

May 2015

# Envisioning a Bright Future for New Braunfels Children: A Community-Based Approach to School Readiness

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## Acknowledgements

The Morrison Consulting Capstone Group (MCCG) has given significant time and effort to the development of this project. However, it would not have been possible without the abundant support of many individuals and organizations. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all of them.

We offer our thanks and appreciation to Dean Ryan Crocker, Dean of the Bush School of Government and Public Service, and Dr. William West, Acting Head of the Public Service and Administration Department, for their outstanding leadership at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University.

It has been a true honor to work with the McKenna Foundation team led by Jerry Major, Chief Executive Officer; Alice Jewell, Executive Director; Kristen Fain, Director; and Lindsay Morgan, Grants Coordinator. We could not have completed this project without their support and participation in the capstone program.

We also give our recognition to local stakeholders that actively participated in this capstone project, including BCFS-Head Start, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Comal County Public Health, Comal County CC, CIS, CISD, Connections, FPGNB, Gabriel Project, Kids Club, McKenna Foundation, NBISD, New Braunfels Public Library, St. Jude's Ranch for Children, Texas Health Steps and Parents, among others.

We are highly indebted to Dr. Jenny Knowles Morrison, who has supported us throughout this capstone project with her patience and knowledge. One simply could not wish for a more successful relationship with a capstone leader such as herself.

We praise the enormous amount of support from all administrative staff at the Bush School of Government and Public Service. All of their work behind the scenes is greatly valued.

Last but not the least, our appreciation goes to our family and friends for their unfailing encouragement which helped us to reach the successful completion of this project.

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## **0. Executive Summary**

This report provides an overview of a qualitative, participatory study conducted by a capstone team from the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. The McKenna Foundation of New Braunfels, Texas enlisted the help of this capstone team in August 2014 to help ascertain how best to support the approximately 5,000 children under the age of 5 in New Braunfels, Texas (United States Census Bureau, 2010), many of whom are not adequately prepared to enter kindergarten. The Morrison Consulting Capstone Group (MCCG) mission was to provide the McKenna Foundation with informed recommendations regarding school readiness, so that they could effectively serve and advance the well-being of the New Braunfels community.

The research incorporated a community-based design to explore the state of school readiness in New Braunfels, Texas. The study included conducting interviews, an online survey, and two participatory meetings with key community stakeholders to help support the McKenna Foundation in assessing possible programmatic and community-wide solutions. The report provides a comprehensive set of findings from each data point, with analysis and expansion of community solutions facilitated by a review of national best practices.

School readiness is defined as “children’s social and emotional competence, motor development and physical well-being, development of pre academic skills such as emergent literacy and numeracy within the cognitive domain, and approaches to learning” (McWayne et al., 2012, p. 1). This approach was chosen based on research that demonstrates how communities are more likely to succeed in preparing children for school if their key educators, namely parents and teachers, share a common definition on what school readiness means for them (Piotrkowski et al., 2000).

To better discover how to utilize this community-based approach in New Braunfels, multiple characteristics of the community were explored using Comal County Assessment data. This data revealed not only demographic information such as racial makeup, but that with a rapidly increasing population there are more Pre-Kindergarten age children and a higher demand for quality childcare services in New Braunfels.

Through extensive research of national best practice programs, five programs emerged as potential models for the McKenna Foundation to consider as they support further community-wide planning around this issue. These include: Community Action Plan (CAP) Tulsa, Head Start for Kent County, First 5 Yolo, Smart Start for Kids, and the School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County. These were chosen based on their effective incorporation of the four components of school readiness: emotional intelligence, social intelligence, cognitive development and physical development. Best practices were also chosen considering the top five

priorities that New Braunfels area stakeholders identified in two participatory meetings facilitated by the capstone group, as part of the study.

Based on the five best practices identified and the success of these programs and activities in their communities, MCCG offers key recommendations for the McKenna Foundation. These include program content-based recommendations; strengthening the education of social and emotional intelligence, and cognitive and physical development; and implementing developmental screens for Pre-K children to assess these internal elements. MCCG also makes recommendations for a community-wide approach to school readiness drawn from the five best practices including: gaining the commitment of families, schools, and the community to support Pre-K children in becoming school ready; implementing a quality tracking system to follow children's progress; planning fun educational events such as field trips; and gathering parents together to promote community networking. Furthermore, MCCG suggests that partnership with a local university to provide health services to children in Pre-K education programs, as well as their parents and siblings, would be beneficial. Ultimately, MCCG makes recommendations to support children's Pre-K learning both through internal development and environmental influences.

# **Chapter 1:**

# **Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction to the Issue of School Readiness**

School readiness is increasingly viewed by stakeholders, researchers, and policymakers alike as key to promoting the long-term educational; success of children. In September of 2014, the McKenna Foundation invited the Bush School consulting capstone team to research the state of school readiness in New Braunfels, Texas. The Foundation sought to identify issue areas of interest, as well as potential solutions, to support a wide range of Pre-K children. In response, the capstone team, Morrison Consulting Capstone Group (MCCG), employed a community-based, participatory approach to gather stakeholder perspectives and examine national best practice approaches for increasing school readiness.

New Braunfels has a number of organizations that address different aspects of child education and development, from dropout prevention to afterschool programs. Despite the rich and dynamic pool of child-related resources, initial data collection demonstrated service duplication in some areas, while other services were underprovided or even non-existent. Community-wide coordination and communication emerged as two key issues to address, similar to conclusions reached by a range of national best practice school readiness implementations across the United States, researched for the study.

To understand school readiness in the New Braunfels community, MCCG brought stakeholders together and facilitated two large group participatory meetings, as well as collected data through interviews and a short online survey. This report presents a comprehensive introduction to school readiness challenges both nationally and in New Braunfels; describes the research and methodology implemented in this project; details the key findings pertaining to problem identification and solution generation; and offers best practices and recommendations relevant to New Braunfels.

The capstone team's inductive research approach and iterative data collection cycle informed the shape of the New Braunfels community understanding of school readiness. This process required the team to move between collecting the community perspective, and the literature and best practices for school readiness. This report is structured to reflect this iterative process. To meet this aim, the report will present findings first and then return to the literature and best practice models to inform recommendations for the McKenna Foundation and the New Braunfels community.

### **1.1.1 Snapshot of School Readiness**

'School readiness' typically refers to the field within early childhood education that prepares children to fully participate in kindergarten, which longitudinal research has shown sets the path for continuous success in school and beyond. Research shows that early success or failure influences the way children relate to others during the course of his or her life (Fowler & Cross,

1986). For example, an extensive study by the Board on Children, Youth, and Families within the Institute of Medicine's *Neurons to Neighborhoods* program demonstrates that disparities seen in children's knowledge and skills before kindergarten age are strongly related with their social and economic circumstances (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Children who enter school with early precursor skills, aided by exposure to enriching preschool environments, are more likely than their peers to experience later academic success (Duncan et al., 2007). Preliminary research shows that many will also attain higher levels of education, and secure employment (Rouse et al., 2005). Other studies show evidence that absence of these and other skills may contribute to even greater disparities in later achievement in school (Phillips et al., 1998).

Further supporting the importance of the school readiness programming is childhood brain development. During the period prior to 5 years of age, the brain grows the fastest and is most capable of change. Increasing research on cognitive development supports attention to the holistic development of young children, such as programming that gives increased attention to developing emotional, social, cognitive, and physical components of a child, to ensure appropriate development in these areas. While tracking a nationally representative sample of approximately 22,000 pupils from their kindergarten year through the fifth grade, the United States Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) provides evidence on the importance of early skills in predicting a child's subsequent academic performance (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2004). Assessing ECLS, Denton and West contend that "Children's reading and mathematics knowledge and skills that differ by child, family, and school characteristics at the beginning of kindergarten persist into the spring of kindergarten and the spring of first grade" (Denton & West, 2002, p. xii).

National attention to school readiness has generated a range of programming options and evaluations across the country, as funding streams from public and private entities have supported such programming (Department of Education, 2014). One of the earliest, most widespread, and best evaluated initiatives is Head Start, which is a federal program targeting low-income children aged 3-5. Head Start funds a variety of services, including education in the form of preschool, and nutrition and medical services. Children eligible for Head Start are identified as the group that is most in need of services to increase their school readiness. Extensive, longitudinal evaluations have highlighted "lessons learned" from Head Start; such as avoiding considering school readiness programming "as a static attribute of children", and avoiding "ignoring factors such as individual differences, inequalities in children's experiences and opportunities; and the responsibilities of school to teach all children appropriately" (Piotrkowski, 2004, p.130).

To align varying groups of children in their preparation for school, there is an increasing consensus that a school readiness program design should begin with information sharing between stakeholders, to better coordinate the instructional environment of school readiness curricula with local classroom practices (Piotrkowski, 2004).

## 1.2 Definitions and Common Approaches to School Readiness

This section explores common definitions and holistic approaches of school readiness. School readiness is defined in a number of ways, underlining the complexity of the issue. Throughout the review of the literature on school readiness, those definitions enhanced our understanding of the subject from different perspectives.

There are five definitions of school readiness utilized to approach our research on the subject (see Table 1.1). These descriptions encompass both Head Start program terminology, as well as community-based perspectives.

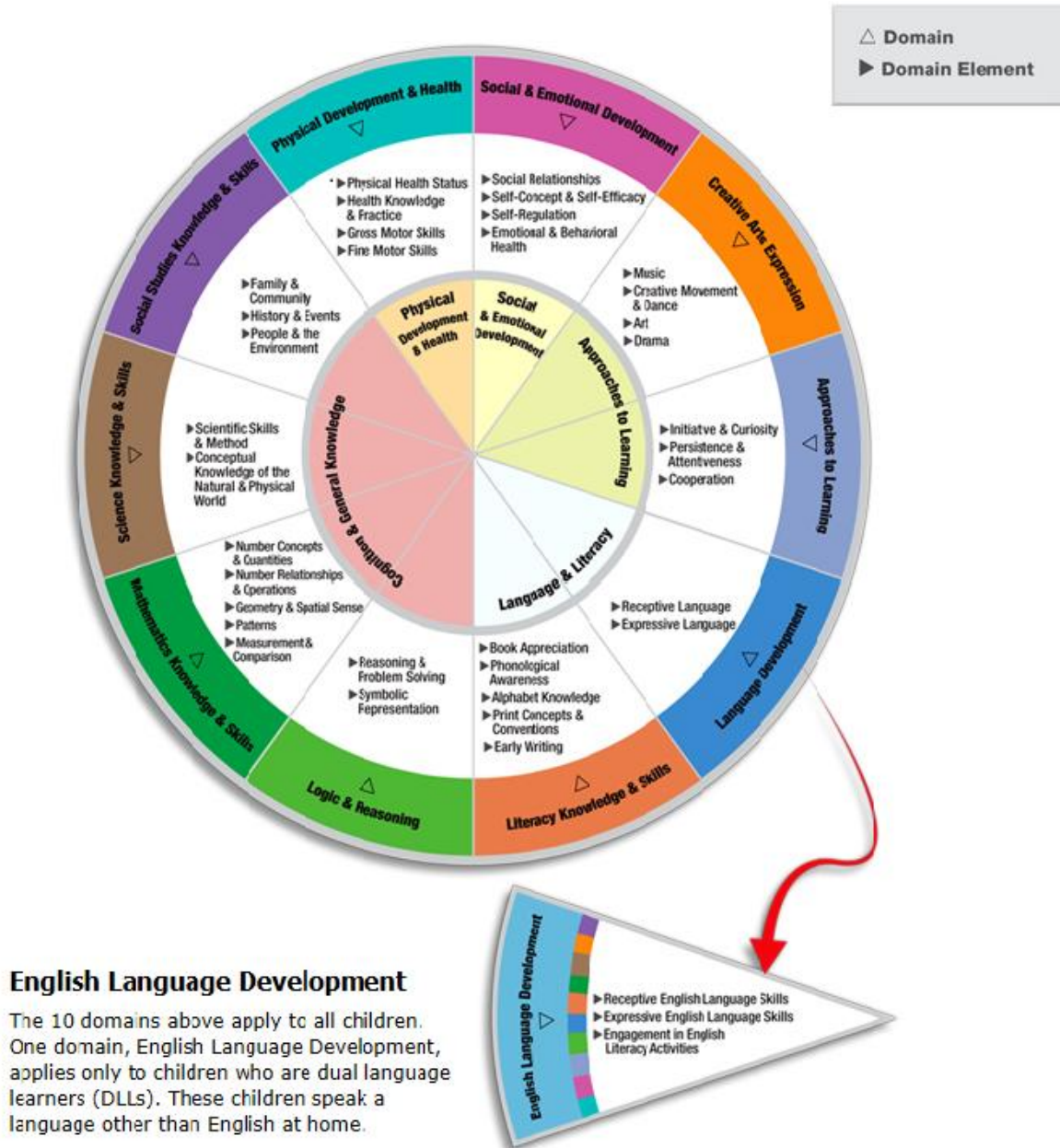
**Table 1.1 Definitions of School Readiness**

<b>School Readiness Perspective</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Head Start Program	“Children’s social and emotional competence, motor development and physical well-being, development of pre academic skills such as emergent literacy and numeracy within the cognitive domain, and approaches to learning” (McWayne et al., 2012, p.1).
	“Multidimensional, encompassing not only cognitive and language skills, but also social-emotional development and health” (Halle et al., 2012, p.614).
Community-Based Perspectives	“The political, social, organizational, educational, financial, and individual resources that help to prepare children for school” (Piotrkowski, 2004, p.131).
	“The ‘readiness’ of families and schools as they contribute to children’s early academic success as part of this construct of school readiness” (McWayne et al., 2012, p.1).
	“Involves interplay between a child’s inherent characteristics and past and present environmental and cultural contexts” (Halle et al., 2012, p.613).

## 1.2.1 The Head Start Approach to School Readiness

The definitions of school readiness in use by the Head Start program focus on the internal aspects of the child, such as social and emotional competence and cognitive development. The Head Start perspective connects more to a child-centric approach to school readiness, which is carried out in the form of academic learning in schools as illustrated below:

Figure 1.1 Head Start Model of School Readiness

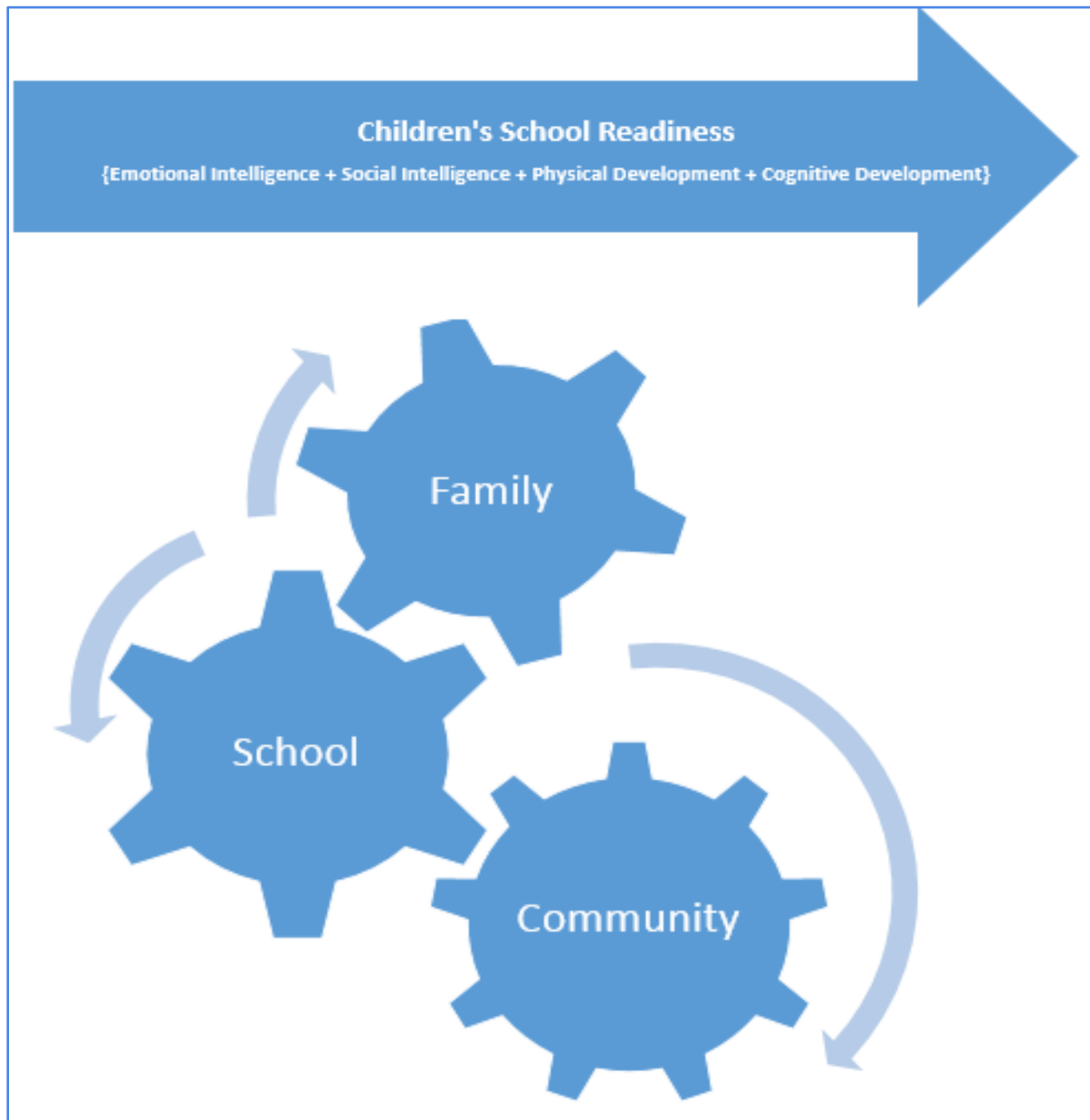


Source: Department of Education, 2014

### 1.2.2 A Community-Based Approach to School Readiness

A community-based approach to school readiness emphasizes the shared responsibility of families, communities and schools to positively impact children's preparedness as they enter kindergarten. Any dysfunctional relation between these three key actors may hinder children's emotional intelligence, social intelligence, physical development or cognitive development.

**Figure 1.2 Community-Based Model of School Readiness**



Source: MCCG, 2014



The survey of *Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School* (CARES) demonstrates that communities are more likely to succeed in preparing children for school if their key educators, namely parents and teachers, share a common definition on what school readiness means for them (Piotrkowski et al., 2000). A community-based approach of school readiness, conceptualizes the issue in a larger framework as the “political, social, organizational, educational, financial, and individual resources that help to prepare children for school” (Piotrkowski, 2004, p.131).

The author of the CARES survey identifies key school readiness resources at three levels and defines the key components (Piotrkowski, 2004):

- community level: quality childcare and preschool for all, easy to use libraries, safe playgrounds and neighborhoods, ample social capital (fellowship, sympathy, social intercourse, ...) and accessible, affordable health service (Coleman, 1988),
- school level: strong and accountable leadership, welcoming environment to parents and children, early care, support for transition into kindergarten, ongoing professional development, responsive to individual needs, partnerships with families and community service providers (Shore, 1998),
- family level: rich literacy environment, adequate financial resources, social support for health care and effective first teacher (Piotrkowski, 2004).

Using both the Head Start and community-based frameworks to guide this research allows for a two-fold understanding of school readiness relevant to the specific context of New Braunfels.

