



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

SAN JOSE

Category: School Readiness

As the third-largest city in California, San Jose has been dedicated to engaging its widespread and diverse community to ensure that all of its children are ready to enter school.

Since 2004, San Jose and surrounding Santa Clara County have been gathering longitudinal data on school readiness. In 2010, the area completed its Early Learning Master Plan, a countywide effort that serves as the early learning strategy for the San Jose 2020 initiative to close the achievement gap. The plan was developed through a year-long community engagement process that involved school districts, early education professionals, community members, civic leaders, community colleges and universities and businesses. The master plan set two-, five- and seven-year goals in six strategic areas: facilities, data management, articulation and alignment, parent engagement, workforce and quality.

In 2011, Santa Clara County was one of only two California counties invited to develop an Educare center — a high-quality, full-year facility for 200 at-risk children under the age of 5 and their families. Educare centers have been demonstrated to close the school-readiness gap between socioeconomically disadvantaged students and their peers. The site serves as a “teaching hospital” for early learning quality in the county and houses a professional development institute and a family resource center.

To increase the quality and accessibility of early education, San Jose’s Smart Start initiative works to foster communication between pre-K and elementary schools, promote parent engagement and allocate redevelopment funds to improve early education sites.

With funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Santa Clara County Office of Education provides statewide strategic planning, training and technical assistance to several districts in the county to ensure that they are able to implement transitional kindergarten programs. These two-year programs provide preschool-age children with the training and resources they need to develop strong foundational skills for long-term academic success. So far, more than 20 local districts that plan to implement transitional kindergarten in the near future have received support.

Currently, the county’s Articulation and Alignment Committee is developing a guide to support these activities between preschool and elementary programs. Included in the guide is a self-assessment tool that schools and districts can use to determine areas of strength and growth.

STRATEGIES

- Developed an Early Learning Master Plan to close the achievement gap
- Implemented an Educare Center to provide high-quality early learning programs
- Allocated redevelopment funds to improve early education facilities
- Provided strategic planning, training and technical assistance to school districts planning to implement transitional kindergarten programs