



SANTA CLARA COUNTY
**Early Learning
MASTER PLAN**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2010

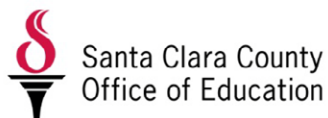


The Santa Clara County Early Learning Master Plan is available online,
at www.sccoe.org

It was written by Karen Hill Scott, Ed.D., with the assistance of John
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community of stakeholders from all sectors of the early learning community

the David &
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My first experience with the notion of preschool came 20-plus years ago, when my son was 2 years old, and there was no full day preschool in the town in which we lived and worked. My wife and I ended up opening our own facility—an experience that taught me how difficult it is for young families to afford high quality preschool.

In the ensuing years, there has been much good work done in the effort to give all of California’s children access to high-quality early learning. And yet, we still have not found a way to make that goal a reality.

This is hard to justify, because we know that high-quality early learning:

- enables children to develop the skills they need to succeed in school;
- helps to reduce the readiness gap, which turns into the achievement gap;
- correlates to higher levels of education, and ultimately employment; and
- lowers the level of incarceration.



Given these and dozens more equally compelling reasons, we can no longer afford to wait—not in a world that poses increasingly stringent demands for knowledge and skills that our children must have to succeed.

This Santa Clara County Early Learning Master Plan—created by a dedicated collaboration of education professionals, community members, civic leaders, and child development advocates—is a vigorous, decisive action. It outlines a vision, defines a strategic mission, and lists metrics for implementation of a plan over the next seven years.

By the way: We titled the effort an “Early Learning Plan” advisedly. We wanted to convey the message that early learning is not an “extra” or a preamble to “real” school, but rather a vital component of the birth-to-adult learning continuum.

Thanks to the collaborators and supporters who made this document possible, the entire community is sure to benefit from the Early Learning Master Plan for many years to come.

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Charles Weis".

Charles Weis, Ph.D.
Santa Clara County Superintendent of Schools

Executive Summary

In March 2009, approximately one hundred early education professionals, community members, civic leaders, and child development advocates gathered at the Santa Clara County Office of Education for the first of four meetings designed to develop an Early Learning Master Plan for the County. This Initiative—originally termed the Santa Clara County Preschool Planning Initiative—was intended to be broad based, collaborative, participatory and consensus building, so that all engaged would be invested in the outcome and in the implementation of a new system for early education.

By November 2009, the meeting process was complete, and the group had attained the goals of outlining a vision, defining a strategic mission for each programmatic domain of the system, and developing metrics for implementation over the next seven years. Consensus was reached on key policy decisions, including management of the implementation process, and the form and direction the system should take. The result built upon all the previous accomplishments and investments made in early learning in the county, and broke new ground for conceptualizing preschool in the context of a birth to age eight developmental framework.

Following are the key findings, decisions, goals, and action items that define this plan for implementing an early learning system in Santa Clara County.

Though Santa Clara County ranks at or near the top in the state of California for measures of income, education, and economic success, there is a persistent achievement gap between the affluent and low income families of the community. Through collaboration across the early learning and K-12 communities, complemented by strong business and civic engagement, it should be possible to mitigate the gap and boost the achievement of students, including dual language learners. The guiding principles for an early learning initiative in Santa Clara County would have the following six principles (Section 1):

- The organization of such an effort should embrace early learning as a **developmental continuum** of learning birth to age eight. This approach recognizes that experiential processes from birth cumulatively build a strong foundation for learning in school and achieving reading and math fluency by third grade. A high quality preschool program is the bridge between infant toddler services, and the elementary school classroom.
- While the early learning initiative aims to boost achievement it does so by creating **equitable access** to high quality early learning experiences that ensure kindergarten readiness; which, in turn, affects third grade outcomes.

Through collaboration across the early learning and K-12 communities, complemented by strong business and civic engagement, it should be possible to mitigate the gap and boost the achievement of students, including dual language learners.

- **Collaboration**, which leverages resources and promotes the exchange of ideas, will move the initiative forward. Santa Clara County has a history of collaborative program implementation and will take this approach to a larger scale with the Early Learning Initiative.
- **Innovation**, a signature of Santa Clara County in industry and in early education will help the initiative to flourish. Programs will build upon current innovations in the county, and new projects, in the category of a place-based strategy, which is epitomized by the Harlem Children’s Zone, will be tried and tested here.
- Santa Clara County will continue to embrace **diverse delivery systems** for the implementation of an early learning initiative. This means that all types of center- and home-based programs might participate if they meet the quality standards that will meaningfully shift these early experiences of children. Public, private, faith-based, center- and home-based settings are likely to qualify to participate if they meet program terms and conditions
- **Quality and Excellence** are the primary criteria for an early learning provider aiming to participate in the proposed early learning system. Whether the quality standard is the State of California’s own pending quality standard, or if the standard is developed locally, the early learning community is determined to have high quality programs.



