2020.
3. Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network Bylaws will be presented to the Advisory Board at the first official meeting in January 2020.

Goal 3: 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 at-risk children birth to age three.

Resources:

- **Existing:**
 - Funds are braided for four-year old's 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 old's 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.
- **Needed:**
 - Research existing grant opportunities for implementing high-quality birth to three programs.
 - Develop local community options and solutions for increasing access for at-risk 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.

Performance Metrics:

1. The number of at-risk birth 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 results of the Louisiana Early Childhood accountability system. The measuring tool will be the Louisiana Media Kit data report.

Goal 4: Create a Rapides Early Childhood Network website independent of the Lead Agency.

Strategies:

- Hire a local advertising agency to develop a plan for branding the Rapides Early Childhood Network that will create a community network website.
- Create a local resource clearinghouse for families with young children, 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:**
 - Recommendation of a local advertising agency to develop a plan for branding the Rapides Early Childhood Network and creating a community network website.
 - Establishment of 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.
 - Creation of a local resource clearing house for families with young children, 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 established by March 1, 2020, and updated monthly as additional data is available.

Goal 5: Create a Community Marketing Campaign to heighten community support through fundraising efforts.

Strategies:

- Develop and execute a marketing campaign to inform the community of the Rapides Early Childhood Network, opportunities available for Rapides Parish families, the vision/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 RECN campaign, soliciting Advisory Board's assistance in drafting and execution of the plan.

Performance Metrics:

1. Create an Advisory Board committee to assist in the development of the fundraising marketing campaign. Committee to begin its collaborative efforts in May, 2020.
2. Introduce the campaign to the Advisory Board for input at the June meeting.
3. Schedule roll out of marketing campaign by August, 2020.

Goal 6: To develop and implement a Leadership Cohort (Director's Seminar) to empower program partners in the Rapides Early Childhood Network with useful 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 applicable business leadership course for community network program partners.
- Develop a timeline of study for program partners to implement a leadership course that includes best practice in improving both 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:**
 - Current community network program partner needs assessment with business and educational leadership practice questions to gauge the knowledge level and needs of business owners regarding the successful operation of an early learning center.
 - Local options and collaborative partnership in developing and implementing an applicable business leadership course for community network program partners.
 - Timeline of study for program partners to implement a leadership course that includes best practice in improving both business acumen and early care and education leadership.

Performance Metrics:

1. The community network program partner needs assessment with current business and educational leadership practices will be conducted and data analyzed by May 2020.
2. Local options for developing and implementing an appropriate business leadership course for community network program partners will be studied by the Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network Advisory Board and a business course developed by October 2020.
3. A clear timeline of the early care and education leadership course for program partners will be developed by December 2020.
4. The first successful cohort for the business leadership course for program partners will commence in January 2021.