## **1.3 New Braunfels Context**

### **1.3.1 Local Context - Comal County Assessment Data**

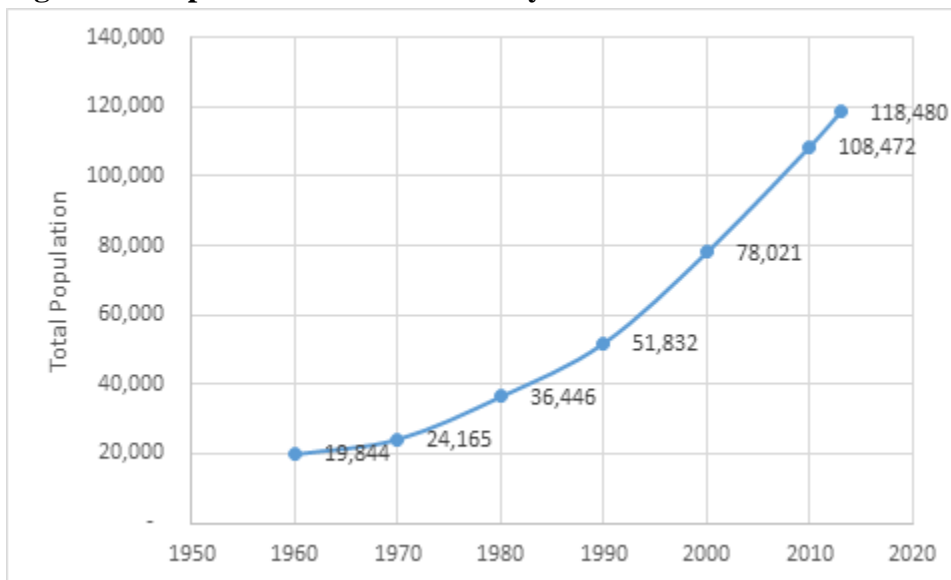
The following contextual data shows opportunities and challenges pertaining to school readiness in Comal County, which includes the city of New Braunfels, Texas, the focus of this study. The data reveals that as one of Texas’ fastest growing populations, Comal County’s Pre-K population (0-5 years) is changing rapidly in regards to racial makeup. In reference to school readiness specifically, more than 90% of parents had access to secondary education, which can be an asset in having a literate familial environment but not a guarantee in preparing children for school. Also, Comal County has a number of daycare services, which constitute one of the major expenses for concerned households. An overview of this local level data is described below, providing a sense of demographic, social, economic, and institutional background of our project.

### 1.3.1.1 Demographics

Three demographic characteristics are of note to the development of a comprehensive school readiness plan in Comal County: New Braunfels is almost half the population of the county, the city is facing an unprecedented rapid population growth, and the city is witnessing a changing racial makeup.

According to the United States Census Bureau, New Braunfels represents approximately 45% of the total population in Comal County. The population in the county is increasing at a rate of 39% from 2000 to 2010, as shown in Figure 1.3 below.

**Figure 1.3 Population in Comal County from 1960 to 2013**

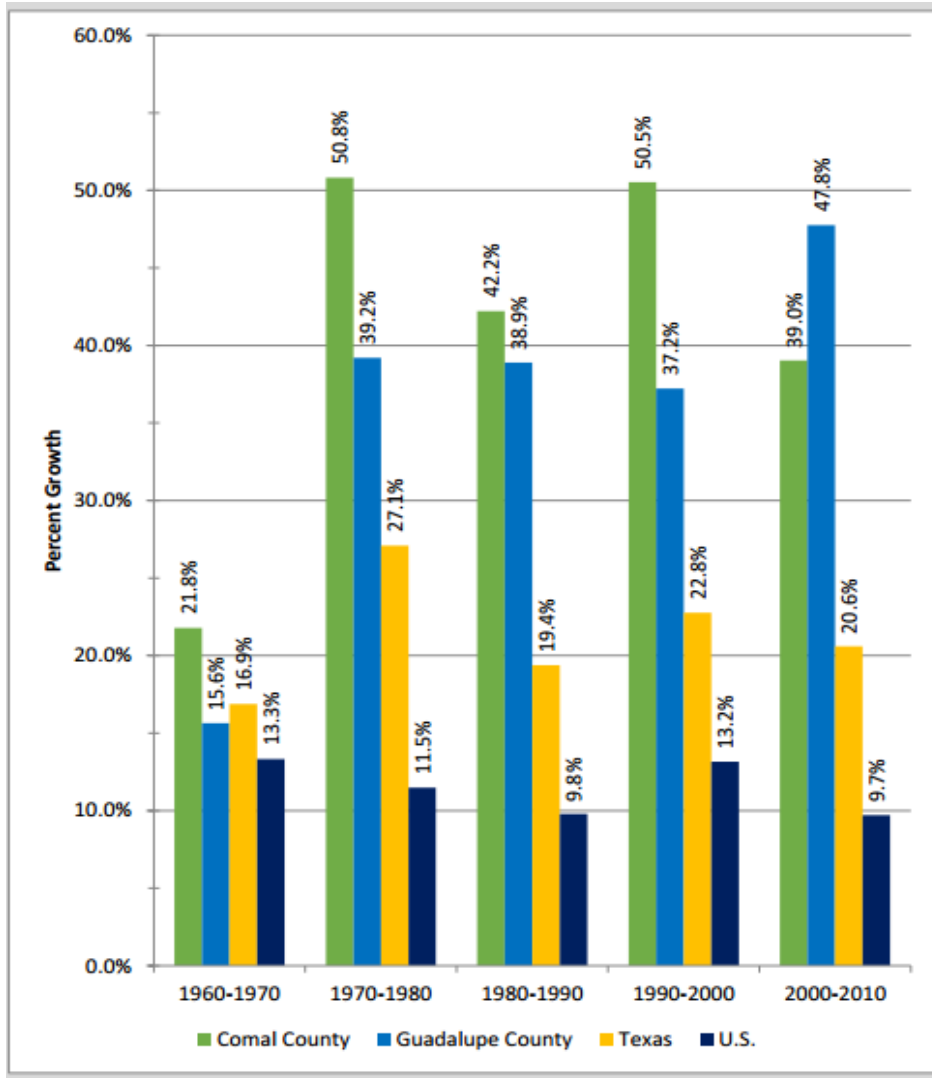


Source: United States Census Bureau, 2013

From 2010, the total population of Comal County has risen by about 2,500 residents each year. This is a faster pace compared to other state and national figures. During the last decade, the population expanded about twice as fast as the state of Texas did and almost four times as fast as the United States, as illustrated by Figure 1.4.

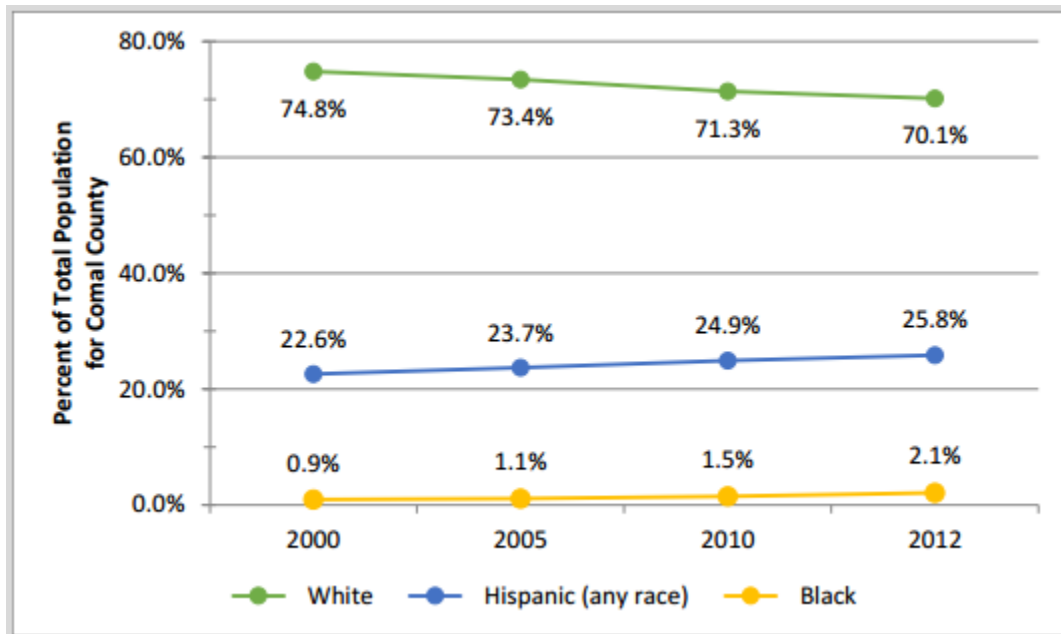
The rapid population growth in Comal County has impacted the residents whose children are of Pre-K/K age. According to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, the Pre-K population (0-5 years) in Comal County consisted of 7,733 individuals in 2013, compared to 4,681 individuals in 2000. That represents more than a 65% increase in a decade, fueling the potential demand for child-related services in the county as described by Figure 1.4.

**Figure 1.4 Decennial Population Change from 1960 to 2010**



Source: United States Census Bureau, 2013

**Figure 1.5 Comal County Proportions by Race/Ethnicity**

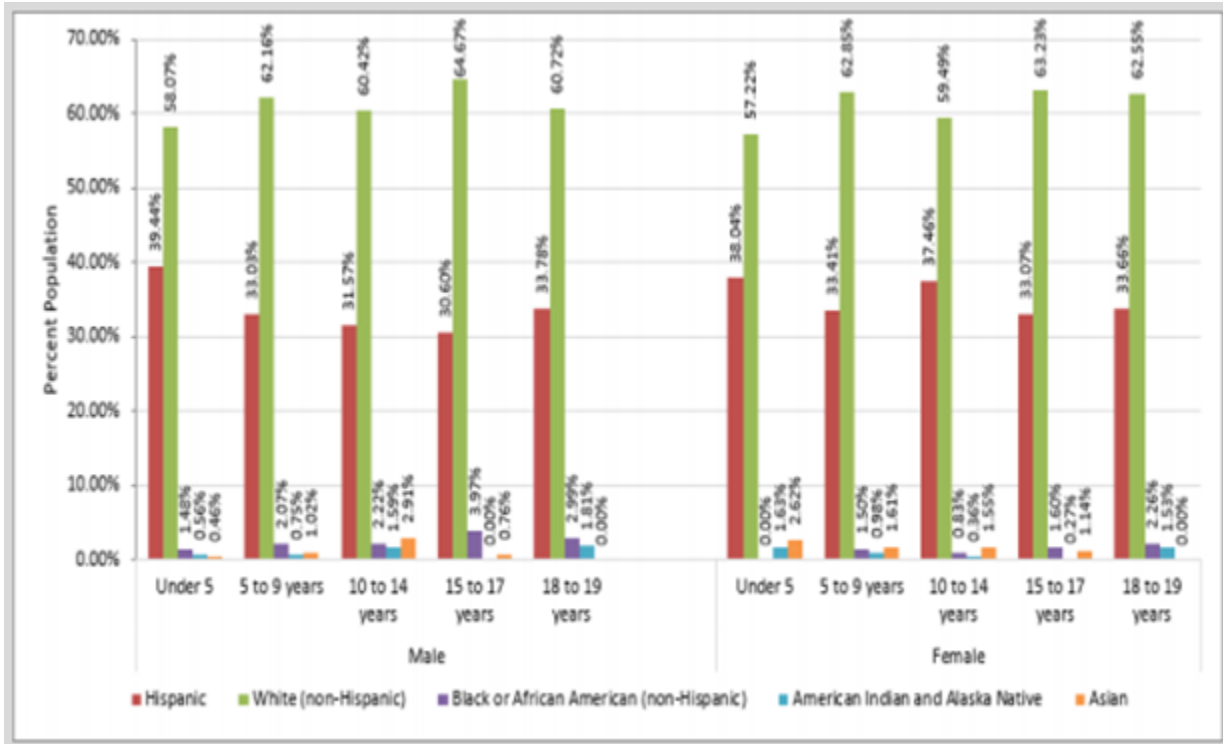


Source: American Community Survey, 2013

In 2012, the racial makeup of Comal County residents was dominantly composed of 70.1% whites (see Figure 1.5). This percentage is declining though, as Hispanic and Black resident populations have grown, respectively, from 22.6% to 25.8% and 0.9% to 2.01% between 2000 and 2012. To date, this is a marginal, but sustained change.

Based on the current data, the Texas State Data Center estimates that by 2050, the Comal County population will increase to 192,808 residents (Texas State Data Center as cited by Comal County Assessment, 2014). By 2050, Hispanics, Blacks, and other races will grow significantly to about 37% and 4.6% of the population respectively as opposed to 25.8% and 2.1% in 2012. The future impact on Pre-K and kindergarten population is captured by Figure 1.6, which displays the Comal County population by age group below 20 years old in 4-year intervals:

**Figure 1.6 Demographic Population of Comal County by Age Group Below 20 Years**



Source: United States Census Bureau, 2010

In 2010, the demographic population of Comal County, when assessed by age group below 20 years, delineates a new pattern of Pre-K population racial makeup. The latter is consisted of about 58% White, 39% Hispanic and 1.48 % Black as opposed to the total population composed of 71.3% White, 24.9 Hispanic and 1.5% Black (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Such a trend translates the emerging cultural diversity in Comal County that should be taken into consideration for school readiness. In response, various local based associations are now working with families from different cultural backgrounds (MCCG Initial Interview, 2014).

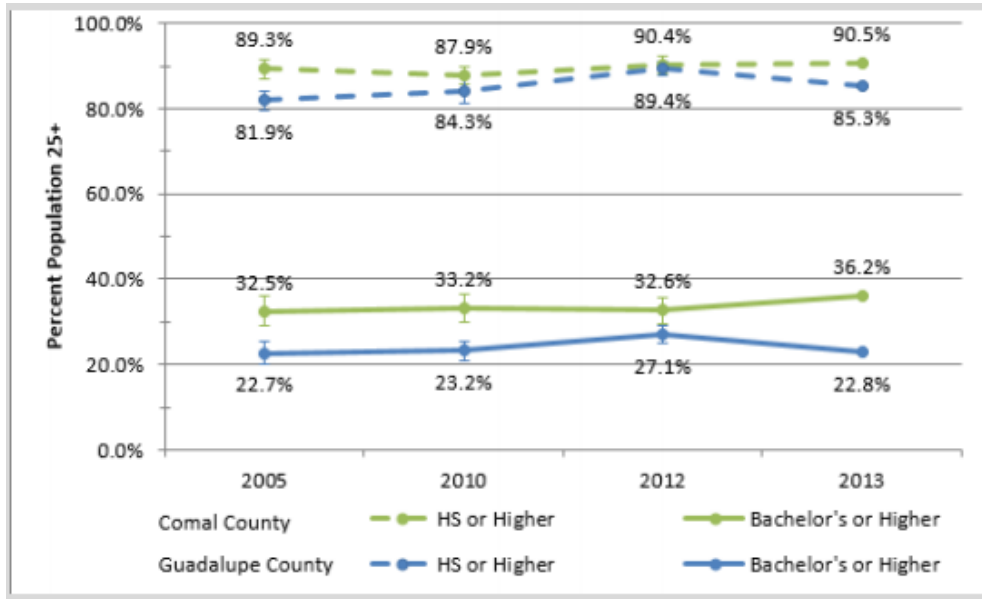
### 1.3.2 Community Well-Being and Resources

#### 1.3.2.1 Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is a key component of community well-being and is closely related to poverty, employment, health status, and other key issues. Between 2005 and 2013, educational attainment stayed relatively flat in both Comal County and its neighbor, Guadalupe County. In Comal County, more than 90% and 36% of parents have graduated respectively from high school and college (American Community Survey, 2013). Their experience in school can help their children to prepare for school in forming a familial environment conducive to home literacy. Still, having parents with a high level of education does not guarantee that they are capable of

preparing children for school. Properly initiating children to learning habits requires certain commitment and patience (MCCG Initial Interview, 2014).

**Figure 1.7 Education Attainment in Comal County and Guadalupe County**



Source: American Community Survey, 2013

### 1.3.2.2 Cost of Living

The minimum required annual income after taxes, for vital and basic needs, is about \$47,064 for a one-adult family of four and \$39,324 for a two-adult family of four (Center for Public Policy Priorities Family Budget Calculator, 2014 as cited by McKieran et al., 2014). These minimum annual incomes are 167% to 200% of the 2013 Federal Poverty Level of \$23,550 for a family of four<sup>1</sup>. Depending on family size, child care may represent 20% to 34% of a family's total income as described below:

<sup>1</sup> The cost of living in Comal County and minimum required income for one-adult households and for two-adult households is based on local expenditure data for food, child care, health care, housing, transportation, and other basic needs in 2013. The data are from the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) Family Budget Calculator. CPPP's family budget estimates assume that the employer pays all of one adult's health insurance premium and half of the premium for the rest of the family.

**Table 1.2 Average Family Expenditures in Comal County**

Expenses	1 Adult	1 Adult & 1 Child	1 Adult & 2 Children	1 Adult & 3 Children
Food	\$254	\$359	\$529	\$625
Child Care	\$0	\$472	\$779	\$1,326
Medical	\$43	\$53	\$69	\$80
Housing	\$682	\$842	\$842	\$1,086
Transportation	\$359	\$359	\$359	\$359
Other	\$136	\$222	\$331	\$329
Required Monthly Income After Taxes	\$1,663	\$2,302	\$2,859	\$3,922

Source: Center for Public Policy Priorities Family Budget Calculator, 2014

Housing and health care are the major expenses for families with children in Comal County. Expenditures for other vital needs like food, medical care and transportation, vary with family size and may take advantage of economies of scale. The cost of living in Comal County is generally perceived as less than the national average, attracting low to middle class working families (MCCG Initial Interviews, 2014). As a result, parents are likely working and may rely on daycare services, or grandparents, to take care of their children. (MCCG Initial Interviews, 2014).

### **1.3.2.3 Child Daycare Services**

Table 1.2 illustrates the availability of child day care services in Comal County and its immediate neighbor, Guadalupe County.

**Table 1.3 Child Day Care in 2013 and Child Day Care Capacity per 1,000 Kids from 2010 to 2013**

	Comal	Guadalupe	Texas
Licensed Child Care Centers	39	36	9,534
Total Child Care Centers Capacity	3,969	3,902	1,003,151
Child Population Age 0-5	7,733	10,733	2,335,966
Capacity per 1,000 Children 0-5	513.3	363.6	429.4
Child Population Age 0-13	20,206	29,165	5,589,741
Capacity per 1,000 Children 0-13	196.4	133.8	179.5

Source: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2013

Thirty nine child daycare services are offered in Comal County (as of 2013). This corresponds to a total capacity of 3,969 kids, for a total Pre-K population of 7,733. The 2008 household survey identifies four barriers to these services: limited space (more demand than supply), cost, limited hours of operation, and convenient location. While working parents may rely on child day care centers to prepare their kids for school, substandard services may yield the opposite effect.

#### **1.4 Key Components of School Readiness Programming Models**

Targeting all key components of school readiness is crucial in programming interventions which are relevant to the need of children. Primary attributes of a child’s school readiness include emotional intelligence, social intelligence, physical development, and cognitive development (Duncan et al., 2007; Rouse et al., 2005). The discussion of childhood development before entry into school contributes to the concept of “school readiness.” This construct encompasses a wide range of child-related attributes, as well as external factors associated with the child’s environment, that have been determined to be vital for preparing young children for long-term school success (Mayer, 2008) (Welsh, 2010) (Grissmer, 2010). External factors consist of the role of parents, as well as schools and the community as a whole in preparing children for school (Perkins, 1997) (Piotrkowski et al., 2000). Table 1.4 below defines each of these components, to highlight the key contributors to a child’s success in school.



