

St. Mary Parish Ready Start Network Blueprint



[Updated as of 2021]

Introduction

Ready Start Networks are coalitions of individuals committed to creating and implementing a bold local vision for early childhood. RSNs are driven by a community's need to improve opportunities and inspire change for children birth to age five. Each RSN brings together partners to continuously improve the quality of and access to early childhood opportunities in their community. Driven by local data and context, we do this in three key ways: develop intentional plans, secure and weave together resources and implement creative solutions. Empowered Ready Start Networks accelerate efforts to help children be ready for school and successful in life. The work must be done to ensure our children's futures, and it takes a village to make the change; we cannot do this without the help of strong forces.

The research is clear- ninety percent of brain development happens before the age of five. In addition, two out of three Louisiana families have both parents working. 35 percent of Louisiana children are not ready for kindergarten, only 46 percent can read on grade level by 3rd grade; and our state is 49th in education overall. Investing in early childhood strengthens our state's overall education system and ensure kids have the foundation they need to learn and succeed on the first day of school. Quality doesn't just happen. As educators, we know the first 2,000 first days of a child's life sets the foundation for language development and socio-emotional skills. Research shows that children who receive quality early childhood education are better behaved, get along better with other children and adults, more likely to read on grade level, and more likely to graduate on time. Having an intentional focus on establishing the conditions for quality is critical to Louisiana's future success and vital for the future of the children of St. Mary Parish.

St. Mary Parish Ready Start Network consists of seven education partners: Yaamahana-Chitimacha Child Development Center, A Child's Place Daycare and Learning Center, Pam's Personal Touch Child Care Center, Barney and Baby Bop Child Care Center, Chitimacha Tribal School, V.B. Glencoe Charter School, St. Mary Community Action Agency Head Start Program, and the St. Mary Parish School System Pre-K. Our network has maintained high-quality education with an overall classroom quality rating of Proficient for the 2019-2020 and an overall access

rating of Excellent. We serve 788 children within St. Mary parish- five infants, nine one-year-olds, 14 two-year-olds, 243 three-year-olds, and 520 four-year-olds. We pride ourselves on having a rich and diverse network dynamic that extends from multiple demographics, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. For instance, our network serves 4 childcare centers, 3 school systems, and a Head Start program all administered through the network by the St. Mary Community Action Agency as the lead agency. Currently, we are the only Ready Start Network with a non-profit, community action agency as a lead agency in Louisiana, and our Chitimacha Tribal School and Yaamahana-Chitimacha Child Development Center provides a cultural element to our beloved network by residing on the Chitimacha native reservation and facilitating high-quality education to the tribe's children. We work with many in the education realm with St. Mary parish, and value how the diversity of our network enriches our community and provides us with the advantage of being multifaceted in our education approaches.

Louisiana's future is tied to the success of its children and today we have the opportunity to transform our future in one generation. Everyone has a shared responsibility to support the economy of today and shape the workforce of tomorrow. Working together will ensure our community of St. Mary parish thrives. We encourage support as we embark on this great endeavor of uplifting our St. Mary parish children through early childhood education.

Guiding Statements

Vision: The St. Mary Parish will be educated and united through childhood education in preparation for children ages birth to five's success in early childhood education.

Mission: St. Mary Parish Ready Start Network brings together ECE providers to work together cohesively for the greater good while providing premier education for children ages birth to five throughout St. Mary Parish.

Goal 1: Establish a local collaborative governing structure for shared decision-making that has by-laws and adheres to public meeting requirements.

Current State:

The St. Mary Community Action Head Start Program is the Lead Agency which conducts all administrative functions for the network. Network members consist of representatives from all early childhood education providers in St. Mary Parish. Committees will be formed as needed. The ideal governance for the community network would be structured as an intermediary or place-based organization, in which it will lead, plan, coordinate and manage across a group of stakeholders to develop and implement common goals. This structure is the most equitable as the Network was initially formed to bring together Early Childcare Education providers and stakeholders.

