

County Needs Assessment Report Draft

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Kindergarten Entry Assessment & Early Childhood Data Systems (KEDS)

Developed for Storey County, Nevada



Report developed by Sarah Marschall at Social Entrepreneurs Inc. (SEI)
6548 South McCarran Blvd, Reno NV 89509
Tel. 775-324-4567 Web. www.socialent.com



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This document contains information collected during the planning process that is specifically from and related to the county. Assets and needs are documented for the purpose of understanding the existing systems and circumstances within each of Nevada’s counties. The ultimate goal of the project is to support the development of a **statewide kindergarten entry assessment and early childhood data system that supports school readiness toward long-term success of each child.**

This project was funded with federal stimulus funds (under the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act). It was envisioned and made possible by the Early Childhood Advisory Council, which is managed by the Nevada Head Start Collaboration and Early Childhood Systems Office (HSC & ECSO).



Introduction

This report summarizes the findings for Storey County that are the result of a statewide needs assessment conducted in the first half of 2012 related to the Kindergarten Entry and Data System project (KEDS). “KEDS” is a statewide effort to build a comprehensive early childhood education and care (ECE) system that supports the ability of all children in Nevada to enter kindergarten ready to learn. The Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council, (NECAC) managed by Nevada’s Head Start Collaboration and Early Childhood Systems (HSC&ECS) Office, in collaboration with the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), is leading this effort, which has identified two major components of system change as priorities for implementation:

- a) Adoption of a Common Kindergarten Entry Assessment; and
- b) Development of a Coordinated Data System that links pre-K to K-12 (and beyond) in order to support early childhood educators to understand and utilize child assessment data to improve programs, curriculum and environments.

The vision for this project, known as KEDS for short, is defined by the NECAC as follows:

Nevada’s statewide data system leads to a shared understanding of school readiness. Everyone who touches children’s lives will have a broad awareness of the strengths, needs and status of Nevada’s children; and information that improves children’s development and learning.

To carry out this vision, a comprehensive needs assessment was launched in January 2012 with a focus on determining the feasibility at both the state and county level for adopting a statewide approach. To ensure that every one of Nevada’s 17 counties were represented in the needs assessment process, an extensive effort was made to obtain local stakeholder input regarding county-level needs, assets, and buy-in related to participating in the implementation of a Statewide Early Childhood Data System and a Common Kindergarten Entry Assessment.

The needs assessment process included focus groups and site visits in all 17 counties and school districts to understand current practices, resource needs, specific barriers, and level of willingness to participate in this statewide systems change initiative. This needs assessment will allow Nevada to determine the most sensible approach for improving each county’s ability to ensure that its children enter kindergarten ready to learn, socialize, and thrive. This report summarizes the needs assessment process and findings specifically for Storey County, and concludes with a subjective assessment of the feasibility for implementing KEDS in Storey County.

County Profile

Storey County is part of the Reno–Sparks Metropolitan Statistical Area. Storey County was created in 1861. It is the smallest county in the state, outside of Carson City. Despite its small size, it was the most populous in Nevada when it was created in 1861. Virginia City has always been its county seat. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county has a total area of 264 square miles, of which, 263 square miles of it is land and 0 square miles of it is water.

In 2010 the total population of Storey County was 4,010. Of this total, approximately 174 were children ages 0 to 5 years (Nevada State Demographer). Nearly one in four children is food insecure (22%) (Feeding America , 2012). According to interviews with school district personnel, school enrollment can vary greatly year to year. In 2010-11, the kindergarten population was 43 (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). They district projects a lower enrollment for 2012-13.

Storey County Demographics

Total Population (2010) ¹	4,010
Number of Children Ages 0-5 (2010) ²	174
Median Household Income (2010) ³	\$ 61,525
Homeless population (school age group) ⁴	No Data
Food Insecure Children: Ages 0-18 (2012) ⁵	22.3%
Enrolled in NV Checkup: Ages 0-18 (2012) ⁶	<5
Number of Children Receiving Early Intervention Services: Ages 0-3 (2010) ⁷	1 (16.45 hours per child)

¹ (Nevada State Demographer)

² (Nevada State Demographer)

³ (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

⁴ (Social Entrepreneurs, Inc., 2011)

⁵ (Feeding America , 2012)

⁶ (Nevada Check up, 2012)

⁷ (Nevada Health Division Nevada Early Intervention Services, 2011)

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown (2010)⁸

	Total Population	% of Total Population
Total	4,010	100%
Asian	66	1.6%
Black or African American	40	1.0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	64	1.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	15	0.4%
White	3,693	92.1%
Other	45	1.1%
Multi-Racial	87	2.2%
*Population that identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino.	228	5.7%

Storey County: Snapshot of Early Childhood Education and Care

Two elementary schools provide education to Storey County residents. Hugh Gallagher is located in Virginia City, and Hillside is located in Lockwood. Hillside is a Title 1 school.