**Table 1.4 Characteristics that Indicate School Readiness**

<b>Determinants of School Readiness</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Emotional Intelligence	Emotional intelligence concerns the ability to carry out accurate reasoning of emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought. (Mayer, 2008, p.511).
Cognitive Development	Domain general skills such as working memory and attention control, and domain specific skills like emergent literacy and numeracy (Welsh, 2010, p.43).
Social Intelligence	Children exhibiting more socially competent behaviors are better able to succeed academically in school than children exhibiting less competent social behaviors (Ziv, 2012, p.307).
Physical Development	Motor skill development and physical well-being (Grissmer et al., 2010, p.1008).

The incorporation of these four determinants constitutes one of our main criteria for selecting best practices.

## **1.5 External Factors**

The following section deals with the role of various actors surrounding children as they are entering kindergarten, including parents, families and school districts.

### **1.5.1 Parental Influence**

Parental influence is a growing variable in the study of Pre-K influences. A key question here is: what specifically makes a child ready for school and how does the home and school environments influence their development, as well as interact? Parents can have a major impact on the education and social well-being of their children. One study specifically addressed the continual school involvement of secondary students from a population in San Antonio, Texas (Perkins, 1997). This study found that the parents were the most influential external factor in pushing their child to continue with school. Programs to help parents promote their child's

education were recommended. These included communication, giving feedback after failure, etc. (Perkins, 1997). Parents' motivation of educating their children at home are not based on their educational preferences, but the expectations and norms of a certain social context in which they live (Spiegler, 2010). If parents have the education themselves and the tools necessary to help their children be successful, they may be more inclined to be involved (*Ibid*, 2010).

In 2009, the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* published an article by Myrberg on the effect of parents' education on their children's reading skills. The study compiled data from approximately 10,000 students in the third grade and results showed that parents' education has a substantial influence. It is important to note, though, that half of this effect comes from other variables such as the number of books at home, early literacy activities, and emergent literacy abilities in time for the start of school (Myrberg, 2009). The results imply that parents with more education, or access to books to gain more education, influence their children's success in school (Myrberg, 2009). This underlines the importance of early intervention in helping parents have access to book through multiple sources.

### **1.5.2 Family Support**

The body of research shows that families play an important role in preparing children for school. The influence of families in helping children to be ready for school can be conceptualized into five different roles to support children in their personal development, as well as in their relationship with communities and schools:

- **families as nurturers and supporters:** The family's most basic role is to provide for their children's health, safety, security, and emotional well-being. Conversely, environments associated with poor nutrition, disease and/or drug exposure negatively affects the development of a child's central nervous system (Shonkoff, 2000).
- **families as teachers:** Families can establish an at-home learning environment for the whole family, expressing high expectations and encouraging learning, reading, and storytelling (Henderson and Orozco, 2003),
- **families as intermediaries:** From safe home to unknown territory, family is "an important intermediary as young children venture into the neighborhood environment" (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1997),
- **family members help negotiate and oversee their children's ties to neighbors, friends, and the broader community:** This helps children learn to observe social protocols and function safely and productively within their spheres of existence (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2004),
- **families as advocates:** Benevolent parents are expected to seek services and opportunities but also to intervene for the good of their children in school and in the community as a whole (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2004).

Currently, the increasing number of working parents has fueled the market of early child care and childhood education. Facing this trend, it is important to note that “for healthy development that prepares them for learning, young children need both nurturing relationships and cognitive stimulation in their childcare or preschool environments as well as at home” (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2004, p.16).

### **1.5.3 School District Involvement**

Without support from the school districts, school readiness programs are difficult to implement (Flaspohler et al., 2012). For successful results, Piotrkowski argues that school readiness program’s curricula should be aligned with kindergarten’s classroom practices (Piotrkowski, 2004). Such an alignment calls for an information sharing from the local school districts (*Ibid*, 2004).

One example of school districts serving as support systems comes from a study in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*. It focused on developing a support system to promote high-quality implementation of whole school prevention initiatives in elementary and middle schools. Data collected over a 5 year period were presented at 12 schools. The data suggested that the ongoing collection of information related to organizational readiness, assists in the adoption and implementation of effective programs (Flaspohler et al., 2012). Therefore, these types of support systems and processes are best used to work with schools and school districts in implementing school readiness programs.

## **1.6 Summary**

Throughout the capstone team’s exploration of the school readiness literature, evidence has emerged which supports the necessity for children’s Pre-Kindergarten education, as well as the importance of this comprehensive education for their healthy development. Whether approaching school readiness from the perspective of Pre-K educational programming like Head Start, or from a community based perspective, increasing school readiness is a multi-faceted and complex process. The literature conveys the importance of both the internal development of a child as well as how their external environment affects their education. Studying the internal indicators of school readiness (emotional intelligence, social intelligence, physical development, cognitive development) in conjunction with the external influences on children (parental influence, family support, school district involvement) is crucial for creating a holistic programming of school readiness for the New Braunfels community. A community-based approach of school readiness offers a comprehensive framework for better collaboration. This approach can aid the New Braunfels Community in reaching out to families, schools, and local stakeholders to reach consensus for a common vision for increasing school readiness.

# **Chapter 2: Research and Methodology**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the research design guiding the community-based research strategy developed by the Morrison Consulting Capstone Group (MCCG), to engage the wider school readiness community in New Braunfels, Texas in a participatory process. This process was envisioned to lead key stakeholders through an analysis of key challenges and opportunities pertaining to school readiness in New Braunfels.

A data collection plan was designed and implemented to capture the most objective, reliable, and extensive evidence to inform the team's strategies and recommendations for the McKenna Foundation. The action research design was employed to help achieve these aims, particularly to facilitate collective development of insights and solutions. The design gives stakeholders an opportunity to address what they see as the primary school readiness challenges in their community.

Traditional qualitative and quantitative approaches were not adequate for identifying such collective insights. Through interviews, surveys, and participatory meetings as the primary action-research supported activity, the community was guided through the process of building a collective action plan to address school readiness challenges. The capstone team developed the process and content of each meeting, and served as the facilitation team throughout each day.

## **2.2 The Role of the McKenna Foundation**

As initiators and funders of the research process, the McKenna Foundation has been instrumental in the process, particularly in helping to access and build trust with the New Braunfels community. Due to the nature of action-based research, it is crucial that the most knowledgeable stakeholders were available for interviews, responded to our surveys, and attended our participatory meetings. The McKenna Foundation serves as a pillar for the New Braunfels community and has strong relationships and established credibility with the individuals that represent the organizations that are experts in the topic of school readiness. Therefore, McKenna has been a critical partner in facilitating interviews, sending out the survey prior to Participatory Meeting I, and inviting the community to Participatory Meetings I and II. The capstone team acted as facilitators, but the McKenna Foundation will lead future efforts stemming from these meetings.

## **2.3 Research Rationale**

Since the 1990s, scholars have recognized the shared responsibility of families, communities and schools to positively impact children in their early school experience (Kagan et al., 1995; NAEYC, 1990). In 2004, Piotrkowski further argued that common pitfalls of school readiness programs are due to treating readiness as a mere attribute of children, like the physical

appearance of a child. This approach does not take into account the environmental dimensions of children's development such as, family, school, and community settings that other scholars deem important.

Researchers triangulate among different sources of data to enhance the accuracy of their study (Creswell, 2008). One author explains that triangulation can be by data source (people, times, places, etc.), by method (observation, interview document), by researcher (Investigator A, B, etc.), or by theory (Denzin, 1970). This action-based research was designed to triangulate across a diverse group of stakeholders while utilizing various methods of data collection. This approach was to ensure accuracy and validity, while minimizing bias. Accordingly, our data analysis was based on the rule that at least two sources or techniques must be consulted or used to investigate the same information. To this end, surveys, interviews and participatory meetings were designed to collect similar information, providing different sources of interpretation for analysis. Such emergent findings from a range of sources incrementally build a composite picture of collective understandings and concerns of school readiness in New Braunfels.

## **2.4 Research Methodologies: Participatory and Action Research**

The MCCG facilitated a participatory process, derived from action research principles. The action research design stems from the methodology of Reason and Bradbury, who envision action research as a "participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes... it seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people" (2001, p.1). This process was also derived from participatory action methods of New York University's Wagner School of Public Service (Research Center for Leadership in Action, 2014). These principles drove the design of the collaborative process, to gather a collective understanding of school readiness challenges and opportunities from stakeholders (Participatory Meeting I). After providing feedback to the community, the team supervised stakeholders as they built a plan of action for the community to improve school readiness outcomes (Participatory Meeting II). The overall goal was to build a shared understanding of school readiness, create a collective path forward, and engage a community driven school readiness strategic plan.

According to Reason and Bradbury (2001), action research has several prominent characteristics. First, it is varied and practical with respect to both knowledge and outcomes. Second, it is democratic (ex: of the people, by the people, and for the people) and emancipatory. At its core, the goal of action research is to involve participants in a democratic way to evoke contributions toward a mutually satisfactory solution. This approach uses dialogue with community stakeholders rather than traditional qualitative or quantitative data collection methods, to engage stakeholders directly in data generation, enhancing buy-in and empowerment of the community to engage in solving problems of import (*Ibid*, 2001). The primary goal of this dialogical process

is to establish local consensus in the New Braunfels community on the elements of school readiness. A dialogical process of this nature plays an important role for engaging the New Braunfels community in addressing school readiness issues, as the primary goal of the work is to establish local consensus on the elements of school readiness. Community buy-in is crucial for the development of a sustainable action plan. Through this process, priority issues were identified which guided the stakeholders in their development of a strategic plan.

## **2.5 Research Methods**

The research design has helped to address five knowledge gaps. The first effort has been to explore the status of school readiness and current programming initiatives using surveys and interviews. The second aim has been to gain a better understanding of the overall status of children and families currently in New Braunfels, through the Comal County Assessment. The third activity was to analyze literature detailing best practices in the development of school readiness in communities that are similar to New Braunfels. The fourth highlighted evidence linking children's preparedness for kindergarten to academic outcomes in the future. The fifth has been the engagement of stakeholders in a collaborative effort that has helped to identify the barriers to school readiness and generate collective solutions.

The capstone team examined school readiness literature before establishing the three data collection streams. The following streams were designed to identify key issue areas in the field, construct interview and survey questions, structure the participatory meetings, and identify research findings and best practices:

- a) early interviews with providers of Pre-K programming for New Braunfels youth,
- b) development of an online survey delivered to a broader range of school readiness stakeholders, and
- c) the construction and implementation of two participatory meetings.

The first Participatory Meeting aimed to support stakeholders' development of a common definition of school readiness, while the second Participatory Meeting facilitated completion of a community-based action plan to create a sustainable school readiness agenda for the New Braunfels community.

### **2.5.1 Sample**

To gather community perspectives on school readiness in New Braunfels, traditional qualitative sampling strategies were employed such as, chain, opportunistic, and combination sampling. Chain or snowball sampling "yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest" (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). This was done in interviews and throughout Participatory Meeting I by asking participants who else needed to be spoken with to further understand the state of

school readiness in New Braunfels. During the process of collecting data, researchers employed an opportunistic sampling approach, which involves the selection of the most accessible subjects (Marshall, 1996). Using these methods of sampling in New Braunfels allowed for: identification of specific case examples given by the experts in the field, seizing information gathering opportunities that arose, and utilizing multiple approaches to gather the information we needed to successfully facilitate community efforts (Creswell, 2008).

Although chain and opportunistic sampling techniques are warranted in this case, they potentially introduce bias, as the researcher has little control over the sampling method and the representativeness of the sample is not guaranteed (Walonick, 2010). Specifically, the subjects likely share the same traits and characteristics because they result from referrals or convenient access. Moreover, using data from opportunistic sampling, one cannot make a strong inductive inference concerning a more general defined population (Anderson, 2001). MCCG used a combination of sampling approaches to limit bias from one technique but also to further meet needs, while maintaining flexibility. Specifically, community representatives were chosen from a list of child-related service providers in New Braunfels. They come from a broad range of community providers from education to daycare to health services.

All interviews, surveys, and attendees of participatory meetings included stakeholders and organizations active in New Braunfels. It is critical to understand that respondents and participants are not necessarily close partners of the McKenna Foundation, but represent organizations that are important to the process. Initial interviews conducted with stakeholders chosen by McKenna revealed the questions that needed to be answered, suggestions for research, and the challenges for school readiness that they see as most important for the New Braunfels community. Speaking with these critical voices in the community provided direction for the survey questions to send out to additional stakeholders via email from McKenna, which then informed the development of discussion for Participatory Meeting I and II. An online survey was then disseminated, which aimed to capture the initial perception of school readiness in New Braunfels and the major issues surrounding the topic (see Appendix A).

### **2.5.2 Data Collection**

The research was designed around four major stages (see Table 2.1 below for further details). The first stage incorporated an environmental scan of major stakeholder conceptions about school readiness and their perceptions of New Braunfels' capacity to address community-wide school readiness needs. This was conducted through in-person interviews and a short online survey. The second stage included a comprehensive literature review of school readiness research and identification of national best practices. The third stage brought the data from the first two stages together to support the design and implementation of two participatory meetings with a wide range of community stakeholders.



For the first participatory meeting, the results of both surveys and interviews were used as the foundation of the design of the group processes (i.e. Participatory Meetings I and II), which built off of aggregated, general community understandings, definitions, dimensions of the problem, and approaches. The results of the sub-group sessions at the first participatory meeting were used to generate further stakeholder discussion, as well as provide knowledge of community resources and programming for the research team.

In preparation for final recommendations, the results of interviews, surveys, and the participatory meetings were pooled to triangulate data, granting varying perspectives on the issue of school readiness in New Braunfels.

**Table 2.1 Data Collection Plan**

<b>N</b>	<b>Component</b>	<b>Data Collection/Research</b>	<b>Focus</b>
<b>1</b>	Environmental scan and needs assessment	Surveys and interviews with stakeholders	Current services and Influential factors
<b>2</b>	Literature review and best practices identification and analysis	Literature review and interviews with experts	Community engagement, school readiness concept, and program or models
<b>3</b>	Community engagement	Participatory meeting I with stakeholders  Participatory meeting II with stakeholders	Initial discussion, stakeholders' perspectives and community vision  Buy-in, agreement, and acting
<b>4</b>	Action planning	Strategic meetings with the McKenna Foundation	Public awareness campaign, programs plan

### **2.5.2.1 Interviews**

The first session of interviews were primarily exploratory and were conducted on September 23, 2014, where the research team spoke to four long-term program providers engaged in delivering services to New Braunfels' Pre-K population, especially low-income, high-risk, and special needs children. The interview process was conducted in person, at the McKenna Foundation. Each stakeholder introduced themselves and discussed their position and roles in both their organization and in the community. They were then asked to discuss the importance of, as well as barriers to, school readiness for children in the New Braunfels community.

These interviewees were purposefully selected by the McKenna Foundation to provide a variety of perspectives from those stakeholders who are most involved in efforts to increase school readiness in the community. As such, these interviews were approached as “a key venue for exploring the ways in which subjects experience and understand their world” in New Braunfels, to gain individual insights into school readiness (Kvale, 2008, p. 9). While the number of interviews conducted was not large, the quality of information collected allowed for the identification of the more significant challenges undergirding the development of a community-wide school readiness plan in New Braunfels. These exploratory interviews also assisted in online survey development, as well as unearthed a range of key perspectives on school readiness across the community of school readiness stakeholders.

### **2.5.2.2 Surveys**

Following the interview process, surveys were deemed necessary to capture a wider range of stakeholder perspectives and definitions of school readiness as relevant to the New Braunfels’ context. As previous research has demonstrated, communities need a common definition of school readiness to move forward with a comprehensive plan (Piotrkowski et al., 2000). Studying these individual definitions of the issue also allowed for a deeper understanding of the collective understanding of school readiness as a community of stakeholders, further supporting the research design process, especially the structure and content of the participatory meetings.

Seven key questions were asked of the stakeholders before Participatory Meeting I. Five questions from the research team and two additional questions provided by the McKenna Foundation (see Appendix A). The goal in asking these questions was to gain an in depth look at the New Braunfels community regarding school readiness, to identify a sense of how school readiness is defined by various stakeholders, and assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges inherent in the community’s current approaches.

Targeted participants included all key stakeholder representatives that compose the school readiness community, encompassing a diverse range of services, from education to foster-care. These groups also included representatives from the major school districts and stay-at home mothers. Twenty-six survey responses were received out of the 45 contacted, allowing for insight into multiple school readiness’ perspectives in New Braunfels. The information gathered from this survey allowed for a greater understanding of the current views of stakeholders regarding school readiness in New Braunfels. It also allowed the research team to group participants based on their differences, to ensure a productive discussion of the questions posed, rather than arrive at an immediate, and possibly premature, consensus.

### 2.5.2.3 Participatory Meetings

The participatory meetings were designed to facilitate an environment where every stakeholder's voice in attendance can be heard (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Collective dialogue is key to the success of the action research process. In addition, a variety of techniques were used, such as a mix of large and small group settings, as well as anonymous voting processes, to ensure all perspectives were documented, not just the most vocal participants. These approaches were used to build community consensus and work towards common problem definition and solution identification.

#### 2.5.2.3.1 Participatory Meeting I

The first participatory meeting was held on November 18th, 2014 (see Appendix B). This meeting consisted of 18 stakeholders, representing the following organizations: ABC, BCFS-Head Start, Big Brothers Big Sisters, CIS, Comal ISD, New Braunfels ISD, Connections, Family Promise GNB, Gabriel Project, Kids Club, New Braunfels Public Library, St. Jude's Ranch for Children, Joel McKenna Children's Museum, and parents from the community.

The agenda for Participatory Meeting I was driven by the survey responses. The larger goals for the meeting were to identify consensus around a definition of school readiness for the community, as well as to articulate the key priority challenges for adopting a community-driven school readiness strategic plan. The day was initiated with a data sharing period (sharing the results from our survey with the stakeholders), efforts to collect new data (from the three small group sessions), opportunities for dialogue as a wider community of concerned stakeholders, and the sharing of small group findings with the larger group of stakeholders to test ideas and prioritize key concerns.

The survey responses allowed us to sort the stakeholders into small groups based on their differences so that these discussions were lively and productive. The goal was to gain a consensus among stakeholders, who were asked to answer the following questions in three small group sessions, as articulated below:

- **session 1:** As a group, please agree on a common definition of what it means for a child to be ready to enter kindergarten,
- **session 2:** What are the demographics of the children in New Braunfels that are least ready for kindergarten in your opinion as a group? Why is this?
- **session 3:** Consensus on key challenges? Knowledge gaps? Available resources? Resource needs? Key actors? Who's not at the table? How do you get them here? Unexpected allies?

### 2.5.3.2.2 Participatory Meeting II

With the aim of moving towards community-buy-in and solutions generation, the second participatory meeting was held on February 20th, 2015 (see Appendix C). This meeting had a larger representation than the first, with 22 stakeholders in attendance (in contrast to 18 at the first meeting) with new representatives from Comal County Public Health, Texas Health Steps, CIS, Comal ISD, and New Braunfels ISD. Participants were divided – on a voluntary basis – into small groups based on the topics identified from the first participatory meeting. Each participant was informed that they could join other small group discussions throughout the session.