The Network's goals will be:

- Engage in ongoing strategic planning, including constant reviewing
- Convene stakeholders from across the sector
- Provide neutral assessments of progress and performance and foster a better understanding of the current landscape
- Develop ways to help ECE providers enhance performances of teachers using professional development
- Develop ways to encourage existing or new providers to continue addressing unmet needs in St. Mary parish

Equitable representation will be ensured by determining that all network will have at least one representative on the Executive Committee. The makeup of this committee will be nine members- two representing childcare centers, one from the Chitimacha School, two representing Head Start, two representing St. Mary Parish School Board, and one representative each for Glencoe Charter and Early Start. All Executive Committee members will serve for a period of two years and can be voted on for another two-year term. The Network membership will include multiple levels of participation. Stakeholders that are Network members fall into several categories:

Tier I- Represents those who are critically involved in systems serving young children and their families including schools, social services, early learning and child care programs, family support programs, higher education and issue area funders.

Tier II- Community stakeholders invested in the work of the Network from a less direct perspective. These stakeholders may include elected officials, business leaders, and chamber of commerce, and community members.

Under the proposed governance structure, the Executive Committee, Tier I, whose role will evolve as a strategic plan is completed and implemented, will oversee meetings and have voting privileges. This Executive Committee will be responsible for major organizational decisions, high-level strategic oversight, and reviewing and approving the Network's budget.

Committee member responsibilities include:

- Attend monthly meetings.
- Joining subcommittees (as needed).
- Offering connections to important community and funding resources that will advance the Network's goals and objectives.

Strategic Plan:

Currently, the Network's plan to serve the most children includes all funding sources- Head Start, Title I, 8(g), LA4, and IDEA, to implement increase across the board in the number of children ages infant to four-year olds. We as a Network will continue our strategic plan and complete a needs assessment which will take into consideration the following:

- The Network's plan will review collected data on a regular and ongoing basis that indicates which partners within our Network have waiting lists, and for what age groups served, based on state and federal requirements.
- We will make certain we continue to utilize slots for children with disabilities throughout the Network.
- Based on the review of data reports, we will enhance our outreach efforts to all children and families through diverse coordinated enrollment activities that meet the needs of the families in our area.
- We will collaborate with some of the community partners named in section one in order to further ensure that families are aware of their choices as it pertains to early childcare programs.

The Network has recruited partners that can bring more resources to the group, thus enhancing the work we are doing. We will explore assistance from private funders and will research and apply for various funding that can be utilized along with the current funding. The Executive Committee will oversee the implementation of the plan. In this plan all partners will be involved in ensuring the plan is properly implemented. Site managers, directors, principals, and administrative staff that will have the responsibilities to ensure that all components of the plan are in place, including:

- Participating in coordinated enrollment activities
- Inputting and accessing all necessary data
- Setting up and implementing trainings

Resources:

- Existing: St. Mary Community Action, LANO, ACS, Early Steps, Louisiana Department of Education Head Start Collaboration Office, St. Mary RSN partners
- Needed: Governance trainings, create feedback document to identify further ideas for network

Performance Metrics: Monthly meetings, RSN by-laws, RSN Strategic Plan, RSN meetings

Goal 2: Measure the need for the affordable access to quality care and education for children birth through age four within the community.

Current State:

The dynamic of the 2020-2021 school year has been unlike any other, and we are all working towards acquiring normalcy back into our and the children's lives. For St. Mary parish, we have a variety of different learning dynamics to ensure the safety and effectiveness of our children. Our Head Start program worked with the virtual school approach through implementing the St. Mary Head Start Kindergarten Readiness Distance Learning Program, where the Head Start administration and teaching staff developed a virtual model to take what they learned in a classroom and reconstruct it into a virtual setting. Teachers had to rethink how they present materials, Creative Curriculum coursework, and daily assignments while creatively

thinking outside of the box. The St. Mary Head Start program will use Zoom and Google Classrooms as virtual tools to help deliver effective lessons. Technology played a major role in connecting to the children while outside of a normal classroom setting. Our Head Start parents' received android tablets in order to continue the intentional teaching and learning dynamic to keep the students engaged. Along with teacher-child engagement, parents were encouraged to sign on and participate in interactive lessons as much as their time allowed. The Head Start teaching staff also sent out educational homework packets to enhance the children's learning in collaboration with the virtual school setting to promote kindergarten readiness. Our childcare centers, such as Pam's Personal Touch Child Care Center and Yaamahana-Chitimacha Child Development Center also sent out resources to their enrolled children for learning continuity. Our school board partners continue with in-person learning throughout the school year for their students while focusing on maintaining safety parameters for their teaching staff and students. Along with in-person learning, centers were adjusted, and additional outside play was added to allow for social distancing. Across the network, St. Mary parish kept our children and the expansion of their learning as the utmost priority.