There is currently no Head Start or Nevada pre-K available in Storey County. The special education program offered through Storey County School District provides services to qualifying children that are younger than age 5. In 2010-11, seven children received pre-K through Storey County School District (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). There is at least one private center-based preschool in the county, located in Virginia Highlands (State of Nevada, Bureau of Health Care Quality and Compliance, 2012). Based on information from the Nevada Registry, there are six licensed care slots in the county (Nevada Registry, 2012).

According to Nevada Annual Reports of accountability, the student to teacher ratio in kindergarten classrooms was 28:1. There is full-day Kindergarten offered at Gallagher Elementary, but, like all districts in Nevada, kindergarten is not mandatory.

District wide, the percentage of children with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is higher than that of the state (19.3% compared to 10.8% statewide). There are very few to no children that have limited English proficiency, and approximately 5.6% of children district wide qualify for free and reduced lunch. The percentage of children that qualify for free and reduced lunch at Hillside Elementary School is 52.2%. (Nevada Department of Education). Qualification for free and reduced lunch is an indication that families may struggle to meet basic needs. These characteristics are important and related to kindergarten entry assessment, and, data suggests that children that experience one or more of these situations may be less likely to graduate from high school than those that don't. Meeting educational needs early in the child's life can help to correct for these disparities in graduation and academic achievement.

⁸ (Nevada State Demographer)

County Early Childhood Education and Resources	#	Enrollment Capacity	Children Enrolled in District Classrooms (2011)	
			Pre-K	K
Public Schools (elementary)	2	N/A	7	36
Charter Schools (elementary)	0	N/D		
Private Schools (elementary)	0	N/D		
Licensed Family Care	N/D	N/D		
Licensed Family Group Child Care	N/D	N/D		
Licensed Child Care Centers	1	6		

Sources: Nevada Department of Education, Children’s Cabinet⁹

School Readiness in Nevada

An important goal of the county-level needs assessment for this project was to solicit feedback from stakeholders at the local level in order to support adoption of a Nevada-specific definition of school readiness. A working definition was developed and shaped at a statewide School Readiness Summit held in February 2012, and subsequently reviewed by hundreds of ECE stakeholders, including parents and providers, who were asked to provide input on the working definition as well as to validate the need for a common statewide kindergarten entry assessment and coordinated early childhood data system.

Feedback from Storey County stakeholders indicated support of the working Nevada definition of school readiness, which was formally adopted in June 2012 by the NECAC.

There is consensus, based upon a wealth of research, that a child’s readiness for school should be measured and addressed across five distinct but connected domains¹⁰:

Physical Development and Health--This domain covers such factors as health status, growth, and disabilities; physical abilities, such as gross and fine motor skills; and conditions before, at, and after birth.

Social and Emotional Development--This domain combines two interrelated components affecting children’s behavioral health and learning. Social development refers to children’s ability to interact with



⁹ (Children's Cabinet , 2009)

¹⁰ Based on findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative: A 17-State Partnership and reviewed and revised at the Nevada School Readiness Summit, 2012.

others and their capacity for self-regulation. Emotional development includes children’s perceptions of themselves, their abilities to understand the feelings of other people, and their ability to interpret and express their own feelings.

Approaches to Learning--This domain refers to children’s inclination to use skills and knowledge. Key components include enthusiasm, curiosity, and persistence on tasks.

Language and Early Literacy Development--This domain includes communication and emergent literacy. Communication includes listening, speaking, and vocabulary. Emergent literacy includes print awareness, story sense, early writing, and the connection of letters to sounds.

Cognition and General Knowledge--This domain refers to thinking and problem-solving as well as knowledge about particular objects and the way the world works. Mathematical knowledge, abstract thought, and imagination are included.

As the graphic on the previous page indicates, Nevada’s definition of school readiness incorporates these five domains into the following equation: **READY FAMILIES + READY EDUCATORS + READY SCHOOLS + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SYSTEMS = CHILDREN ARE READY FOR SCHOOL**. Each factor necessary for the outcome that “Children are Ready for School” is further defined below:

“Ready Families” have adults who understand they are the most important people in the child’s life, understand age appropriate development, and support the child’s school readiness. Adults recognize their role as the child’s first and most important teacher, providing steady and supportive relationships, ensuring safe and consistent environments, promoting good health, and fostering curiosity, excitement about learning.