Building on the findings from the first participatory meeting, the participants were divided into groups associated with the five main school readiness challenges identified in New Braunfels. Small groups were instructed to complete the following four exercises:

- **session 1:** Review priority areas of need for school readiness from the Participatory Meeting I and develop a community vision using the “vision statement exercise” (see Appendix D),
- **session 2:** Consider issue areas and brainstorm possible solutions, finding consensus on the most relevant solutions,
- **session 3:** Review the vision statements presented earlier in the day and develop specific projects, considering key limitations as well as opportunities.

Following these group sessions, the McKenna Foundation gave their initial thoughts on the next steps necessary to coordinate the solutions generated by the participants. By the conclusion of the event, the research team had gathered significant data related to community preferences for pathways forward, as well as data to drive the development of a menu of key challenges and solutions, to help formulate a set of recommendations.

These data collection methods lead the capstone team to explore additional research and analysis. In particular, the following chapter depicts initial findings of the two participatory meetings conducted by the research team, in partnership with the McKenna Foundation.

# **Chapter 3:**

# **Findings - Problem**

# **Identification and**

# **Solution Generation**

### 3.1 Introduction

The following findings have been compiled as a narrative of all findings to date, across the various data collection points identified below, to give a sense of the key concerns, challenges, and opportunities emerging from an array of key stakeholders engaged in this issue. While considering these findings, it is important to recognize that they are exploratory and representative of the majority concerns expressed during the first phase of our research, collected from a small group of stakeholders, not representative of the community of New Braunfels as a whole. While not drawn from a large sample, these findings do provide insights into key stakeholder perceptions around school readiness.

“Stakeholders” are defined as those individuals or organizations that are: a) providing services relevant to school readiness, b) currently experiencing school readiness challenges in New Braunfels, and/or, c) expressing interest in being involved in a community-wide school readiness planning process. These findings were gathered from:

- interviews conducted with 7 stakeholders on October 24, 2014,
- 26 survey responses collected the week of November 10, 2014,
- the first participatory meeting held on November 18, 2014 with 18 key community stakeholders,
- and the second participatory meeting held on February 20, 2015 with 22 key community stakeholders.

A summary of such findings was provided to participants at the second participatory meeting, held on February 20, 2015.

### 3.2 Interview Results

To begin to understand the issue of school readiness in New Braunfels, interviews were conducted with 7 key stakeholders that are directly involved in service provision of activities related to school readiness for children under age 5. Interviewees were chosen by the McKenna Foundation to represent a broad spectrum of perspectives. Although the interview findings are not representative, they do provide insight into key challenges across the community. It is worth noting that the core themes that emerged during these interviews repeatedly resurfaced in fill-in responses to the survey questions issued prior to the first participatory meeting, as well as in the small and large group discussions during this first meeting.

Interviews with these stakeholders focused on the following issues: *how family dynamics, socio-economic status, communication, and coordination amongst organizations affect school readiness in New Braunfels.*

According to the majority of interviewees, family dynamics should be considered more carefully by service providers when planning and implementing programs. While school readiness is the primary focus, a family's readiness to support their child's development is also an important variable. The impact of generational transmission of culture and values within families is a crucial aspect of assessing family readiness. Focusing specifically on parental influence, providers express the need to keep parents involved in the learning process to give their children a greater chance for success.

Similar to the need to understand family dynamics, these stakeholders agreed that the socio-economic status of families is often an indicator of the school readiness level of children. The majority of interviewees described a systematic inequality in the offering of services, and also noted that the difference in the level of preparedness of children who have access to formal day care, as opposed to those who do not, is marked. There is common agreement in the belief that there needs to be available programs for all ages and socio-economic backgrounds, with a uniformity of quality across programs.

The topic of communication, both between stakeholders, as well as with parents and support agencies, emerged during these interviews as a challenge in multiple contexts in the New Braunfels community. All but one of the interviewees mentioned this issue. The lack of communication was mentioned by one stakeholder as the largest issue faced by the community. This links to the problem of an inability to share information due to the lack of a central media source. Additionally, there is concern by all interviewees that young parents are not receiving the information they need about how to access daycare or childcare.

The need to increase communication in the New Braunfels community is linked to an additional need for organizations to share information. This information sharing will aid service providers in New Braunfels to, in the words of one stakeholder, "collaborate, not duplicate" services to increase school readiness.

### **3.3 Survey I Results**

The survey team designed an exploratory, open-ended question survey to identify major areas of concern, as well as opportunities for future action, in the lead-up to the first participatory meeting (see Appendix A for questions). Surveys were distributed to 45 stakeholders, as defined by the McKenna Foundation, with 26 respondents. The survey findings represent perspectives from more than half of the major school readiness stakeholders, as currently identified. The results of seven survey questions (see Appendix E for results) sent to the invited stakeholders prior to the first participatory meeting revealed information helpful to considering how best to address school readiness as a collective undertaking in New Braunfels, Texas.

Several key pieces of information stood out in the survey results. When asked if New Braunfels supports school readiness, 57% of respondents replied ‘yes’, while 39% said ‘somewhat’ and 4% said ‘no.’ A majority of stakeholders asserted that a supportive environment, where key actors in the community are all taking the necessary actions to nurture early education, would be crucial for the advancement of school readiness in the community. Another key element is the involvement of certain individuals and organizations in a child’s life, who stakeholders identified as: parents, siblings, extended family, guardians, teachers, school administrators and personnel, pediatricians, doctors, nurses, church organizations, coaches, and civic organizations (this list is a compilation of individual responses). Respondents highlighted that encouraging the involvement of these individuals and groups has the potential to create a unified community to support a child throughout their educational journey (See Appendix E).

**3.3.1 Challenges**

When asked what the key challenges facing New Braunfels were with regard to school readiness, respondents provided answers that demonstrate a collective perspective around 8 priority areas for the community. These areas are (in no particular order):

**Table 3.1 Challenges to School Readiness**

1	School readiness resources
2	School operation
3	Logistics
4	Home environments
5	Parenting
6	Attitudes and beliefs
7	Access to information and communication
8	The community

Pertaining to school readiness resources, stakeholders’ answers indicated 4 top concerns (in no particular order):

**Table 3.2 Concerns for School Readiness**

1	There are not enough options for all family income groups
2	There are a lack of quality affordable programs and facilities in the



	New Braunfels Community
3	There is a need for more programs similar to Head Start
4	There is a lack of support systems for promoting school readiness in education

Three stakeholders also highlighted that schools, from an operational standpoint, do not have funding for high quality teachers for the Pre-K age group, and noted that there is a disconnect between schools and incoming families due to language and education level.

Outside of the school environment, 5 stakeholders identified logistics as a point of concern. This includes transportation, programs where young children can be taken to learn, and a lack of pediatric medical doctors and mental health services. A majority of stakeholders noted that the home environment of a child can also present challenges for school readiness. The following were identified as environmental circumstances that negatively affect a child’s ability to learn:

**Table 3.3 Environmental Circumstances Surrounding School Readiness**

1	Living in poverty
2	Having parents or guardians who abuse drugs or alcohol
3	Having parents who lack education
4	Having parents who are unemployed
5	Emotional and physical abuse
6	Single parent households with limited resources
7	Environments in which the family and child spend more time using electronics than in stimulating learning environments

In conjunction with parents creating a positive home environment, 8 survey respondents identified parental knowledge of best parenting practices, parental personal efficacy, and parents’ awareness of the importance of structure, routine, and enrichment at home as important factors.

The majority of stakeholders also highlighted the issue that parental attitudes and beliefs can hinder their children’s learning. This is evident when parents:

- do not assume appropriate responsibility for teaching their child outside of school,
- are apathetic when offered services free of charge, and
- when they fear being reported to the government for illegal residence.

Additionally, 2 respondents highlighted the hardship of immigrant families who are in the United States illegally, who not only fear seeking educational services for their children, but also often have a fundamental lack of understanding of what information is available to them. This lack of access to information and communication does not only affect the immigrant community, as 5 stakeholders point out that many families may simply not know where to seek help to foster early learning prior to enrollment in formal school.

The final challenge that emerged from the survey prior to the Participatory Meeting 1 was a repeatedly noted lack of coordination across resources in the community, as well as under-utilization of these resources. Five survey responses indicated that there is a common perception that lack of overarching coordination is a significant barrier to the success of efforts to increase school readiness in New Braunfels.

### **3.3.2 Opportunities for Improvement**

Respondents were asked to identify areas where they see opportunity for improvement to address challenges and expand on successful school readiness efforts in the New Braunfels area. Fill-in responses provide further articulation of how stakeholders wished to see challenges and barriers addressed, which are highlighted below. The priority areas identified include:

- school readiness programming,
- increased family support, and
- and community engagement.

To improve school readiness programming in New Braunfels, stakeholders suggested both basic and more detailed solutions. The majority of respondents would like to see quality preschool programs that are available in all price ranges, programs that aid children from many backgrounds in their transition to kindergarten, and additional programs like Head Start that include transportation, as well as more efficient hours of operation as compared to existing programs. A more specific suggestion from one stakeholder included extending early childhood programming to a full day (as opposed to half), that would provide all of New Braunfels ISD 3 and 4-year-old qualified Pre-Kindergarten students with a more inclusionary approach, including Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities (PPCD).

Stakeholders also suggested a number of ways to increase family support. Their ideas included:

- expanding parental involvement and opportunities for education,
- early intervention and education with parents and caregivers, and
- finding ways to increase parental excitement for their child's education and programs without causing offense.

These suggestions revolved around what one parent described as, “stimulating” parent buy-in of school-readiness programs and services by helping them understand how it can benefit not only their child, but the family as a whole. One stakeholder wished to see more accessible childcare for single parent families, allowing mothers who are caring for younger siblings but lacking childcare to participate in their older children’s activities. From a health perspective, another stakeholder saw a need for preventive measures that would decrease the need for medical intervention later, allowing for healthier children and families. Additionally, according to one respondent, stakeholders would like to increase support for low-income families, allowing them to prepare their children to be successful in the educational system.

The final area of improvement that the majority of stakeholders indicated in their responses is community engagement. Stakeholders would like to have (in no particular order):

**Table 3.4 Improvements to School Readiness**

1	Community involvement to explore opportunities for change and improvement
2	A central communication system for resources available to parents and young children
3	Community support for all children
4	Training for parents and children with behavioral issues

In addition, two stakeholders suggested building on the city’s current resources, such as libraries and parks, to attract more families of young children to learning opportunities before school.

### **3.3.3 The Most Important Factors for School Readiness**

In the survey, stakeholders were asked to choose the first most important, second most important, and third most important factors in a child’s life to facilitate school readiness, out of 7 factors total (see Appendix E, Table 1). These 7 factors are listed with the first, second and third listed in order of importance, with the remainder in no particular order:

**Table 3.5 Factors for School Readiness**

1	Parental involvement
2	Cognitive development
3	Access to enrichment programs
4	Emotional intelligence
5	Social Intelligence
6	Physical development
7	Community services infrastructure

Respondents identified parental involvement as the first most important factor with 10 total votes, cognitive development as the second most important factor with 5 total votes, and access to enrichment programs as the third most important factor with 6 total votes.

### **3.4 Participatory Meeting I**

Participatory Meeting I consisted of large and small group discussions with 18 stakeholders, over a period of 5 hours. These stakeholders included, but were not limited to: Pre-Kindergarten education providers, stay-at-home mothers, and service providers who focus on the well-being of children in the community. Eight core themes emerged over the day and participants were then asked to rank them. 5 priority issues were identified:

**Table 3.6 Priority Issues for School Readiness**

<b># of Votes</b>	<b>Priority Issues</b>
31	Child development
26	Young parents
19	Quality daycare & preschool
17	Family & grandparents
16	Lack of knowledge of community resources

Discussion of these five priority themes, once ranked, provided additional insights into: a) the challenges that New Braunfels is facing and b) how to approach effective solution generation in Participatory Meeting II.

### 3.4.1 Child Development

Child development was discussed in the following terms:

- the impact of generational knowledge,
- coordination of agency involvement,
- key actors for the healthy development of a child, and
- identifying who needs to be involved in promoting school readiness that is not currently.

Regarding generational knowledge, stakeholders expressed concern that older generations are not passing down supportive parenting knowledge to their children, or grandchildren. Stakeholders also noted that agencies providing services to families to aid the development of children must work together in a coordinated effort to address multiple issues and avoid service overlap. During the discussion the key actors that emerged for child development were (in no particular order):

**Table 3.7 Key Actors to Child Development in School Readiness**

1	Parents
2	Hospitals
3	Pediatricians
4	Informal childcare providers
5	Professional daycare teachers
6	Preschools
7	Schools

Stakeholders emphasized the need for these actors to teach children as opposed to just supervising them. The group also identified potential ways to share information about good parenting for healthy child development including: increasing New Braunfels Independent School District (NBISD) and Comal Independent School District (CISD) involvement, increasing peer group involvement, creating online discussion boards, distributing information on restaurant message boards and in advertising areas, and creating Pre-Kindergarten dates

where children can bond with one another to learn social skills that prepare them for kindergarten.

### **3.4.2 Young Parents**

Following childhood development, stakeholders identified issues affecting young parents as a risk to children's readiness for school in New Braunfels. This topic was discussed more broadly, resulting in the identification of what the community needs to do to help young parents prepare their children for school. Stakeholders expressed the importance for key actors in the school district to agree on what must be done. They also discussed the need to support young parents with quality daycare, and for passage of development funds that will allow agencies to provide them with multi-level education and facilities. Additionally, pediatricians and nurses must get involved as parents see these individuals the most in the first six months of their children's lives. Barriers must be removed for young parents, especially teens who are often forced to choose between receiving their high school diploma and taking care of their child due to lack of child care resources. Though there is a perceived lack of services, the group did identify agencies that are working in the community to address these issues such as: Young Lives, Child Care Services, Gabriel Project, various churches, and places like Mother's Day Out.

### **3.4.3 Quality Daycare and Preschool**

Another resource discussed was quality daycare and preschool. Stakeholders highlighted significant barriers to securing quality daycare and preschool, due to socioeconomic factors. Families who do not qualify for financial assistance but need services fall into this category. Underpaid and under qualified daycare workers are also a concern for stakeholders. Waitlists for high quality programs are an issue in New Braunfels as well. For example, if a family waits until a child is born to enroll them in a high quality program, the child will not be able to attend until the following year. Stakeholders also pointed out that school district half-day Pre-K programs should be extended to a full day, to allow for additional learning and to accommodate the schedules of parents who work full-time. Key actors for this issue include the school districts that serve New Braunfels, and Child Care Services (CCS).

### **3.4.4 Family and Grandparents**

For grandparents and families caring for children in the absence of their parents, stakeholders identified the barriers that can affect a child's readiness for school. The first issue is that there is a lack of support for grandparents raising their children's children. Secondly, the legal system does not allow for grandparents to enroll their grandchildren in certain programs, or seek health care for the child. Thirdly, there is a significant technical gap for many grandparents in an environment where many appointments are made online, via smartphone, etc. The cycle of grandparents raising their children's children can continue on for generations with the same

issues faced each rotation if not addressed. Stakeholders identified current sources of support in the community but stressed the importance of ensuring awareness of such resources. Current resources included: the Senior Center, churches in the area, the McKenna Foundation, the Family Life Center, The Gabriel Project, and counseling services.

### **3.4.5 Lack of Knowledge of Community Resources**

The final issue that stakeholders focused on in Participatory Meeting I was parental lack of knowledge of community resources. Participants commonly perceive this gap as inhibiting the school readiness of children in the New Braunfels community. Concern was voiced over a possible lack of resources targeting specific socioeconomic and cultural populations in a way that they understand and are comfortable with. Stakeholders also noted a need for quality universal and continuing child development education, as well as discussed how physicians and pediatricians who take Medicaid could be instrumental in educating families about the resources they could access to support their child's healthy development.

## **3.5 Conclusion to Participatory Meeting I**

The interview and survey processes revealed challenges and barriers that re-emerged and were explored further in Participatory Meeting I. The identification of five issue areas by community stakeholders - child development, young parents, family and grandparents, quality care outside of the home, and lack of knowledge of available resources – appear to be priority areas for action, based on their emergence across the range of data collection points. These findings, in conjunction with the findings from Participatory Meeting II, will help to facilitate MCCG's thoughtful recommendations for the McKenna Foundation and the community for addressing school readiness in New Braunfels.

## **3.6 Participatory Meeting II**

Participatory Meeting I focused on identifying the problems surrounding school readiness in New Braunfels. At its conclusion, through the collective information gathered from participants and the McKenna Foundation, it was decided that the next meeting would focus on solution generation to these problems. To begin Participatory Meeting II, the McKenna Foundation began by introducing the facilitation team to the 22 stakeholders in attendance. Some of those stakeholders were new, requiring an overview of the first meeting.

The McKenna Foundation explained that 5 top priorities of school readiness in New Braunfels, Texas had been established by the Foundation after tallying up votes from Participatory Meeting I. The importance of limiting the ideas to the 5 priorities was to narrow the scope and allow stakeholders to feasibly create solutions to these problems. These priorities included young parents, family and grandparents, child development, lack of knowledge of community

resources, and quality daycare and preschool. Each table at the meeting was labeled with a sign based on the 5 priority ideas. Stakeholders were invited to join any of the five tables to sit at based on their interest. Our group chose this method in order to receive the best possible solution generation from stakeholders interested in each of the topics. For a reference, Appendix C contains the agenda for the day.

### **3.6.1 Community Vision**

To begin the second meeting, the stakeholders were asked to create a vision statement in their small groups based on their topic for school readiness in the community of New Braunfels, Texas. The stakeholders were given time to brainstorm vision ideas in small group discussions by table and present out to the entire group for a larger discussion. The session was led by a member of the facilitation team and it was explained in detail how to create a vision statement. The guiding questions for this included:

- What are the issues that matter most to people in our community?
- Why should these issues be addressed?
- How would you like to see our community transformed?
- What would success look like?

The Morrison Consulting Capstone Group acted as facilitators by sitting at each table to help start the discussion and answer any questions that arose. The findings follow in Table 3.8, the second column is a summation of the general discussion answering the four bulleted questions above. It is important to note that not every group chose to discuss all of the questions.

During this meeting, MCCG was able to identify similar challenges that stakeholders discussed in Participatory Meeting I, further establishing their priority for the New Braunfels community. It is important to note, though, that MCCG provided stakeholders with a summary handout of Participatory Meeting I so the re-emergence of certain themes is not surprising.