Strategic Plan:

The ideal system for measuring the need for access in our community network will be a management software module that would be aligned with the St. Mary Ready Start Network's enrollment process to its fullest, which in return will allow all partners to see where they are currently, and where there are needs for additional slots and support. Partners will be able to access their data and create reports to help improve their overall quality of their classrooms. This would accomplish several objectives that some Network partners say would enhance the quality of their programs.

These include:

- Identifying current demand for access, met and unmet, by age and locale
- Available capacity for each provider, by age and locale
- Sites and classrooms where quality improvement is needed
- Where and how unmet access demand is impacting business and industry about hiring retention and attendance
- All public and private funding streams that can be used to improve quality and increase access

The ideal state would be utilizing the online registration system to its fullest, which in return will allow all partners to see where they are currently, and where there are needs for additional slots and support. Partners will be able to access their data and create reports to help improve their overall quality of their classrooms. This information will better enhance and support parent choice through coordinated enrollment and parent information initiatives.

A good way for us to further identify current objectives is to have partners complete a needs assessment in which any problems and concerns in their programs and within the Network can be identified. Once the problems are identified, then the partners as a group can determine how all data collected can help resolve those problems.

The Network recognizes the need to strengthen the quality of the St. Mary Parish Early Child Education sector to meet the overall needs of the community. The collection, analyzing, and sharing of unbiased data increases transparency, helps enhance program quality, and keeps all network and community partners informed on how all priorities are being met. By utilizing this online registration system, all ECE partners, i.e. Head Start, School System and Childcare Centers, will be trained on how the system works, how to input information and how to access data and reports.

Accessible information includes:

- Applications in both English and Spanish
- Coordinated Funding Request Information
- CLASS Observation and Scores
- Classroom Information
- Name of Curriculum
- Teacher Degree
- Type of Funding (LA4, Head Start, CCAP, Title I, etc.)
- Classroom Quality Ratings

Resources:

- Existing: coordinated network applications, monthly network meetings, network trainings, CLASS trainings, TS Gold trainings, Education resources/supplies, classroom supports
- Needed: Coordinated Enrollment software system

Performance Metrics: Coordinated Enrollment plan, Coordinated Funding/Super App

Goal 3: Identify shared resources that can support improved access to quality early childhood care and education programs for children from birth through age four and determine how resources can be leveraged to maximize the impact of such programs for each age.

Current State:

St. Mary Ready Start Network childcare partners along with some of our other network partners were closed for a portion of the pandemic and needed income to keep their staff employed and businesses open. Some of the centers closed for a short time, but whenever the child care centers became operational again, they were faced with increased costs related to increased cleaning and sanitation, required adult-child ratios and group sizes, and other activities necessary to maintain operations. To keep up with rising costs, our eligible child care centers received the Louisiana Child Care Assistance Provider (LaCAP) relief grants to cover those unforeseen expenses. When the network received the Coronavirus Disease 19 (Covid-19) Community Child Care Recovery Grant, we were able to be of assistance to them based on the network's alignment and implementation of our Strong Start 2020 plan. We determined our total funding request on 1) the number of CCAP providers in the network prior Covid-19 and 2) how intensely Covid-19 impacted the network and the childcare providers in our network. We analyzed data and reflected on the impact of Covid-19 on our community and considered how significant Covid-19 impacted our childcare providers in our area, the poverty level in our community prior to Covid-19, and how has Covid-19 affected the unemployment rate in our community. With the funds received by the Recovery Grant, childcare centers applied for subgrants as direct supports needed to effectively benefit and support their centers by using their allocations for: workforce incentives, purchasing additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and supplies to ensure safe environments for children in the months to come, and other community-level supports like workforce training to ensure children are still receiving high-quality care in a safe environment and family engagement and coordinate enrollment to aid in the communication and engagement with families to support re-enrollment.