In formulating the scale and scope of the Initiative, an analysis of community assets (Section 2) revealed the following:

- Public subsidy for early education in Santa Clara County currently reaches almost 60% of the eligible children, substantially higher than in most of the state which averages about 38% having access to subsidy.
- Teachers in early education programs are also better educated than the early education workforce in the state as a whole and participate in CARES, a professional development subsidy program that has made it possible to earn the B.A. Degree.
- The effectiveness and history of collaboration will pave the way for the large scale work needed to build a system.
- Philanthropic investment in the county has been excellent, resulting in very good and insightful data on school readiness.

- There remains a shortage of spaces in the areas of greatest need for preschool access, which points to the need for a plan to address facilities development.
- Dual language learner students comprise a significant proportion of the population not served by or not having access to early education programs.
- There is a compelling need to enlarge the circle of engagement around the issue of early learning and education. Continued outreach to family child care and the K-12 community, as well as specific outreach to the diverse sectors of the business and industry circles and coordination of efforts with municipal initiatives (SJ2020), is essential.

The planners translated the core knowledge regarding assets and needs into a plan for the future (Section 3). The vision for the ideal future as a result of this planning effort is:

Families, educators, and community and business leaders will together support and sustain an early learning system that ensures every child birth to age eight has the opportunity to learn in an environment of such high quality that each child's ability to succeed is secured, the achievement gap is eliminated, and students, families, the community, and the local economy benefit.

By 2017, the planners set goals to achieve outcomes in fourteen domains. Highlights of the broad system goals include:

- All parents will have an active engagement and investment in the process of learning and committing to consistent school attendance, and supporting program quality through their engagement.
- Curriculum for early learning services will be aligned from pre-natal parent education services through third grade instructional programs for all children with language-rich models including dual language learners, who comprise about a quarter of all students.
- All schools will be “ready schools” involved in the alignment of a developmentally continuous learning experience from the preschool years to third grade.
- Data management will be continuous and on-going; providing well-documented evidence of program success.
- Frequent and cogent communications around outcomes and results will sustain civic engagement.
- All children will have regular and meaningful assessments of developmental progress.
- Families will have choices among diverse settings and educational philosophies as long as quality standards are met.
- Teachers and programs will meet quality standards and be supported in continuous quality improvement.

Workgroups organized themselves around translating the broad system goals into implementation plans with periodic milestones for benchmark years. These plans are organized around functional areas of system development: Program Quality, Family Engagement and Leadership, Workforce Development, Data Management, Articulation and Alignment, and Facilities. These plans are a roadmap for the future and the mission statement and goals for each domain have been cross-checked to form an inter-connected whole supporting system unification and consistency.

As a plan for immediate implementation, the work product from the planning process is concrete and provides metrics for achievement in each domain. However, the design is elastic, providing for adjustments

as implementation unfolds. The Strategic Mission Statement which outlines what is to be accomplished is expected to remain constant while the tactics for achieving that goal may flex and bend with the changes that occur in the policy and economic environments.

The planning group also identified early wins, accomplishments for the first year of implementation that will signal to the community both the resolve to transform children’s early learning trajectories, and the feasibility of bringing a plan to life. Among the early wins are:

- Piloting at least three elementary school district “meet and greets” where early education providers and elementary educators begin formulating approaches toward aligning their curricula and creating a more unified and continuous learning experience for the children.
- Convening a community-wide forum on parent engagement in learning.
- Developing a strategic plan for a place-based strategy similar to the Harlem Children’s Zone in Santa Clara County.
- Developing a communications campaign to build and sustain local awareness and champions for the Birth – Preschool – 3rd grade approach to continuous learning experiences for children.

In translating the plan into action (Section 4), the planners reached consensus on responsibility centers for coordinating the work ahead and designated the Santa Clara Office of Education as overall convener and coordinator of two Advisory Committees that will further refine the work plan, bring additional resources and leaders to the table, and continue to promote early learning as a key investment of the community as a whole.



One Advisory Committee, the Program Development Group, will focus on systems design, program operations and implementation—the core of the operating system. A second Advisory Committee, the Civic Engagement Leadership Group, will focus on widening the circle of public engagement, specifically around large systems requirements for facilities, governmental affairs, public polling and external communications. The advisory committees will engage in joint meetings twice a year to gauge progress and connectedness on the many goals outlined in the plan. They may eventually merge as the system itself becomes whole (or may merge with leadership groups of other initiatives)—a living system comprised of inter-connected networks unified by a common purpose and shared vision of the future for Santa Clara County.