**Table 3.8 Vision Exercise Findings**

<b>Group Topic</b>	<b>Key Challenges and Definitions of Success</b>	<b>Vision</b>
Group 1: Child Development	<p><b><i>Key challenges by topic</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children do not choose their environment, but parents do.</li> <li>● An educated parent does not mean one has a degree, but the parent is able to do the right things to prepare their children for school.</li> <li>● A high level of parent participation means the parents are engaged.</li> <li>● Child development necessitates a well-rounded family, clear information, and health and wellness. Success relies on a standard of basic parental knowledge sometimes, parents need guidance.</li> </ul>	“An engaged parent is an educated parent”
Group 2: Young Parents	<p><b><i>Key challenges by topic</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There are day care services in the area, but affordability and accessibility can be an issue for young parents.</li> <li>● Basic needs for young parents include: healthcare, knowledge of resources, parenting education, awareness of resources and how to access them, motivation to improve child’s environment/situation, and mentoring/support/good advice.</li> <li>● One new option that is available to young parents is the new partnership between Baptist Church Family Services (BCFS)/Head Start which will create new resources and energy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ BCFS was awarded a Head Start grant in 2014 that will last for 5 years.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● The ISD’s perspective on the issue: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The expected outcome is that less will be spent on “remedial” services.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	“New Braunfels will support parents and caregivers in providing an enriching early environment to set children up for school success and beyond thus, developing a healthy and productive future”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The community needs to help young parents get ready for higher learning and the workforce.</li> </ul> <p><b>What is success?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● More parents of all types are actively involved in supporting young parents learning.</li> <li>● Comal County and New Braunfels ISDs must collaborate and coordinate their efforts. Support for quality (assuming certain standard) child care in all environments like home, family care and day care.</li> </ul>	
Group 3: Quality Child Care	<p><b>Key challenges by topic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is a need to focus on creating the necessary foundation to raise kids.</li> <li>● Key issues include being aware of milestones that occur when raising children, from the beginning of the pregnancy stage to beyond.</li> <li>● There are cultural and ethnic barriers present that may prevent trust with parents in child care.</li> </ul> <p><b>What is success?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parents demonstrate knowledge of child development, resources and options to meet those milestones.</li> </ul>	No vision statement
Group 4: Grandparents	<p><b>Key challenges by topic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The goal is to have grandchildren ready for school.</li> <li>● The children should be comfortable with living grandparents instead of family of origin.</li> <li>● Grandparents need an understanding of the technology that schools are using and understanding what is expected of them.</li> <li>● There is a need to provide education to grandparents to equip them to help</li> </ul>	“Families will have access to all necessary resources to ensure that their children are at their best as they enter the educational system”

	<p>grandchildren.</p> <p><b><i>What is success?</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support groups, technology training, understanding technology, protecting children when using technology.</li> <li>● Grandparents have a different level of motivation and “honeymoon” phase when caring for their grandchild.</li> </ul>	
Group 5: Lack of Community Knowledge	<p><b><i>Key challenges by topic</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It is important to start from the city level instead of waiting for the federal government.</li> <li>● There is a need for resources allowing regular checking of the child development progress.</li> <li>● Places where community knowledge can occur include: centralized location, communication, information, coordination.</li> <li>● It must be a comfortable location open to all kinds of people like grandparents (not only for kids) and social classes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ An example: a museum is open to all kinds of people no limitation of race, age, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● It is possible that regulation versus good will (voluntary) will force Pre-K education for kids or force parents to take certain action regarding school readiness.</li> </ul>	<p>“Every child of Pre-K/K age has the necessary skill sets both socially and academically through the provision of resources that promote a healthy stable environment”</p>

### 3.6.2 Individual Vision Statement Exercise

As the stakeholders discussed their vision statements as a large group, time limits did not allow consensus around one vision statement. It was then decided that each stakeholder would write a vision statement privately on a piece of paper. These were displayed on the wall and voted on by using dots, labeled 1 through 3, with 1 indicating the most important vision for each vote. The findings below were tallied up and listed in order of importance.

1. *Through the support of engaged, empowered families and strong, sustainable community commitment, every child of Pre-K/K age will possess the essential skills, both socially and academically, that ensure school success.*
2. *Through collaborative relationships between families and community, every child will possess the necessary social and academic attributes to ensure school success/preparedness.*
3. *By supporting families and encouraging community based relationships, every child of Pre-K/K should have the ability to be successful in school.*
4. *Through collaborative relationships, Comal County families and communities will support, inspire and enrich environments so children are equipped to thrive in their educational setting and beyond.*
5. *Through collaborative support of families and community, empower parents to give their children the necessary skills to be successful in school.*
6. *With collaborative support and relationships within families and their communities every child of Pre-K/K age will have the necessary skills for school success.*
7. *Through collaborative support and relationships between families and communities, every child of Pre-K/K age has the necessary skills for school success.*
8. *Through collaborative support of empowering families and developing community relationships, every child of Pre-K/K age has the necessary skills needed for social and educational success.*

### **3.6.3 Development of Program Ideas**

The next session was designed to allow small groups of stakeholders to formulate specific projects or solutions for the issue of school readiness in New Braunfels. Their guidelines were to identify the core challenges for this issue area, propose a specific solution, consider key limitations as well as opportunities, describe key indicators of success, and propose how to evaluate the project. The idea was for this exercise to build from previous small group exercises such as their generation of a vision statement to help guide the process. Their results were discussed openly in a large group setting allowing MCCG to gauge feedback for programs and solutions and assess stakeholder buy-in of the ideas being presented.

This program idea discussion produced potential solutions that were then ranked using a dot exercise similar to the one in Participatory Meeting I. The solutions, and their priority based on the number of dots participants placed next to them, are displayed in Table 3.9.

**Table 3.9 Priority Solutions**

<b># of Votes</b>	<b>Priority Solutions</b>
32	Expanding Pre-K capacity: for every child, especially those who cannot afford day care, and that are not eligible for Head Start
27	School-based wrap-around services: expand half-day Pre-K to full day
26	Events: fun learning/engaging parents and children
21	Community network relationship
15	Public awareness campaign
12	Educational materials
11	Mobile unit
9	Web presence
6	Physical resources center: centralized services for health, information, etc.

### **3.6.4 Solution Analysis**

The next session focused on analyzing the feasibility of each solution choice. Stakeholders were able to move around to different tables based on the top 5 solution ideas: expanding Pre-K capacity, school day wrap-around services, holding engaging events, community networking and relationships, and public awareness. A summation of the discussions for each solution are shown in Table 3.10 below. These solutions will be discussed further in the recommendations portion of this report.

**Table 3.10 Solutions to School Readiness**

<b>Solution Topic</b>	<b>Full Scope of Each Topic</b>
Expanding Pre-K Capacity	<p><b>Concerns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Funding for full day Pre-K with funds from the city, state, or a foundation grant.</li> <li>● Transportation issues may hinder the social interaction of children.</li> <li>● There is a need to re-evaluate the partnership w/ Head Start and local ISDs.</li> <li>● Community outreach/knowledge is vital.</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A physical facility/center (schools growing - overcrowding).</li> <li>● There is a lack of information: Some parents do not know that Pre-K programs exist or how to apply for them.</li> </ul>
School Day Wrap-Around Service	<p><b>Scope</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Head Start at every campus for all kids age 3+ (at least one classroom), Community in Schools (CIS) at every campus, or Kid’s Club for the whole family.</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community involvement with mobile unit (educational, medical, mental, behavioral services).</li> <li>● Space is a concern at schools.</li> <li>● Recruiting professionals, volunteers and interns.</li> <li>● Parental incentives.</li> </ul>
Fun Event	<p><b>Suggested Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fields trips: stations to teach basic skills like tying shoes, putting clothes on, plus follow up to be sure that kids keeps doing the lessons learned at home.</li> <li>● Sport-based event: engaging bonding for parents and kids – teaching parents that school readiness is not intimidating and the event is open for all and socialize</li> <li>● Price: little to no fee</li> <li>● Role of McKenna Children’s Museum</li> <li>● Day of the young child – MHDD</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Kid Fest – fairground</li> <li>● Health fairs</li> <li>● Incentive programs</li> <li>● Public library</li> <li>● Parent involvement</li> <li>● Roll and read</li> <li>● Activities: experience that kids need, mastering skills at events, “oh wow” moments, School based event</li> </ul>
Community Networking and Relationships	<p><b>Scope</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Great asset for Comal County = There is a close relationship and strong tie among communities</li> <li>● Action: filtering the existing network</li> <li>● Comal County Early Impact Team</li> <li>● There is a number of professional organizations that can be contacted to build networking</li> <li>● The McKenna Foundation does provide rooms to meet at no charge for non-profit agencies</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Local networking: Comal Co. Interagency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ (set up lunch meeting with FLC, ABC, Salvation Army, Medicaid, Hope Hospice, Gabriel Project, Kitchen Table, Bulverde)</li> <li>○ Hill Country (Interagency meeting, breakfast meeting)</li> <li>○ Comal ISD Interagency (public school and local agencies)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Public Awareness	<p><b>Suggested Idea</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A public awareness campaign, spreading the word about school readiness solutions, that could be spearheaded by the McKenna Foundation and its leaders</li> </ul>

### 3.6.5 Next Steps

Following these small and large group discussions, the stakeholders discussed what the next steps were to move forward, to both maintain and expand momentum for the issue of school readiness. Suggestions included scheduling inter-agency meetings, aggregate reports to detail the work being done and to promote information sharing, creation of a listserv to share contacts through email, and development of a Facebook page for event updates.

### **3.7 Conclusion of Participatory Meeting II**

The solutions generated in Participatory Meeting II can be visualized under an umbrella of programming initiatives, promoting both public awareness of the issue, as well as tangible program solutions. The solutions include: a physical resource center, an increased web-presence, engaging events, a mobile unit, education materials, expanding Pre-K capacity, and school based wrap-around services.

As the McKenna Foundation pointed out at the closing of the meeting, coordination among the community of stakeholders is key, in that the Foundation cannot act alone. The success of any program developed will depend of the commitment of partners. While McKenna can advocate on behalf of the community and provide funding, they noted that they cannot address school readiness without buy-in and long-term commitment.

### **3.8 Findings – Moving Forward**

The findings from Participatory Meetings I and II informed the research on national best practices for school readiness. The next chapter is structured to provide evidence-based recommendations that explicitly respond to the key challenges identified in Participatory Meeting I, the top 5 solutions suggested in Participatory Meeting II, and best practice examples derived from the study's literature review. These recommendations have been developed to support the next stage of this participatory process, as envisioned by the research team, to create tangible, relevant, and feasible solutions benefitting as wide a range of stakeholders as possible.



# **Chapter 4:**

# **Best Practices and**

# **Recommendations**

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides recommendations based on an extensive review of best practice school readiness efforts across the United States. Five were selected as indicative of programming strategies best suited for the New Braunfels community based on similar demographic makeup, exemplary programming activities, or because a community has already engaged in a solution that the New Braunfels stakeholders identified as of interest in the participatory meetings.

To assess the applicability of best practices to the New Braunfels community, the capstone team identified elements of the key challenges and solutions focused on by stakeholders during Participatory Meeting I and II. Challenges and solutions that were addressed during the participatory process, but that do not appear in this chapter, are topics for which the team did not locate adequate supporting research. The focus on proven school readiness best practices is in service to Morrison Consulting Capstone Group (MCCG)'s goal to provide the McKenna Foundation and local stakeholders with a set of evidence based, relevant, and feasible recommendations, to allow the community to confidently move forward and effectively prepare children for kindergarten. This chapter strives to promote knowledge sharing, allowing the New Braunfels community to benefit by learning about successful school readiness programs in other communities. Before outlining the best practices selected, it is necessary to provide evidence of the child based components that informed the MCCG's decisions.

## 4.2 Rationale for Selection of “Best Practices”

To select the best practices highlighted in this chapter, the MCCG began by assessing the five primary challenges identified in Participatory Meeting I and researching programming solutions. The team then explored the connection of selected best practices to the 5 key solutions identified by stakeholders in Participatory Meeting II. It was then determined that best practices incorporating both key challenges and solutions were the most appropriate for the New Braunfels community. Demographic comparisons between program implementation cities and New Braunfels were considered further to ensure relevance. Best practices were also chosen based on whether they contained program elements addressing the four internal components of a child: emotional intelligence, social intelligence, cognitive development, and physical development.

These components are supported by an extensive review of the literature on the topic of school readiness. Following a review of the internal components, the chapter will expand to more collaborative community-wide initiatives designed to build public awareness and support for school readiness among all stakeholders. These best practices are: *Community Action Plan (CAP) Tulsa*, *Kent County Head Start*, *School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County*, *First 5 Yolo*, and *Smart Start for Kids*. While not all implementation sites for the following best practices mirror New Braunfels demographic makeup exactly, each program allows for insight

into potential paths of action for New Braunfels, TX to increase school readiness in their community.

### **4.3 Recommendation 1: Programming Component Recommendations**

The Morrison Consulting Capstone Group's first recommendation for the McKenna Foundation and the New Braunfels community is to ensure that school readiness programming consists of four components: emotional intelligence, social intelligence, cognitive development, and physical development (Table 4.1). Each of the four components are central to the definitions of what it means for a child to be school ready (McWayne et al., 2012; Halle et al., 2012). The fostering of emotional intelligence, social intelligence, cognitive development, and physical development are thought to be crucial for a child's success in preparing for kindergarten (Mayer, 2008).

The following literature discussing each component draws upon extensive studies and the work of top minds in the field of child development and school readiness. This literature does not contain best practices per se, but is rooted in studies that have evaluated school readiness programming and children's responses to various programs. The community can use this information to evaluate current Pre-K education programming content, to determine where it can be improved, as well as confidently develop new programs encompassing these components, with proven success.

Due to the fact that the four programming components are still emerging and being experimented with in multiple combinations, MCCG has chosen to provide an overview of these to help the New Braunfels community understand their definitions and importance, separately and combined.

**Table 4.1: Child Related Components of Successful School Readiness Programing**

<b>Indicators of School Readiness</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Application</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Emotional Intelligence	The ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought (Mayer, Solovey, & Caruso, 2008, p.503)	Research suggests that “children’s school readiness is multidimensional,” including “social-emotional development” (Halle et al., 2012, p.614)	Head Start study using the Family Child Experiences Survey data to determine how strongly “child, family, classroom, teacher, and Head Start program characteristics are related to children’s school readiness and continued development over the four-year-old Head Start year” (Halle et al., 2012, p.613)
Social Intelligence	Children exhibiting more socially competent behaviors are better able to succeed academically in school than children exhibiting less competent social behaviors (Ziv, 2013, p.307)	Children’s motivation and ability to focus and sustain attention in the preschool setting is associated with them having socially competent mental representation of social encounters (Ziv, 2013, p.316,)	Short term longitudinal study (198 preschool children. Data on social information processing were obtained via child interview, data on child social competence were obtained via teacher report, and data on school readiness were obtained via child assessment and teacher report (Ziv, 2013, p.306)
Physical Development	Motor skill development and physical well-being (Grissmer et al., 2010, p.1008)	Six international longitudinal data sets that collected data between birth and kindergarten entry and followed children at least through third grade (Grissmer et al., 2010, p.1008)	Results suggest that both attention and fine motor skills measured at kindergarten are important developmental skills that predict later achievement (Grissmer et al., 2010, p.1008)

Cognitive Development	Domain general skills such as working memory and attention control, and domain specific skills like emergent literacy and numeracy (Welsh et al., 2010, p.43)	164 Head Start children (44% African American or Latino; 57% female) were followed longitudinally (Welsh et al., 2010, p.43)	Development in working memory and attentional control during the preschool period can contribute to later academic achievement in reading and math (Welsh et al., 2010, p.43)
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### 4.3.1 Emotional Intelligence

Evidence of emotional intelligence, as a determinant of children’s success, both personally and academically (school readiness), is growing. The first pertinent question for our examination of the relationship between emotional intelligence and school readiness is, what defines ‘emotional intelligence’? According to Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade in *Human Abilities: Emotional Intelligence*, “Emotional intelligence concerns the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought” (Mayer et al., 2008, p.511). This definition is based on an extensive study of the literature exploring the evolution of emotional intelligence, where the scientific references date to 1960 (*Ibid*, 2008). Additionally, using a population based analysis of school readiness from a national population sample and data from the Family and Children’s Experiences Survey of 2000-2003, school readiness is defined as “children’s social and emotional competence, motor development and physical well-being, development of pre academic skills such as emergent literacy and numeracy within the cognitive domain, and approaches to learning” (McWayne et al., 2012, p.1).

The study of emotional intelligence began in the 1990’s as the idea “that some individuals possess the ability to reason about and use emotion to enhance thought more effectively” (Mayer, Solovey, & Caruso, 2008, p.503). Scholars have taken many approaches towards the study of EI such as the Mayer-Solovey and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), the Emotional Quotient Inventory, and the Swineburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (SUEIT), but are measures for adolescent children. There is concern that “although both trait and ability models have evidenced predictive efficacy and validity within young samples, it is likely that ability models for younger children would be more appropriate” as small children may be unable to accurately self-report (Billings et al., 2014, p.503).

In response to these concerns Billings, Downey, Lomas, Lloyd, and Stough expanded on the existing SUEIT test to create the Swineburne University Emotional Intelligence Test—Early

Years (SUEIT-EY) to measure pre-adolescents specifically (*Ibid*, 2014). This was the first study to measure emotional intelligence specifically in pre-adolescent children and, if duplicated, “may suggest that EI should be consciously and constructively developed in young children” (*Ibid*, 2014). Scholars and their critics struggle with emotional intelligence, what the term encompasses, and how to measure it. However, at this point in time, compelling evidence exists to affirm Emotional Intelligence as a necessary and legitimate field of study.

Children with a higher level of emotional intelligence are thought to possess higher levels of “self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Danciu, 2010, p.15). This is to say that they have the ability to reason, communicate, and set boundaries more effectively to exhibit both “personal and social competency” (*Ibid*, 2010). The balance between personal and social factors have been tested as key traits for success in life (Stoica, 2012, p.150), an idea supported by Cherniss, Extein, Golman, and Weissberg who argue “that there is a strong and growing base documenting the positive effects of school-based EI programming on students’ healthy development and academic performance” (2006, p.243). Cherniss, Extein, Golman, and Weissberg draw their conclusion from extensive analysis of school based programming that focused on social and emotional learning, finding that this approach addresses “social and emotional variables to enhance positive youth development and mental health, reduce substance use and antisocial behavior, and improve educational outcomes” (2006, p.243).

The concept of Emotional Intelligence as related to school readiness must not be viewed independently from external influences. Pertinent examples of such influence are parenting styles and practices to which a child is exposed (Alegre, 2012). Through an extensive review of available literature exploring child emotional intelligence and parental influence, Alberto Alegre identified four dimensions of parenting “that are relevant to the study of emotional intelligence: parental responsiveness, parental positive demandingness, parental negative demandingness, and parental emotion-related coaching” (2011, p.56). He found that all factors except parental negative demandingness were indicative of higher emotional intelligence in children (Alegre, 2011). Additionally, Alegre’s findings indicate that through specific training “children’s emotional abilities can be improved,” further solidifying the “importance of emotional intelligence as a predictor of an array of positive developmental outcomes” (Alegre, 2011, p.59).

In 2012, Alberto Alegre delved deeper into the study of parental practices influencing a child’s emotional intelligence by focusing specifically on the mother-child relationship. To collect this data, Alegre sent questionnaires to 155 mothers and 159 children (ages 7 to 12). It is important to note that his study was conducted in northeast Spain, and focused on trait emotional intelligence, or EI as related to personality traits. He found that overall, the more amount of time a mother spends with her child in conjunction with the quality of that time spent together, greatly influences trait emotional intelligence. Furthermore, this positive parenting is “likely to promote modeling, reinforcement, shared attention, and social cooperation” (Alegre, 2011, p.493).

Parental influence is also a large factor in determining school readiness, lending solidity to the relationship between emotional intelligence and school readiness.

Through exploring the literature for emotional intelligence as a component of a child's school readiness, evidence exists that the legitimacy of the subject as a field of study is increasing. This increasing legitimacy is exemplified by those scholars defining school readiness, where emotional intelligence has become a crucial piece of the discussion (McWayne et al., 2012). Furthermore, the need for emotional intelligence tests for specifically pre-adolescent children has been recognized in creation of the SUEIT-EY test (Billings et al., 2014). Through increased study of the subject as a component of school readiness, scholars have been able to discover a positive link between emotional intelligence and a child's ability to interact well with others, their healthy development, and academic performance (Danciu, 2010; Cherniss et al., 2006). An enhanced understanding of the factors that influence a child's emotional intelligence is also a benefit of increased scholarly attention on the subject. Parental influence as an external factor has been shown to have a substantial effect on a child's emotional intelligence, an important influence to understand for communities attempting to increase school readiness (Alegre, 2011).

