



Facilitating Communication between Libraries and School Districts: Talking Points for Library Staff

Libraries and school districts working together can create powerful partnerships for a strong impact in their local community. To secure and strengthen these partnerships, it's crucial that library staff be able to communicate clearly and effectively with school district personnel. Below are a list of talking points and suggestions to help support these conversations around school readiness.



Approach each conversation with an attitude of mutual respect. Open and close each conversation with a reminder that you are partners working together to benefit children and families in the community, and that your impact is stronger together. Voice your appreciation for the work that they do.

Talk together about the definition of school readiness.

There is not one agreed-upon definition in the field of education, and researchers bring a myriad of perspectives and definitions. Some areas to consider discussing are:

- The influence of culture and the community on the child's readiness (e.g. values, expectations and norms);
- The approach and readiness to learn of the individual child (e.g. curiosity, persistence);
- The cognitive and social-emotional skills of the individual child (e.g. math, literacy, language skills as well as empathy and self-regulation);
- A child's prior experiences and particularly their interactions with a trusted, consistent, caring adult.



When you go to meet with school district personnel, print out some examples from the toolkit

(e.g. bookmarks, flyers, posters) and bring them with you to show and discuss together. Share the goals of your programs and a story or two about their influence on children and families.

Review the Reimagining School Readiness Position Paper and bring to the meeting a few facts from research supporting children's holistic development.

Along with each fact, provide an example of how your library programs support the development of those important skills. Here are a few example facts to share:

- Social-emotional skills predict academic math and literacy skills; but also predict better outcomes into adulthood in education, employment, mental health, substance use, and criminal activity.
- Executive function skills – working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility- hold strong predictive power for success in academic domains and in life.
- Oral language skills underlie long-term literacy success.
- Motor skills are important predictors of school success.



Before your meeting, find and review the kindergarten readiness checklist for your school district.

Take the checklist with you and talk through it together. Point out ways you are supporting the development of some of the skills through your programs, and discuss additional important components that may not be included on the checklist. A few specific suggestions are below:

- Children's ability to name upper and lower case letters and to recognize the sounds of some of the letters are almost always included in school readiness checklists. While this is a precursor skill to reading, early childhood is a crucial time to focus on building language, vocabulary and communication. A preschooler's language skills are more predictive of long-term reading than simple measures of early literacy like letter recognition.
- Fine motor skills are essential to many academic tasks: using scissors, holding a pencil with a pincer grip, forming intelligible letters. Hands-on experiences in art, science, and making – such as ripping tape, handling blocks, painting, and building with clay –are terrific, and developmentally appropriate, ways for young children to build their fine motor coordination and the musculature for later writing.
- To assess children's early numeracy, checklists generally ask if children are able to count from one to ten or one to twenty. Yet this task only demonstrates children's memory. The more predictive indicator of long-term success with mathematics is early conceptual mathematics, such as a foundational understanding of quantity. For example, a young child must learn to recognize that three can describe many different types of things: three claps, three elephants, or three hops.

Thank the school district personnel for their time in meeting with you. Make a concrete plan for moving forward with conversation and partnership opportunities.