“Ready Educators” are skilled teachers, who understand age appropriate development, possess the skills to develop appropriate curriculum based on children’s development, recognize, reinforce, and extend children’s strengths and who are sensitive to cultural values and individual differences, including children with special needs.

“Ready Schools” accept all children and provide a seamless transition to a high-quality developmentally appropriate learning environment by engaging families and the whole community. A ready school welcomes all children and their families with opportunities to enhance and build confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities. Children in ready schools are led by skilled teachers as defined above.

“Ready Communities” play a crucial part in supporting families in their role as primary stewards of children’s readiness. Ready communities, including businesses, faith-based organizations, early childhood education and care service providers, community groups and local governments, work together to support children’s school and long term success by providing families affordable access to information, services, high-quality child care, and early learning opportunities.

“Ready Systems” describes the availability, quality, and affordability of proven programs that influence child development and school readiness. It also includes the degree to which public and private agencies promote policies and practices including data collection that enhance access to needed

supports, information and tools that help all other components (family, educators, schools and children) be ready for children to be ready for school.¹¹

Children's readiness for school is made up of multiple components and shaped by numerous factors. Improving school readiness, therefore, must address children's development of skills and behaviors as well as the environments in which they spend their time. Early childhood education and care leaders at the state and national level agree that efforts to improve school readiness must address three interrelated components:

- Children's readiness for school.
- School's readiness for children.
- The capacity of families and communities to provide developmental opportunities for young children.

Ultimately the goal is that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children. School readiness is an ongoing process from the moment of birth, to prekindergarten, and through the transition into elementary school and beyond. It is the foundation defined by the intersection of two critical components:

- 1) Children's condition to learn based on the five identified domains of learning, and
- 2) The school's capacity to meet the needs of all children to prepare them for future school success and the 21st century.

This includes, but not limited to providing access to high quality services for all children including aligned standards and curriculum, supportive relationships, engaging environment, smooth transitions and strong family and community connections.¹²

School district teachers in Storey County reacted favorably to this definition of school readiness. There was broad support for the focus on multiple developmental domains, rather than a more singular focus on academic readiness.

¹¹ (Bruner & Coperman, 2003)

¹² Nevada working definition from bill draft request

Kindergarten Entry Assessment

Description of Existing Kindergarten Entry Assessment

Storey County School District currently uses several assessments in pre-K and kindergarten classrooms. These assessments meet different purposes. They are listed here:

- The district is currently working with a 2-8 accountability testing system linked to the Nevada State Academic Standards, implemented with Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing (Storey County School District, 2008-2009).
- Screening and assessment is also a valued practice in Storey County's early childhood education and care programs, just as it is with the county's kindergarten programs. The kindergarten teacher assesses children directly (getting additional classroom support as needed) to ensure she is aware of the children's individual needs and progress.
- Kindergarten Entry Assessment utilizes the DIAL-3, and this is used both to understand the child's needs prior to kindergarten as well as qualify children for early childhood education and care programs (e.g. special education). When possible, assessment takes place in the spring, prior to kindergarten entry, allowing teachers and other staff the opportunity to provide information to parents to help prepare for the school year over the summer months. The DIAL-3 screens five early childhood education and care areas, including motor, language, concepts, self-help development, and social development.¹³
- The close relationship between the early childhood education and care classroom and kindergarten classroom means that instruction for young children is well-coordinated. For children that are identified with a concern, special education throughout the year often means that a child overcomes specific barriers and no longer needs special education beyond kindergarten. Other assessments are used throughout the year; for example, the tools developed by Washoe County (Kindergarten Entry Assessment Portfolios) have been of value at Hugh Gallagher Elementary.

Goals and Attributes for a Common Kindergarten Assessment

Kindergarten assessment is currently used to help inform the teacher of the child's individual needs and strengths, so that instruction can best meet their needs. Use of the DIAL-3 also plays the important role of qualifying children for early childhood education and care programs and special education. The data from assessment, strengthened by internal communication, means that teachers have a good idea of where each child is at, what growth has occurred, and what challenges remain.

Staff interviewed showed support for a common kindergarten assessment, in that they feel assessment is valuable and would like to be connected to best practice. However, they also feel that their current practices are effective. Upon outreach, the superintendent underscored the small number of children that enter kindergarten. This likely affects how the district and school prioritize investments in assessment and data.