#### **4.3.2 Social Intelligence**

Social intelligence, notable when children exhibit more socially competent behaviors, is often closely linked to emotional intelligence (Ziv, 2013, p.307). The concept has received scholarly attention as a construct in its own right. Yair Ziv, published in the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, studied 198 preschool children to explore links among "social information processing, social competence, and school readiness" (Ziv, 2013, p.306). He obtained data through teacher reports and child assessment. The findings of this study indicate that:

"Children who view social encounters in more competent ways are also reported to possess more competent and less abrasive behaviors in preschool and seem to be better ready to perform in school both academically (as demonstrated by their better expressive language abilities) and in relation to their motivation, persistence, and attitudes toward learning (as demonstrated by their reported approaches to learning)" (Ziv, 2013, p.316).

This study supplements the existing research exploring school readiness by establishing a connection between social competencies and both academic and social skills. These conclusions are crucial for informing how preschool readiness programs are to be implemented in the future. To be truly efficient a school readiness program must focus on "both academic and social aspects of development," not strictly "cognitive/academic skills" (Ziv, 2013, p.317). Ziv's findings are consistent with Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, and Weissberg's analysis of social and emotional learning (SEL) research findings (2006). The authors cite Zins, Weissberg, Wang, and Walberg, noting their findings that "SEL programming improves school attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance" and "consistently emphasize roles of both social and emotional competence in and school climate in improving students success" (Cherniss et al., 2006). The weakness of Ziv's

study is that the same teacher is measuring the child's social competence and approaches to learning, which could create bias. Secondly, the measurements are indirect, as children were measured at the end of preschool, not in formal schooling. These findings bolster existing models of school readiness that stress the importance of social competence and "inform preschool policies about the types of programs that best prepare children for school" (Ziv, 2013, p.317).

The literature that investigates social intelligence as a component of school readiness indicates that while the subject is often linked and studied in conjunction with emotional intelligence, the subject is receiving increasing attention individually. Research shows that children who possess social intelligence are more competent behaviorally and more ready to perform academically (Ziv, 2013). Additionally, exploration of this literature provides evidence that scholars have begun to assess the importance of studying a child's social and academic development as a unit rather than solely focusing on cognitive skills to indicate preparedness for, and success in, school (Ziv, 2013; Cherniss et al., 2006).

### **4.3.3 Cognitive Development**

There is healthy debate surrounding precisely which elements of a child's cognitive development are the most important vis a vis school readiness. These are often children who have grown up in impoverished or low-income households (Welsh et al., 2010). Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman, and Nelson discuss the "substantial achievement gaps between middle-income children and low income children at school entry that widen over time and contribute to serious disparities in learning difficulties, educational attainment, and long-term employment potential" and cite programs like Head Start as crucial to reducing these differences (Welsh et al., 2010, p.43).

They followed 164 Head Start children longitudinally to explore the relationship of "rapidly developing executive function skills" like "working memory and attention control", and the development of "domain specific literacy and numeracy skill" during the year prior to kindergarten (*Ibid*, 2010). Additionally, Welsh and colleagues wished to define how much the growth in these executive functions prior to kindergarten contributed to achievement in kindergarten, when they controlled for "domain-specific skills and language skills" (*Ibid*, 2010). Their first main hypothesis tested was whether "growth in working memory and attention control would be associated concurrently with growth in emergent literacy and numeracy skills over the course of the Pre-Kindergarten year" (Welsh et al., 2010, p.43). Their second hypothesis was whether "growth of domain-general (working memory, attention control) and domain-specific (emergent literacy and numeracy) skills during the prekindergarten year would each make contributions to reading and math achievement in kindergarten" (*Ibid*, 2010).

Children were assessed at the beginning of their Pre-Kindergarten year, the end of their Pre-Kindergarten year, and at the end of kindergarten to obtain multiple points of comparison. Results revealed correlations that indicated "highly significant relations among all cognitive



variables” and “stability for both domain-specific and domain-general cognitive skills” from the start to finish of prekindergarten (Welsh et al., 2010, p.47). This result implies that the early formation of executive function skills directly contributes to the growth of “emergent literacy and numeracy skills” in a child’s year prior to kindergarten. Additionally, working memory and attention control skills developed during this year contribute to success in reading and math during the kindergarten year (Welsh et al., 2010, p.47).

This literature also shows evidence of significant disparities between middle-income and low-income children in being school-ready, pointing to the role of access to resources in the preparedness of children for school (Welsh et al., 2010). To remedy this, scholars highlight programs, like Head Start, that address and minimize this knowledge gap (*Ibid*, 2010). Additionally, study results indicate that early development of cognitive skills are directly linked to a child’s success in core subjects prior to kindergarten, as well as in kindergarten (*Ibid*, 2010). Identifying these relationships establishes further areas for study and progress towards understanding what determines a child’s school readiness.

#### **4.3.4 Physical Development**

Another important component of senior programming is physical development, which encompasses both the development of fine motor skills and general physical well-being (health etc.) of children (Grissmer et al., 2010). Grissmer, Grimm, Murrah, and Steele expand on the work of Duncan et al. (2007) in their study of indicators of school readiness, using three of the original six longitudinal data sets ( 2010, p.1008). The authors used only the data sets that measured motor skills, finding that while “gross motor skills were not a significant predictor of later achievement... fine motor skills were a very strong and consistent predictor of later achievement” (Grissmer et al., 2010, p.1008).

The authors go on to share that further research indicates that the link between later cognitive ability and motor skills exists in the fact that “most activities that build or display cognitive skills also involve the use of fine motor skills” (Grissmer et al., 2010, p.1013). For example, to write requires both hand eye-coordination and fine hand motor skills, to speak requires the fine motor skills that produce sound, and reading requires the ability to control eye movement.

This evidence suggests that children slow in developing fine motor skills will have more of a challenge developing cognitively as the activities to learn each are tied to one another (*Ibid*, 2010). Additionally, multidisciplinary research has contributed to the evidence establishing the link between cognitive development and development of motor-skills (*Ibid*, 2010). Studies of “neuroimaging, neuroanatomy,” and “motor/cognitive disorders, psychological testing, and recent child development research of motor skills” further solidify this link (Grissmer et al., 2010, p.1013).

The development of both fine motor skills and cognitive development are elements of a child's overall health. Both are indicators of physical and mental health, the foundation for a child that is school ready (Grissmer et al., 2010). Janet Currie explores the importance of health for school readiness noting that "health problems can affect a child's school readiness both directly and indirectly" (Currie, 2005, p.117). This is to say that, at the most basic level, if a child is sick they cannot and do not want to perform (Currie, 2005).

In their population-based study (large size) using the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), it was found that children with asthma had more absences, learning disabilities, and were more likely to repeat a grade than well children (*Ibid*, 2005). Additionally, in more chronic situations, "poor health can also affect readiness indirectly by crowding out beneficial activities and changing the way the family treats a child" (*Ibid*, 2005). For example, parents with a child in poor health might "coddle or inadequately discipline the child or may discourage him or her from engaging in activities that could hone both academic and social skills" (Currie, 2005, p.127). Parental health conditions or habits can also have an effect on a child and their readiness for school (Currie, 2005).

A central question of Currie's research asks if health disparities between black and white children in the United States also "explain the racial gaps in school readiness?" (Currie, 2005, p.132). This discussion raises the question as to the role that a child's socioeconomic status plays in their readiness for school as black children tend to come from lower income families than white children (*Ibid*, 2005). Overall, Currie's research reconfirmed the idea that "the readiness gap between blacks and whites might be attributable to health conditions" and if this is the case between these two racial groups, this study has broad implications for other communities (Currie, 2005, p.132).

#### **4.3.5 Recommendations for Programming**

Based on the above research, MCCG recommends that the McKenna Foundation promote the integration of emotional and social intelligence, and cognitive and physical development, into existing Pre-K programming in New Braunfels. The McKenna Foundation could also choose to promote development of a new model entirely in New Braunfels that fosters the four necessary components. To take this route, any of the 5 best practices selected and expanded upon below would be feasible options, as each one that has been chosen incorporates all four factors into their approach. Given that New Braunfels already has a successful Head Start operation, if the community chose to build a new program from an existing model, they could benefit from 3 of the 5 best practices highlighted, particularly: School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County, First 5 Yolo, and Smart Start for Kids.

## **4.4 Best Practices**

Our rationale for the selection of “Best Practices”, described above, led us to identify five cases that can best inform school readiness programming in New Braunfels, Texas. Two of them are Head Start program models while three cases deal with community-wide programs. All of them have had success in their communities and have the potential to inform an effective approach to increasing school readiness in New Braunfels.

### **4.4.1 Tulsa, Oklahoma CAP Head Start Program**

#### **4.4.1.1 Demographics**

While Tulsa has a population of 398,121 as compared to the New Braunfels population of 63,279, the Community Action Plan (CAP) program has addressed specific challenges and solutions that school readiness stakeholders in New Braunfels have identified as relevant for their community (United States Census Bureau, 2013). Tulsa and New Braunfels also differ somewhat in demographic composition, which is important to note. In Tulsa, the White (non-Hispanic or Latino) population is 57.9%, which is similar to New Braunfels, where the white (non-Hispanic or Latino) population is 60.8% (United States Census Bureau, 2010). It is in the composition of the minority populations that differences are evident. The Hispanic or Latino population in Tulsa is only 14.1% compared to New Braunfels 35.1%. Additionally, the African-American population in Tulsa of 15.9% is much higher than New Braunfels’ 1.9%. Despite these differences, both communities are serving large numbers of minority families and children in their school systems.

#### **4.4.1.2 Goal of the Program**

CAP Tulsa has an overarching mission “to help families in need achieve economic self-sufficiency” (CAP Tulsa Head Start, 2015). The program strives to both prepare children for success in formal schooling while providing their parents with resources to increase their skills at home and in the workforce. Elements of its larger scale program could prove beneficial for the New Braunfels community.

#### **4.4.1.3 Solution Implementation**

The CAP program exhibits a community approach with a goal for children to be prepared for school in a “nurturing and secure environment” thanks to various family services (*Ibid*, 2015). Elaborating on the family perspective, the families of children in the early education program can utilize a family support specialist to help them set goals and suggest ways to meet these goals. The program connects parents and families to the resources they need, such as career websites and places they can go to advance their own academic skills. To expand on the

community perspective, CAP strives to strengthen the communities of their Head Start children and families by “aligning strategies, families and community partners around the key results of great schools and safe, stable neighborhoods” (CAP Head Start Tulsa, 2015). The program also partners with Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences (OSUCHS) to meet the health care needs of enrolled children, their parents and siblings” (CAP Head Start Tulsa, 2015).

Additionally, the program, in conjunction with Head Start, seeks to address three of the four components that define school readiness, supported by the literature exploring the topic. CAP strives to help children who are eligible for the program develop cognitive skills (memory, language, math, reading), emotional intelligence (reasoning and problem-solving abilities), and social intelligence (self-control and judgement). Additionally, the program values language skill development for both a child’s first language as well as English. Stakeholders in New Braunfels have expressed concern for children and families for whom English is not their first language, so assessing how Tulsa implements this piece of their Head Start Program could be beneficial.

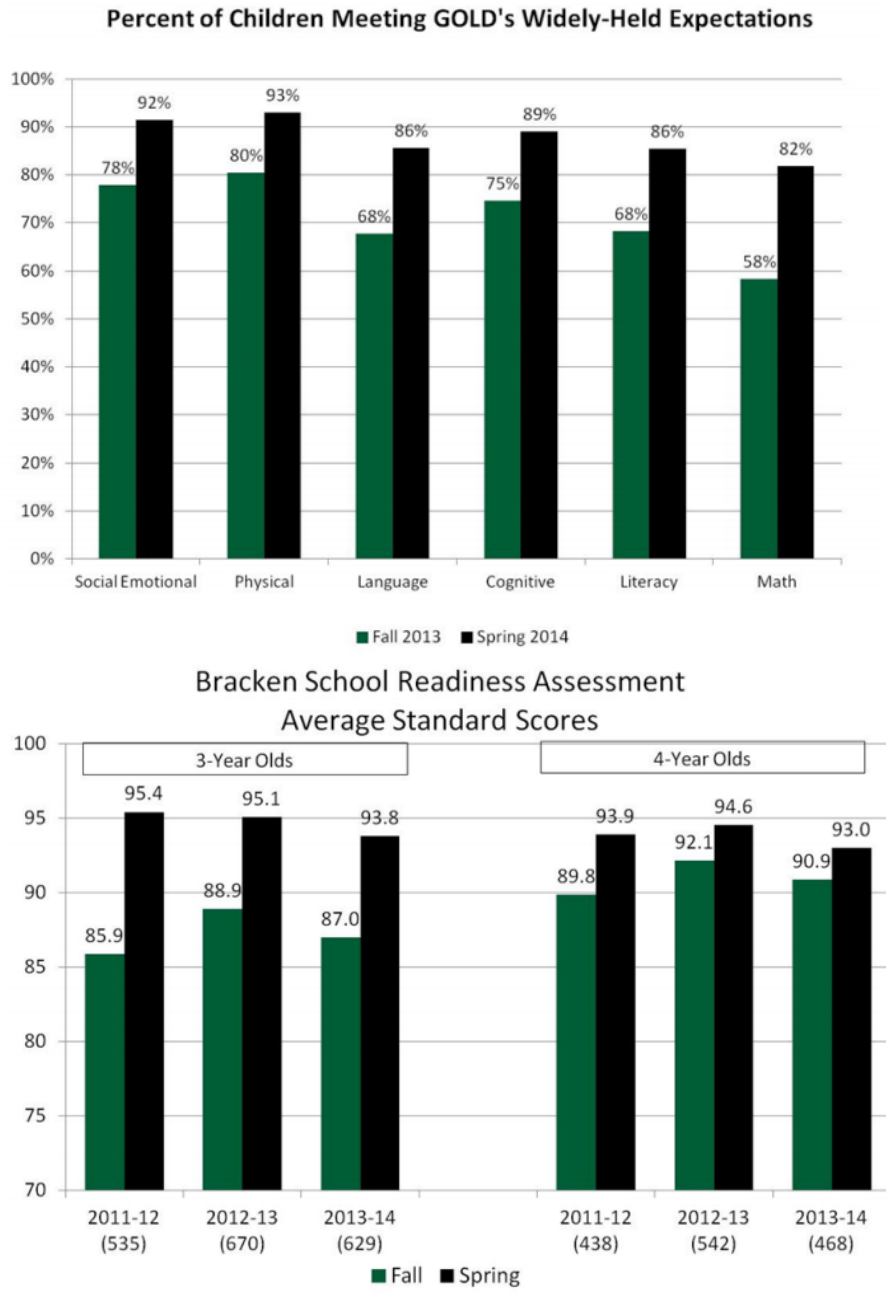
#### **4.4.1.4 Indicators of Success**

To measure progress and development, children participating in the CAP Head Start Program in Tulsa are assessed on a yearly basis using two assessment tools — Teaching Strategies GOLD™ and Bracken School Readiness Assessment. The former is a standard evaluation that accounts for six domains: social emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy and math. The latter contains six subtests based on the ability to recognize common colors, letters, numbers, sizes, objects and shapes.

#### **4.4.1.5 Program Success**

CAP Head Start Program in Tulsa, Oklahoma is one of the most successful Head Start programs in the nation (Gormley et al., 2008). Recent figures show continued positive results regarding all criteria of the Teaching Strategies GOLD and the Bracken School Readiness Assessment, as described by Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1 Percent of Children Meeting GOLD’s Widely-Held Expectation and Bracken School Readiness Assessment Average Standard Scores**



Source: CAP Head Start Tulsa, 2015

## **4.4.2 Head Start for Kent County: Connecting Families and Community Resources**

### **4.4.2.1 Demographics**

The population in Kent County, Michigan is significantly higher than Comal County, Texas; 602,622 versus 108,472 respectively (United States Census Bureau, 2010). As in the case of Comal County, Kent residents are overwhelmingly composed of a White population, but at a different rate. It is at 76%, with a rising minority. The Hispanic population is at 9.7%; Black at 9.4%; Asian at 2.3% (*Ibid*, 2010).

### **4.4.2.2 Goal of the Program**

This program has been formulated in response to the realization of the grave impact poverty can have on a child's development. Its goal is to have every child enrolled in Head Start Pre-School or their Early Head Start Home Visiting. Children will leave this Head Start program ready for kindergarten, enthusiastic about learning, confident in their skills, and prepared to thrive in school (Head Start for Kent County, 2014).

### **4.4.2.3 Solution Implementation**

Overall, children who participate in this program:

- Learn how to solve problems and follow directions,
- Write and recognize numbers and letters
- Communicate thoughts and feelings
- Use books to gain information
- Build confidence by doing things for themselves
- Participate in a positive learning environment
- Develop lasting, positive relationships

The most important solutions related to the top 5 chosen by New Braunfels' stakeholders in Participatory Meeting II are below.

- Fun Events
  - Each year, every Head Start class visits the Children's Garden at Frederik Meijer Gardens.
  - Other field trips occur during the year and parents can come along.
- Community Networking
  - Parent Policy Council
    - It is an elected group of parents and people in the community that come together to make decisions about the strategies and procedures of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
    - This allows parents to be to communicate.

- Monthly Site Parent Meetings
  - These are held every month of the program year.
  - Parents and staff meet to plan site events, share information about Head Start issues, special training by choice, and network with each other.
- School Based Wrap-Around Services
  - The Head Start Program based on Creative Curriculum© and Teaching Strategies GOLD™ in Michigan
  - Through a home visiting model, the Early Head Start program allows children to feel accepted and understood. Creating nurturing relationships with a variety of experiences leads to optimal growth and development. Home Visitors help parents develop their parenting skills, and in using the home as the primary learning environment.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4.4.2.4 Indicators of Success**

This program aims to provide the highest possible quality level of service to the children eligible to the program and their families. In order to evaluate the success, there are various indicators chosen. The relevant indicators to New Braunfels include the following:

- Head Start's Average Monthly Enrollment divided by Early Head Start Home Visiting Average Monthly Enrollment
- The percent of eligible children served
- Accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) at all Head Start sites
- The percent of children up-to-date on health services

Similar to CAP Head Start Tulsa, Head Start for Kent County also uses objectives and expectations developed from the Teaching Strategies GOLD™ to assess each child's development<sup>3</sup>. It has been evaluated and deemed reliable by the Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (CEME) and aligns with other standards of learning in Michigan (Head Start for Kent County, 2014).

#### **4.4.2.5 Program Success**

The success of the Head Start for Kent County during the FY2013/2014 can be summarized as follows:

- Head Start's Average Monthly Enrollment divided by Early Head Start Home Visiting Average Monthly Enrollment: 1482/86
- 86 Early Head Start Home Visiting average monthly enrollment

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<sup>2</sup> See link for a composite summary of Michigan home visiting model in reference list

<sup>3</sup> Refer to 4.4.1.3 for description of Teaching Strategies GOLD™

- 89.6% of eligible children were served
- Accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) at all Head Start sites
- 78.7% of the children served received a dental exam
- 88.8% of the children were up-to-date on a schedule of health services, including: annual physicals, hearing, and vision screens, growth assessments, blood pressure and blood lead level checks

Besides, the program is rated 9.6/10 by the participating parents during home visit service and 9.4/10 by the Head Start grantors.