Along with the Recovery Grant, the St. Mary Parish School Board received mask donations from Ochsner Health System and the New Orleans Saints for all students

and teachers. Cleaning supplies were also donated for all schoolteachers and children by numerous partners to push the agenda of a safe and healthy learning environment for all.

The Louisiana Department of Education held a host of webinars on Coronavirus information and informed Ready Start Networks and others on small business loan opportunities, which there were some centers in our network who applied and received aid for their childcare centers to assist with their centers as they saw fit.

Safety has been one of St. Mary Parish Ready Start Network's top priorities this year considering the Covid-19 pandemic changing our normal hygienic routines in the work and learning environment. Following CDC guidelines, our network received PPE and supplies consisting of masks, thermometers, and other hygienic cleaning supplies to facilitate the necessary materials to our childcare centers and school systems; all network partners received PPE equipment and supplies orchestrated by Volunteers of America. Also, the St. Mary Ready Start Network childcare center partners applied for subgrants under the Coronavirus Disease 19 (Covid-19) Community Child Care Recovery Grant to utilize their allocations for purchasing of additional PPE equipment and supplies to ensure the safe environment for children in the months to come. We will continue to adhere to the CDC guidelines as it pertains to the unexpected upcoming months of Covid-19. In order to administer the subgrants, we have reached out to all childcare partners where they completed applications and gave the lead agency feedback on what essentials would be beneficial to their facility. To receive their allocations, the childcare partners had to complete assurances ensuring their funds would be used to: administer workforce incentives, purchase additional PPE equipment and supplies, coordinate workforce trainings, and purchasing additional instructional supplies. We value good hygiene and safety for our network, and we will continue to strive for maintaining high quality and access in all aspects.

Strategic Plan:

The Network is utilizing all federal funds (Head Start, Title I, 8(g), LA4, IDEA, etc.) to foster an increase across the board in children ages infant to four-years old classes. St. Mary Parish School Board braids federal funds to support the universal preschool classes operating with the public schools. Head Start only receives federal funds for the program; however, the childcare partners braid funding through CCAP and private funding. Access data indicates that some programs within our Network have

waiting lists for their age groups served based on federal requirements. Our Network has mirrored the state numbers in serving over 90 percent of economically disadvantaged four-year olds; we are still working to reach a higher number of disadvantaged three-year olds. We are keenly aware of the need to increase options for ages infants through age two. We have worked diligently to ensure that the seats we do have are of high-quality. Regarding access, we are more informed about what is being done in instruction and learning in each facility. To address quality, all sites are using a state approved curriculum for early childhood education. To enhance the quality of our Network partners, specifically the childcare centers, and based on the anticipated results of the strategic plan ad needs assessment, we have been able to

- Hire a mentor coach who works specifically with childcare centers. This mentor coach works directly with classroom teachers to give them strategies to help them become effective and develop more effective teaching practices. This will enhance the quality of learning in each of the childcare center.
- Secondly, we have helped our childcare center teaching staff to acquire their Child Development Associate (CDA). This is important, particularly for childcare centers by ensuring they have credentials as they are the only ones without teaching credentials.
- Purchased Tier I Curriculum, hosted professional development trainings, and provided instructional support to ensure each classroom within the Network has one. Also, CLASS MMCI and CLASS Reliability calibration trainings were provided to all observers for our network. St. Mary Ready Start network was able to build capacity of Pre-K class observers for our parish. This will support quality interactions.

Resources:

- Existing: Calibration trainings, CDA, curriculum materials, classroom supports, TS Gold trainings, CLASS trainings, PPE equipment and supplies
- Needed: Develop implementation methods for upcoming school year to create longevity for RSN, health and safety trainings for all network partners

Performance Metrics: CLASS scores, school Performance Profiles, TS online assessment child outcomes, Strong Start Recovery Grant (Subgrant) applications