¹³ (Pearson)

Kindergarten assessment should provide value to the teacher for the purpose of instruction, and based on current practice. Support staff may be needed to help with the classroom during assessment time. Kindergarten assessment should support the current practice of effectively connecting children to specialized education as needed.

Summary of Assets

- This district is very small and effectively provides transition and customized assistance for each child.
- The district already utilizes screening and assessment (DIAL-3) as well as other district developed assessments.
- Assessment is seen as valuable for instruction and tracking of individual student progress.
- Outreach to private providers is streamlined, with one center in the county.

Summary of Barriers

Stakeholders in Storey County cited the following as being significant barriers which may hinder the creation and implementation of a statewide kindergarten entry assessment:

- The district is small and enrollment fluctuates greatly each year. There is a great deal of transiency.
- The existing system works well, and there may be some resistance to changing something that is currently experienced as effective.
- Many children may not receive any pre-school. Families that have children in the home may be hard to reach prior to kindergarten entry.

Early Childhood Data System

Description of Existing Efforts Related to Early Childhood Data

The Storey County School District currently uses PowerSchool to maintain district data and coordinate with Nevada Department of Education needs related to data. The child's cumulative folder is used to hold and store much of the information before and after kindergarten.

Storey County's Technology Plan identifies several critical issues that relate to the ability to collect and maintain data at the classroom level. They include:

- Communication
- Repairs and supplies
- Training
- Scheduling
- Upgrades of staff computers
- Upgrades of student computers
- Upgrades of Libraries and Computer Classrooms/Labs

The district is working to improve the technology needed monitor student progress toward meeting the computer technology state standards as well as non-computer literacy coursework. Strategies include development of a cross-curricular multidisciplinary project to be developed between computer curriculum and core subject curriculum. The technology plan is currently being implemented (Storey County School District, 2011-2013).

Storey County School District provides information via Bighorn, the Nevada Statewide Longitudinal Data System. It provides a living academic history for each student, and their teachers and schools, from 2005 to the present. Bighorn serves Stakeholders, Districts, Schools, and Teachers by providing automated tools and information to help them improve academic outcomes in Nevada. In terms of technology, the district is equipped as follows:

Educational Technology	# of classrooms	# of classrooms with Internet access	# of labs, libraries and media centers	# of labs, libraries and media centers with Internet access	# of classroom instructional computers	# of classroom instructional computers with Internet access
Storey County School District	36	34	9	9	278	272

Goals and Attributes for Early Childhood Data System

Having information about the incoming kindergarten population is important for the purposes of planning and instruction. Teachers also identify the importance of having information for parents and families to best support the child. The district’s current practice of reaching as many families as possible in the spring before kindergarten provides some information. Data on children (including pre-K experiences within the county or from other districts) would be of value for planning.

Data should provide value toward instruction. Time away from instruction for data entry would be difficult without additional resources.

Summary of Assets

- The district is small, and there is only one center-based provider, making changes and communication less complicated than many other districts. The existing system works well in part because of relationships and good internal communication.
- There is interest in having more information about children that are entering kindergarten.

Summary of Barriers

- The existing system works relatively well, and there may be resistance to investing resources considering that there is agreement that the current system works well.

Needs Assessment Summary

For it to be feasible to implement KEDS, the following issues need to be addressed for Storey County:

- Based on information available, Storey County would readily participate in a common kindergarten entry assessment that provided value for instruction. Involving kindergarten teachers and early childhood (special education teachers) in the decision making process would be important to implementation, as administrators value them as the experts in educating young children. Parents and private providers should also be engaged in implementation planning.
- Based on the information collected during the needs assessment process, Storey County may be ready to participate in an early childhood data system, but more information is needed on the resources, training, and infrastructure required. Parents and private providers should be engaged in implementation.

As part of implementation, the factors will be re-assessed to determine feasibility of a statewide kindergarten entry assessment and data system in the fall of 2012. Using the results from the first phase of this project, the findings for each county will be synthesized and prepared into a preliminary paper to frame draft goals for both Early Childhood Data System and Kindergarten Entry Assessment System, including recommendations. The results will then be documented into implementation plans and implementation templates for each individual county. After distributing the template to the counties, SEI consultants will work with them to provide assistance and direction in completing their plans, based on their readiness and unique needs.

Summary of Contacts and Information Sources for Storey County

Outreach

- Superintendent Dr. Robert Slaby
- Principal Todd Hess
- Presentation to the Nevada Department of Education Title 1 Coordinators meeting

Interviews

- Sonja Hicks, Kindergarten Teacher Hugh Gallagher Elementary
- Lisa Sinnot, Special Education Teacher Hugh Gallagher Elementary

Other Information Resources

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