#### **4.4.3 United Way Success by 6: School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County, Texas**

##### **4.4.3.1 Demographics**

The population in Travis County, Texas is another example of a mismatch to Comal County, Texas as far as its population, 1,024,266 versus 108,472 respectively (United States Census Bureau, 2010). In Travis, most adults are White but more than half of children under 5 are Hispanic (*Ibid*, 2010). The county has a high percentage of Hispanic at 33.5% of the total population, by contrast to White and Black at 50.5% and 8.1 % respectively (*Ibid*, 2010). Nevertheless, both counties are located in Texas and separated at approximately 50 miles.

##### **4.4.3.2 Goal of the Program**

The Travis County School Readiness Action Plan seeks to “inspire and guide community leaders, advocates, parents, service providers, and educators to participate in a movement that will allow Travis County to be the best place to prosper and raise a family for decades to come” (School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County, 2012, p.5).

The vision statement for this program plan is:

*Public and private sectors in Austin/Travis County will work together to ensure that school readiness becomes and remains a top priority. By the time children enter kindergarten, they will have the cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language skills needed to thrive in the educational setting (Ibid, 2012).*

##### **4.4.3.3 Solution Implementation**

Children will succeed better in school and life if their development of the necessary skills is supported. These include cognitive skills and also social-emotional skills, physical and mental health, and attributes such as perseverance, motivation, and attention. “It is not the number of



letters or numbers a child learns in preschool, but rather a child's abilities to avoid risky behaviors, to attend to classroom instruction, and to persevere in tasks, that predict long-term academic success, earnings and community economic return" (School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County, 2012, p.13). The Travis County School Readiness Action Plan was designed with these factors of school readiness in mind.

In the critical learning period that occurs before the age of 6, many Central Texas children are not as prepared for school, nor receiving what they need to be as prepared as they should be. Statistically, only 1 out of 2 students in Travis County enter kindergarten prepared for success. A coalition has formed to address this with advocates, experts, parents, service providers, and business leaders all working together under United Way to transform the early childhood system in Travis County through a 3-year strategic plan. This plan consists of the cultivation of: families who are equipped to support their children in becoming school ready, available early education services (social-emotional skills), available health and mental health services, and communities that are invested in the success of their children becoming school ready and achieving their academic potential. These elements are to result in children being ready for school success in this model. The plan is depicted in an equation as follows:

Each input of the plan is vital to the success of the children in Travis County, Texas (School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County, 2012). Conversely, a missing element may result in a dismal failure of a child development. To ensure the integrity of this system, families, services providers and the community as a whole must work hand in hand to meet children's need in their early education.

#### **4.4.3.4 Indicators of Success**

The Travis County School Readiness Action Plan uses a system of indicators and measurements to monitor its success. It includes measures of progress, accountability systems, and continuous evaluation to ensure improvements are made and success is promoted properly.

There are many measures to indicate success. These are laid out for ready families, services, communities and children. For example, for ready families, the plan is to increase the percent of children under 3 with parents who have completed at least one year of evidence-based home-visiting services from 4 to 15. The goal for children ages 3 to 5 years with parents who have completed evidence-based parent education services is to increase the percentage from 9 to 30. The goal for low-income families with 3-year-old children who receive culturally and linguistically relevant information about school readiness is to increase the percentage to 30 (School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County, 2012).

#### **4.4.3.5 Program Success**

The success of the Travis County School Readiness Action Plan is based on its partnership with United Way for Greater Austin. United Way provides collaborative efforts with the City of Austin, Travis County, and local stakeholders while managing and monitoring the progress of the plan. These results are reports to the Results Based Planning Committee. The community support and working together in partnership across agencies and sectors is key to these efforts. This program exemplifies the success of a community-based approach to school readiness and can provide New Braunfels with a potentially useful new model (School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County, 2012).

#### **4.4.4 First 5 Yolo: Yolo County, California**

##### **4.4.4.1 Demographics**

Located in the Northern California, Yolo County has a total population of 200,849 composed of 49.9% White, 30.3% Hispanic, 2.4% Black and 12.8% Asian as of 2010 (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Despite of this demographic divergence to Comal County, First 5 Yolo has a wide community based-approach and a long-term community commitment to school readiness that can be applied to New Braunfels.

##### **4.4.4.2 Goal of the Program**

In order to ensure children are learning and ready for school, Yolo County Children and Families Commission was created in 1999. The commission is composed of appointees from the 5 districts, a number of county department representatives and the chair of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors. In 2005, this commission's name was changed to "First 5 Yolo" to reflect its mission of assisting the community to raise children who are healthy and ready to learn, assuring that resources are effectively used and that all community voices heard. One of the Council responsibilities is to conduct public meetings and complete a child care needs assessment at least once every five years. Accordingly, the 2012 First 5 Yolo Needs Assessment Survey highlights the top four priority program areas: Physical Health, Social and Emotional Health, Ready to Learn, and Childcare (First 5 Yolo, 2014).

##### **4.4.4.3 Solution Implementation**

First 5 Yolo's programs are integrated family support initiatives composed of four components: physical health, social-emotional health, ready to learn, and child care quality. Additionally, First 5 Yolo supports family resources centers as a strategy to meet the needs of Yolo County's Pre-K population and their parents.

#### **4.4.4.3.1 Physical Health**

First 5 Yolo addresses the physical development of children, ensuring that they stay healthy throughout their first five years. First 5 Yolo partners with local community health services to provide all children in Yolo County with a comprehensive health insurance. To ensure maximum enrollment for eligible children, First 5 Yolo provides outreach, and retention assistance to families. Currently, the program is expanding access to dental care as a key issue for children of ages 0 through 5 and pregnant women in the county.

#### **4.4.4.3.2 Social and Emotional Health**

First 5 Yolo considers children's social and emotional development as a core foundation of early child education. This encompasses the ability to regulate and express emotions from close and secure interpersonal relationships. First 5 Yolo's social and emotional health component consists of a home visiting program performed by family support workers and a licensed clinical social worker. The visit may include instructions for self-care during pregnancy, soothing a crying baby, ensuring a child's adequate nutrition, among others. Such support aims to raise children in a healthy, bonding, and safe home environment.

#### **4.4.4.3.3 Ready to Learn**

Ready to Learn focuses on children's social intelligence, emotional intelligence and cognitive development. First 5 Yolo has designed the following "fun and easy to learn" activities to promote nurturing and positive emotional environments and early education experiences (First 5 Yolo, 2012):

- Monthly Parent/Family Education workshops, training and support
- Weekly bilingual Play School Experience (PSE) parent/child interactive sessions
- Weekly Library story time and Family Place library activities
- Annual Kinder Transition Camps: four-week camps on each campus

#### **4.4.4.3.4 Child Care Quality**

In the context of a high number of working parents, access to affordable, high-quality childcare is one of the key concerns in Yolo County. In response, First 5 Yolo has been providing grants and funds to increase the number of high quality, affordable center-based, home based and/or public childcare spaces. These grants and funds seek for a systematic, county-wide approach to reaching the objective of quality child care through training and capacity building. A system of quality rating and improvement is established to help families identify annual achievements of participating providers. At the same time, the system helps First 5 Yolo to identify training, technical assistance, resources, or professional development needs, to help child care providers achieve their quality goals.

#### **4.4.4.3.5 Family Resource Center**

First 5 Yolo has developed the Expanded Family Resource Center Model as an innovative strategy to meet the needs of Yolo County's Pre-K population and their parents. In 2012, eight Family Resource Centers (FRC) were created to ensure specific outcomes including:

- Increased number of families are connected to the services they need, for which they are eligible.
- Increased number of families have the training and skills necessary to manage their finances and the opportunity to maximize their income
- Increased number of parents have the knowledge, skills and opportunities to engage in activities that support their child's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development
- Increased number children who eat fresh fruits and vegetables every day
- Increased number of children screened for developmental issues and accessing of appropriate levels of treatment

In 2013, First 5 Yolo documented nearly 2,500 referrals for services to over 1200 families; 49% of all referrals were for food distribution, followed by 21% for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, 6% for the Play School Experience parent/child drop-in program and 5% as other family needs (First 5 Yolo, 2014).

#### **4.4.4.4 Indicators of Success**

The First 5 Yolo's Annual Report to the Community FY2012/2013 identified indicators of school readiness success in Yolo County. The report has a dashboard using color and arrow codes to describe the status and progress for each indicator:

- Green for going well
- Yellow for taking caution
- Red to indicate a serious problem
- The arrows indicate if the increase or decrease is positive or negative in nature, respectively (See Appendix F)

#### **4.4.4.5 Program Success**

First 5 Yolo provides a grant model that could be used to improve child care services in New Braunfels, using a quality tracking system. It also offers a Family Resource Center Model that has a proven high usage rate within the local community. Furthermore, the Ready to Learn program constitutes a package that can be duplicated in New Braunfels for fun event-field trips, the public library, and kid-fest initiatives.

First 5 Yolo outlined key weaknesses in school readiness programming, which are relevant to New Braunfels, and that could potentially limit positive outcomes:

- Need better collaboration and a stronger team approach to address the needs of all families
- The Community-Based Organizations are collaborating but no real collaboration with other organizations
- Very little action for progressing the health of low-income women, with the exception of pregnant women
- No one is addressing transportation
- Services are not coordinated to the extent that they should be
- Lack of collaboration and communication between community service providers is resulting in duplication of services
- Too much paperwork in all the programs
- Need more coordinated support, especially for low-income parents

#### **4.4.5 Smart Start for Kids: United Way of Larimer County, Colorado**

##### **4.4.5.1 Demographics**

Larimer County is located in North Central Colorado. It is the sixth largest county in Colorado based on population size of 299,630. As in the case of Comal County, Larimer’s residents are predominantly White, but at even higher proportion; up to 84.5%. Hispanic and Black populations represent a lower fraction at 10.6%, and 0.8% respectively (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

##### **4.4.5.2 Goal of the Program**

In 2007, the United Way of Larimer County, initiated a discussion on poverty and its effects on the community as a whole. One of the critical areas that emerged from this discussion is “breaking the cycle of poverty by working to see that every child enters school ready to learn and finishes high school prepared to succeed in college, work and life” (United Way of Larimer County, 2012, p. 3). Pursuant to this goal, the United Way has designed the Smart Start for Kids program to contribute in its effort to prevent the negative effects of poverty in Larimer County.

##### **4.4.5.3 Solution Implementation**

In order to prepare children for school, the United Way has been working closely with the Early Childhood Council of Larimer County, the County’s three school districts, nonprofit child care providers, Colorado State University, and representatives from faith communities. Thus, Smart Start for Kids was established in 2010 as a two-fold program focusing on School Readiness and Early Literacy.

#### **4.4.5.3.1 School Readiness**

Before equipping parents and caregivers with necessary tools to prepare their kids for kindergarten, Smart Start for Kids emphasizes the need for establishing “a culture within Larimer County that understands and values the importance of learning in the formative years, how a child’s early years can impact the future viability of our county, and supports parents” (United Way of Larimer County, 2012, p.5). This is the foundation of a public awareness approach based on a common and consistent message and targeted interventions for vulnerable kids.

Oftentimes, parents may have heard about school readiness, but program content varies from one source to another: teachers, doctors, churches, nonprofits and employers. This may affect parents’ understanding and their role in early child education.

An effective public awareness campaign on school readiness should consist of a common and consistent message. At the school level, all three districts in Larimer County should agree on a common definition of “school ready.” While working with community partners, common languages on school readiness will remove the confusion regarding parents’ roles in educating their children of early age. As for the general community, the United Way utilized different platforms and public figures to raise public awareness on the importance of early education. Tailored intervention is necessary to meet the need of specific groups, as is the case of at-risk children that face the burden of poverty.

#### **4.4.5.3.2 Early Literacy**

Exposing children to books, and other basic reading and learning opportunities are critical to early literacy. The Smart Start for Kids program consists of “early literacy volunteer readers” and “expanded reading and learning opportunities”. The volunteer readers provide a read aloud session to help kids develop skills such as phonics, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Besides, United Way provides children with reading opportunities through increased access to educational sites such as libraries and zoos.

#### **4.4.5.4 Indicators of Success**

The overarching goal of Smart Start for Kids Program is that every fourth grader starts school is able to read and learn at grade level. Key indicators of success for this program relates to the following elements:

- identification of children falling behind through developmental screenings,
- parents reached through community partners,
- public awareness including parents and general community on school readiness, and
- family related services.

#### **4.4.5.5 Program Success**

Smart Start for Kids provides an excellent model for a school readiness public awareness plan. Based on the common definition of school readiness from the Participatory Meetings, the McKenna Foundation can craft a consistent message to be spread across New Braunfels, using all media channels available in the city and beyond. Such an approach aims to limit disparities on school readiness understanding among parents, friends and other actors of the communities. Secondly, by framing school readiness programming as a strategy to unleash community development, United Way of Larimer County is able to explore other federal funds and resources to support its school readiness program. One instance is the AmeriCorps VISTA, a national service program designed to fight poverty, which has consistently funded early literacy program across the United States.

## **4.5 Recommendations II: Best Practices**

### **4.5.1 Introduction**

The above best practices were chosen for their potential to provide a roadmap for the New Braunfels school readiness community, as key stakeholders work together to develop a community-wide strategy. As previously noted, these best practices were selected from a much larger sample of programs reviewed, based on their use of the four components of school readiness: emotional intelligence, social intelligence, cognitive development, and physical development and employment of a community-based approach to school readiness.

A community-based approach highlights the importance of involvement from schools, communities, and families working together to positively impact children's preparedness for school. These five best practice cases were also selected because they incorporate various components of the top 5 solutions generated by stakeholders in Participatory Meeting II. These include expanding Pre-K capacity, school day wrap-around services, holding engaging events, community networking and relationships, and public awareness. MCCG's comprehensive recommendations for the McKenna Foundation, based on evidence of success of the national best practices referenced above, are detailed below.

### **4.5.2 Programming Recommendations**

The top national best practices that emerged from our group's research were CAP Tulsa, Head Start for Kent County, School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County, First 5 Yolo, and the Smart Start for Kids. The following table provides a summary of the key challenges to emerge across various data points of this study. We have matched each challenge and solution against program components of the 5 best practices highlighted, to demonstrate alignment with New Braunfels' programming needs (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Best Practice Research**

<b><u>Challenges</u></b>	<b>CAP Tulsa Program</b>	<b>Head Start for Kent County</b>	<b>School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/ Travis County</b>	<b>First 5 Yolo County</b>	<b>Smart Start for Kids</b>
<b><i>Participatory Meeting I</i></b>					
Family dynamics	X		X	X	
Generational knowledge					
Parent Involvement	X	X	X	X	X
Socio-economic status	X	X		X	X
Systemic inequality of offerings		X			X
Communication between stakeholders	X	X			X
Barriers for young parents in receiving their education	X		X		
<b><i>Survey</i></b>					
Involvement of key individuals	X	X	X		X
School readiness resources	X	X		X	X
School operations					
Logistics		X			
Home environment	X	X	X		
Parenting	X			X	
Attitudes and beliefs					
Access to information and communication	X		X	X	
Community	X	X	X		X
Technical gap for grandparents in getting information					
Development funds for multi-level education and facilities				X	
<b><i>Participatory Meeting II</i></b>					



Child development	X	X	X	X	X
Young parents	X			X	
Quality child care	X	X	X	X	X
Grandparents					
Lack of community knowledge	X	X	X		
<b><u>Solutions</u></b>					
<b><i>Participatory Meeting I</i></b>					
Involving the community	X	X	X		X
Increase family support	X		X	X	X
Extending early childhood programming to a full day as opposed to half	X	X			
Expanding parental involvement and opportunities for education	X	X	X	X	
Early intervention and education with parents and caregivers	X	X	X		X
Increase parental excitement for the child's education and programs		X			
Involvement of pediatricians and physicians that use Medicaid to distribute information	X		X	X	
<b><i>Participatory Meeting II</i></b>					
Expanding Pre-K capacity				X	
School day wrap-around services		X			
Fun events		X		X	
Strengthening community networking & relationships	X	X	X	X	
Public awareness campaign					X

The McKenna Foundation can utilize the specific program models from the top best practices. In particular, the First 5 Yolo best practice program provides a grant model that could be used to improve child care services in New Braunfels, and utilizes a quality tracking system. It also

offers a Family Resource Center Model that has a proven high usage rate within the local community. Furthermore, the Ready to Learn program constitutes a package that can be duplicated in New Braunfels for fun event-field trips, public library/reading, and kid-fest initiatives (First 5 Yolo, 2014).

The Smart Start for Kids best practice program had several key indicators of success that can be emulated in New Braunfels, such as:

- 1) identification of children falling behind through developmental screenings,
- 2) parents reached through community partners,
- 3) public awareness including parents and general community on school readiness, and
- 4) family related services (United Way of Larimer County, 2012).

The McKenna Foundation can use the solutions generated in the Kent County program in relation to the solutions chosen by their stakeholders in Participatory Meeting II. These include fun events through field trips, community networking through a parent policy council, monthly site parent meetings, and home visits. School based wrap-around services could be emulated from the Kent County Head Start program model as well. Kent County children have statistically been proven to succeed in this program and the children in New Braunfels can benefit from such services as well (Head Start for Kent County, 2014).

In order to monitor school readiness programming in New Braunfels, the development of a dashboard constitutes a tracking device for the community to measure progress and success. Components of such a dashboard corresponds with the status of the top challenges and solutions from the initial interview, the survey and participatory meetings. Thus, periodic data collection every 3 to 5 years, is necessary to keep track of the evolution of these components.

#### **4.5.3 Community-Based Support**

Some of the most successful school readiness programs noted in the national best practices section involve the support and involvement of the entire community. This includes vital stakeholders from program leaders to parents. The success of the Travis County School Readiness Action Plan is based on its partnership with United Way for Greater Austin. United Way works collaboratively with the City of Austin, Travis County, and local stakeholders while managing and monitoring the progress of the plan. Community support and working together is key to these efforts. This program exemplifies for New Braunfels the success of a community-based approach to school readiness (School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County, 2012).

The CAP program exhibits a community approach in that its goal is to give children a “nurturing and secure environment” through family services to ensure children’s success in school (CAP Head Start Tulsa, 2015). By partnering with Oklahoma State University Center for Health

Sciences (OSUCHS), the CAP program is able to meet the needs of enrolled children and their parents and siblings. One way that the McKenna Foundation can use this program is to utilize the family support specialists that helped parents whose children are participating in CAP Tulsa set goals and suggest ways to meet these goals (*Ibid*, 2015).

## 4.6 Aggregated Recommendations

The section above highlights more general recommendations that incorporate emotional, social, cognitive and physical components in new or revitalized school readiness programs; and a model of community-based support for school readiness in New Braunfels. While these umbrella recommendations, largely based on best practice research, are useful, MCCG developed more specific aggregated recommendations. These recommendations synthesize the Best Practice information with challenges and solutions identified by stakeholders through the three primary data collection channels (See Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3 Aggregated Findings: Challenges and Solutions**

Stage	Challenges
Survey	Involvement of key individuals
	School readiness resources
	School operations
	Logistics
	Home Environment
	Parenting
	Attitudes and Beliefs
	Access to information and communication
	Community
	Technical gap for grandparents in getting information
	Development funds for multi-level education and facilities
Participatory Meeting I	Family dynamics
	Generational knowledge
	Parent Involvement
	Socio-economic Status
	Systemic inequality of offerings
	Communication between stakeholders
Participatory Meeting II	Barriers for young parents in receiving their education
	Solutions
	Expanding Pre-K capacity
	School day wrap-around services
	Fun events
Strengthening community networking & relationships	
Public awareness campaign	

Based on the five best practices examined for this study, MCCG offers three primary sets of evidence-based recommendations for the New Braunfels community. These include the development of a community-centered strategic approach, a public awareness campaign, and the enhancement of current efforts in the New Braunfels community related to Head Start and home visitation. The recommendations have been designed with an eye to the development of a comprehensive package of supportive services for all Pre-K children across the New Braunfels community. The following aggregated recommendations are how MCCG suggests that the McKenna Foundation move forward to aid in increasing school readiness in the community:

**1. Develop a community-centered strategic approach to support a long-term, comprehensive school readiness initiative. This should include the following activities:**

- A. *Develop supportive community network and communication infrastructure*
- design a draft data dashboard to support tangible next-steps to convert the broader community vision for school readiness into a community-wide school readiness plan
  - create a commission of invested community members such as leaders, advocates, parents, service providers, and educators
  - create a parent policy council where an elected group of parents and people in the community come together to make decisions about the strategies and procedures of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs
  - conduct monthly Parent Meetings during the school year (see Kent County)
- B. *Fund a family resource center to meet the needs of the Pre-K population and their families (see First 5 Yolo)*
- provide referrals for family services
  - host family education workshops
  - host weekly bilingual activities for parents and children
  - provide counseling services to support children and their families of different cultural backgrounds
- C. *Establish a partnership with a local university or health care provider to give pre-kindergarten children and their families access to affordable health care, as the physical and mental health of children influences their ability to be prepared for school (see CAP Tulsa)*

**2. Develop a public awareness campaign to help define a consistent message about school readiness, developing a common language surrounding the topic (see School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/ Travis County)**

- A. *Select a community leader to support outreach to appropriate New Braunfels stakeholders*
  - B. *Frame school readiness programming as a strategy to unleash community development, where other federal funds and resources to support a school readiness program may become available*
  - C. *Fund informative and engaging events to promote positive learning environments*
    - *plan parent and child field trips*
    - *host reading aloud sessions in stimulating environments like zoos or libraries*
    - *organize kinder transition camps: four-week camps on each campus*
    - *develop a series of workshops that parents can attend to learn about topics such as: parenting skills, financial literacy, and job tools (See CAP Tulsa)*
- 3. Strengthen Pre-K curriculum to better encompass the four child-related components prevalent in successful best practices - social, emotional, cognitive and physical development through the following:**
- A. *Build off of the BCFS Head Start model as a foundation to incorporate a broader Pre-K population, as well as expand programming to include comprehensive school based wrap-around services and integration of curriculum that supports a wider range of social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.*
  - B. *Enhance Head Start programming by piloting innovative home visitation models such as First Steps Kent and the Prevention Pilot home visiting program (see Head-Start Kent County)*
  - C. *Rally community support and provide funding for a Pre-K only mandatory program such as the AISD full-day Pre-K program in Austin, TX (see Lucy Reed Prekindergarten demonstration school, Austin Independent School District, 2015).*
- 4. Design and implement systematic measurement and evaluation techniques, both at the individual program-level, as well as to assess collaborative impact of the community-wide strategic initiative (see Smart Start for Kids)**
- A. *Adapt the Data Dashboard used by First 5 Yolo to monitor Pre-K programming in the New Braunfels community*
  - B. *Strengthen existing Head Start programming by identifying weaknesses through regular needs assessments*
  - C. *Fund a child-care needs assessment every five years to inform programs and activities that are most likely to increase school readiness success and identify indicators to measure this success*
    - *Implement developmental screens for Pre-K children to assess the four internal elements: emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development*
  - D. *Fund a county wide evaluation of all Pre-K programs to identify best practices and areas for improvement*

## **4.7 Conclusion**

This study was commissioned by the McKenna Foundation to explore the opportunity of equipping children with tools and desire to learn, and creating an environment conducive to children's success at school. Beyond educational success, promoting and coordinating school readiness initiatives in New Braunfels contributes to the long-term goal of making a positive impact on the community as a whole.

The study engaged as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, was participatory to ensure a broad range of voices were heard. Hence, the study highlighted social, economic and structural challenges surrounding school readiness in New Braunfels. In response, best practices identified across the United States offer models that can be emulated in New Braunfels. Such models capitalize on existing resources for better coordination and efficiency. Ultimately, a successful school readiness program must be monitored and evaluated using a dashboard that tracks the status of all challenges and solutions identified during this study.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Survey Questions

Do you think New Braunfels supports school readiness? What factors influence your decision?

1. What does it mean for a child to be ready for school?
2. What characteristics would a child have to be ready for school in New Braunfels?
3. Who needs to be involved to for a child to be a success?
4. From your perspective, what are the key challenges to school readiness programming in New Braunfels? Why?
5. What are the opportunities for improvement?
6. Which of the following factors are the three most important for a child to be ready to succeed in school?

Emotional Intelligence  
Social Intelligence  
Cognitive Development  
Physical Development  
Parental Involvement  
Community Services Infrastructure  
Access to Enrichment Programs

7. Of the following factors which three need the most growth and/or development in our community?

Emotional Intelligence  
Social Intelligence  
Cognitive Development  
Physical Development  
Parental Involvement  
Community Services Infrastructure  
Access to Enrichment Programs

## Appendix B: Participatory Meeting I Agenda

<b>Tuesday, November 18, 2014</b>		
<b>Focus</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Content</b>
<b>Introductions</b>	10:30AM	Introduction of our Capstone, Meeting Objectives and Structure
<b>Indicators of School Readiness Success: Best Practice Review</b>	10:45AM	Present Portion of Data Dashboard
<b>Identification of School Readiness Issue from Community's Perspective</b>	11:00AM	Present Findings of Pre-Survey
	11:10AM	Small Group Work
<b>Lunch</b>	12:30PM	Lunch
	1:15PM	Small Group Work
<b>Large Group Discussion: Community Priorities</b>	1:50PM	Wall Walk - Prioritization Exercise
	2:00PM	Tabulation & Discussion of Results
<b>What's Next</b>	2:30PM	Wrap Up



## Appendix C: Participatory Meeting II Agenda



### School Readiness Participatory Meeting 2 February 20, 2015

10:00AM	Introduction
10:10AM	Develop Community Vision of School Readiness
11:10AM	Small Group/ Brainstorm Solutions
11:40AM	Large Group Report Out
12:20PM	Ranking Exercise
12:30PM	Lunch
1:00PM	Small Group/ Development of Program Ideas
1:45PM	Large Group Report Out
2:45PM	Next Steps

## **Appendix D: Vision Statement Exercise Instructions**

### **What is a Community Vision?**

A vision communicates what we believe are the ideal conditions for our community – how things would look if the issue important to us were perfectly addressed. In general, vision statements should be:

- Broad enough to encompass a variety of local perspectives
- Inspiring and uplifting to everyone involved in your effort
- Easy to communicate

Here are a few vision statements which meet the above criteria:

- Healthy children
- Safe streets, safe neighborhoods
- Every house a home
- Education for all
- Peace on earth

### **Why a Community Vision?**

There are many other reasons to develop vision and mission statements as well. For example, having clear and compelling vision statements can:

- Draw people to common work
- Give hope for a better future
- Inspire community members to realize their dreams through positive, effective action
- Provide a basis for developing our planning process

### **Guiding Questions?**

- What are the issue that matter most to people in our community?
- Why should these issues be addressed?
- How would you like to see our community transformed?
- What is your dream for our community?
- What would you like to see change?
- What kind of community do we want to create?
- What do you see as the community's major strengths and assets?
- What do you think should be the purpose of this project?
- What would success look like?

## **Vision Statement**

It may take several statements to fully capture the ideal vision of our community. As we encourage people to suggest all of their ideas, let us keep in mind the following questions:

- Will it draw people to common work?
- Does it give hope for a better future?
- Will it inspire community members to realize their dreams through positive, effective action?
- Does it provide a basis for developing an action planning process?

## Appendix E: Survey Results

### 1. Do you think New Braunfels supports school readiness?

Yes	56.52%
Somewhat	39.13%
No	4.35%

### 2. Who needs to be involved for a child to be successful in school?

- Parents, siblings, extended family, guardians, teachers, school administrators and personnel, pediatricians, doctors, nurses, church, coaches, civic organizations, and the community as a whole.

### 3. From your perspective, what are the key challenges to school readiness programming in New Braunfels?

- School readiness resources: Not enough options for all family income groups, lack of quality affordable programs and facilities in the community, need for more programs like Head Start and community initiatives, lack of support system in education
- School: Funding for high quality teachers at birth-age 5, a disconnect between the schools and incoming families
- Logistics: transportation, learning spaces for young children, lack of pediatric medical doctors, dentists, nurses, and mental health services
- Home environment: Poverty, drug use, alcoholism, and parents' lack of education, emotional and physical abuse, employment, single parent families, family and child spends more time in front of electronics than in stimulating learning environments
- Parenting: Parental knowledge of best parenting practices, parent personal efficacy, and parents' awareness on the importance of structure and discipline at home
- Access to information and communication: Family may not know where to get help to foster early learning before enrollment in the school, lack of understanding of what is being offered to them
- Child specific: English proficiency, Children with special needs

- Attitudes and Beliefs: Parents who feel it is the schools job to teach their children, parents' apathy when they are offered free/no cost services, fear of being sent out of the country or reported to the government
- Community level: Lack of coordination and under-utilization of local resources

#### 4. **What or where are the greatest opportunities for improvement?**

##### School readiness programs:

- Quality preschool programs that are available in all price ranges
- Early childhood program extended to a full day that would serve all NBISD 3 and 4 year old qualified Pre-K students with a more inclusionary approach with Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities (PPCD)
- Programs that help with transition to kindergarten from multiple settings
- Head start type programs with transportation and more efficient hours of operation

##### Family support:

- Expand parental involvement and education opportunities
- Early intervention and education with parents and caregivers
- Parental involvement/excitement without offending the parents
- Getting more parents to buy into programs and services, seeing how it can benefit their child and family as a whole
- Child care for single moms who want to be involved in their older children's school activities but unable to due to lack of childcare for small children
- Preventive intervention to decrease the need for medication intervention
- Bridging the gap for low income families to feel as though they can prepare their children to be successful in a system that can be overwhelming

##### Teacher specific:

- Less red tape, less written reports by teachers
- Give teachers less rules and more freedom to teach

##### Community engagement:

- Community involvement to explore opportunities for change and improvement
- Central, robust communication system for resources available to parents and young children
- Community support is needed for all children
- Community training for parents of students with difficult behaviors
- Building on resources we have in the community to bring more young children in, i.e. library, parks, history of city, etc.

**5. Which of the following factors are the three most important for a child to be ready for school?**

- Most important: Parental Involvement
- Second most important: Cognitive Development
- Third most important: Access to Enrichment Programs

**Table 1: Survey Results**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>First Most Important</b>	<b>Second Most Important</b>	<b>Third Most Important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Some what Important</b>	<b>Not Important</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>
Emotional Intelligence	2	4	3	3	3	0	0	3.07
Social Intelligence	4	3	4	2	0	0	0	2.31
Cognitive Development	1	5	4	2	2	1	0	3.13
Physical Development	1	1	0	0	4	4	3	4.70
Parental Involvement	10	3	1	2	0	1	0	1.94
Community Services Infrastructure	0	1	1	4	3	0	3	4.00
Access to Enrichment Programs	1	2	6	1	0	1	1	3.00

**6. Which area needs the most growth and/or development in our community? Please rate in order from greatest need to least.**

- Most important: Parental Involvement






- Second most important: Community Services Infrastructure
- Third most important: Social Intelligence

**Table 2: Survey Results**





<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>1 (needs most growth)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7 (needs least growth)</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>
Emotional Intelligence	2	2	3	5	2	3	2	4.05
Social Intelligence	2	3	4	2	4	2	2	3.89
Cognitive Development	0	0	0	9	3	5	2	5.00
Physical Development	0	1	0	1	5	3	9	5.89
Parental Involvement	7	3	6	0	1	2	0	2.53
Community Services Infrastructure	3	6	4	0	2	1	3	3.37
Access to Enrichment Programs	5	4	2	2	2	3	1	3.26

## Appendix F: A Dashboard Model to Monitor and Measure School Readiness Success









### FAMILY ECONOMIC SUFFICIENCY

<p>Babies Born to Mothers on Medi-Cal<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>The percent of live births paid by Medi-Cal in Yolo County has been increasing  since 2001, to the 2013 rate of 43%, which remains below  the state rate of 48%.<sup>2</sup> Rates are highest among Latinas, African Americans, teen mothers, and those with less than a high school diploma or GED.</p>
<p>Children Living in Poverty<sup>3</sup></p>	<p>The percent of Yolo County children living at or below federal poverty decreased  from 22.7% in 2011 to 16.4% in 2012. The greatest numbers of children living in poverty reside in Woodland, Davis (which includes children of University students), and West Sacramento. Over 25%  of the children from Clarksburg and Knights Landing live in poverty. Comparatively, 21.3% of children in California live in poverty.</p>
<p>Unemployment Rates<sup>4</sup></p>	<p>Unemployment rates in Yolo County fluctuate with the agricultural seasons. They crept upward from a low of 4.1% in the fall of 2006, to a peak of 15.1% in the winter of 2011. Since then, they have been decreasing . In March 2014, the countywide rate was 10.1%. Historically, the cities of West Sacramento and Woodland have considerably higher unemployment rates than the county and the state.</p>



### HEALTH

<p>Teen Births<sup>6</sup></p>	<p>As throughout California, Yolo County teen birth rates have been decreasing  from 17.4 per 1000 females aged 15-19 in 2010, to 14.4 in 2012. Yolo County rates have been consistently lower than statewide rates which have dropped to only 28 per 1000 in 2001. Teen pregnancy remains highest among Yolo Latinas.</p>
<p>Health Insurance<sup>7</sup></p>	<p>98% of Yolo County children aged 0-17 years have health insurance  compared with 89% statewide.</p>
<p>Infant Mortality<sup>8</sup></p>	<p>The Yolo County infant mortality rate has ranged from 3.6 to 3.8 per 1000 live births, which is below  the 5.4 California rate and far below the Healthy People 2020 goal of 6. This has not been true for our African American and Native American babies, who have rates of 10.2 and 19.8 .</p>









Breastfeeding <sup>9</sup>	The percent of mothers who exclusively breastfeed in the hospital has steadily increased  from 78% in 2009 to 85% in 2012. Yolo outperforms most of the state which has a 63% rate.
Immunizations <sup>10</sup>	91.5% of 2014 entering kindergarten had all required vaccinations, exceeding  the 90.2% statewide rate. The greatest rates were in Woodland at 96.2% and the lowest in West Sacramento at 87.4%
Mothers Obese during Pregnancy <sup>11</sup>	The percentage Yolo County mothers with pre-pregnancy BMI >30 has significantly risen  from 20% to 26% between 2009 and 2013, with highest rates among Latinas.
Childhood Obesity <sup>12</sup>	40% of public school students in grades 5, 7, and 9 are overweight or obese. In 2011, statewide rates declined to 32.4% while Yolo overweight and obese rates in all but Davis and Winters school districts climbed  , particularly for 5 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> grade students, with highest rates among Latinos.
Food Insecurity <sup>13</sup>	In 2011 an estimate of 24.4% of Yolo children lived in food insecure households <sup>14</sup> . The percent of Yolo households with food insecurity rose steadily  from 11.7% to 15.5% between 2000 and 2012.
Consumption of Fruits and Vegetables <sup>15</sup>	Estimated percent of children eating five or more servings in Yolo County has improved significantly  from 49% in 2007 to 56% in 2012, which exceeds the statewide rate of 53%.
Oral Health <sup>16</sup>	 89% of Yolo County children aged 2 to 11 saw a dentist in the past 12 months, compared with 86% statewide. CommuniCare Smile Savers program documented a drop in children with dental disease  from 38% in 2009 to 26% in 2012.
Low Birth Weight <sup>17</sup>	From 2007 to 2013, the percentage of Yolo infants with low birth weight and infants born prematurely remained stable at approximately 6%.



## MENTAL/BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Mood Disorder Hospitalizations <sup>18</sup>	Mood disorder hospitalizations for women age 15 to 44 jumped 80%  from 625 per 100,000 women in 2000, to 1126 in 2011.
Substance Abuse <sup>19</sup>	Substance abuse hospitalizations for women age 15 to 44 years jumped 63%  from 416 per 100,000 in 2000, to 679 in 2011.









## CHILDCARE

Licensed Child Care <sup>20</sup>	Licensed child care slots increased  from 7,611 in 2010 to 7,921 in 2012. The percentage of licensed child care slots for children ages 0-12 years with parents in the labor force increased  in 2012 from 34% to 37
Child Care Costs <sup>21</sup>	In the past two years, cost of full-time center-based care decreased  4% for preschool children to \$8,239 and increased  2% for infants to \$12,089/year. Licensed Family Childcare fees rose  10% between 2011 and 2012, but at \$7,102 for preschool children and \$7,520 for infants, they remain significantly lower than center-based care.
Subsidized Childcare <sup>22</sup>	Since 2008, the total number of subsidized child-care slots in Yolo County has decreased 30%  , from 3277 to 2288.

## EDUCATION

Preschool Enrollment	An estimated 59% of all three and four year olds in Yolo County are enrolled in a preschool program  , compared to 49% statewide. <sup>23</sup> At time of kindergarten registration, 74% <sup>24</sup> of parents report their child has attend a preschool program.
Reading Proficiency <sup>25</sup>	The percent of 3rd graders in Yolo County public schools who score proficient or higher on the English Language Arts California Standards Test (CST) has increased  from 40% in 2010 to 46% in 2013, exceeding the California rate by 1%.

## SAFETY

Substantiated Child Abuse or Neglect <sup>26</sup>	The overall rate of Yolo County children in foster care has been steadily dropping  over the past 10 years, from a high of 10.2 per 1,000 in 2000 to a current rate of 5 per 1,000. Rates for children, infants and youth over 16 have been increasing  and are above statewide rates for those age groups. 221 Yolo County Children were in foster care as of July 2013.
Reunification Rates <sup>27</sup>	The percent of children entering foster care and who return to their families within 12 months has been steadily increasing  from 51% in 2008 to 74% in 2013.
Homeless Children <sup>28</sup>	The 2014 Point-in-Time Sheltered Count (individuals in emergency shelter or transitional housing) revealed a total of 80 children- 30 being 5 years of age or younger (11 in Davis, 9 in Woodland, and 10 in West Sacramento). In 2012, the Yolo County Office of Education reported a total of 1106 homeless students, 50 less  than in 2011. Of those, 52% are enrolled in Woodland schools, 21% in West Sacramento schools, and 11% in Davis schools.
Foster Care <sup>29</sup>	The number of Yolo County children ages 0-5 years who have been removed from their homes and placed in foster or kinship care has been declining  from a peak of 191 in 2006 to 88 in 2013. Rates of Yolo County children in care under age 1 were higher  in FY12-13 than statewide averages, but rates for children ages 1-5 were lower  .
Domestic Violence <sup>30</sup>	While statewide rate have been decreasing, Yolo County rates of domestic violence calls have  increased from 5.9 per 1,000 households in 2008 to 6.9 per 1,000 household in 2012, exceeding the state rate since 2009.

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