

How Do You Get Nine Million Kids Ready for School?

Pre-kindergarten is a steppingstone period in a child's life, from babyhood to the social and educational whirlwind that follows and it is no longer just about wooden blocks and sing-alongs. Attention to the science of early learning—screening, assessment, and intervention— is becoming more focused, with a special emphasize on reading readiness. And none too soon, say many early childhood experts: In the past twenty years, pre-school enrollment has doubled from 4 to 8 million children, and by 2010 this pre-school segment, ages three to five, is expected to exceed nine million.

The Need for Early Learning Intervention

According to the Childcare Information Exchange, approximately 20 million students are at risk for reading failure. Responding to this need, Pearson Education, the world's leading education publisher, has announced the formation of the Pearson Early Learning Group to provide a broad range of integrated solutions that directly address both early learning and professional development of preK-2 teachers and caregivers.

Pearson Education is currently the only organization offering this breadth of research-based programs, products, and services that directly target all aspects of early literacy and reading readiness, including teacher and caregiver training and tools, with both traditional and state-of-the-art curriculum tools.

Scientifically Proven Solutions

Early Screening and Assessment

Fully seventy-five percent of children with reading difficulties who are not identified by the time they reach age nine will still have poor reading skills at the end of high school. Early diagnostics like those proposed in the Education Bill's "Reading First" initiative are critical to the process of identifying young children at risk for reading failure. Toward this end, Pearson Education acquired Rebus, Inc., developer of two highly regarded research-based tools designed to detect developmental delays, help improve instruction, and further child development.

Work Sampling System (WSS)

The Work Sampling System is an ongoing classroom performance assessment system that is used in preschool through fifth grade. Its purpose is to document children's skills, knowledge, behavior, and accomplishments across a wide variety of curriculum areas on multiple occasions in order to enhance teaching and learning. Complementary elements include developmental guidelines and checklists, portfolios and summary reports.

Early Screening Inventory (ESI)

The Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESIoR) is a developmental screening instrument that is individually administered to children from three to six years of age. It is designed to identify children who may need special educational services in order to perform successfully in school. Standardized and validated with 6,000 children, many of whom were enrolled in Head Start programs, the system covers the developmental areas of visual motor/adaptive, language and cognition, gross motor skills.

"Get Ready to Read!"

In association with the National Center for Learning Disabilities, the Early Learning Group now offers the research-based "Get Ready to Read!" screening tool, designed to identify young children's readiness to read and accessible through Pearson's LearningNetwork.com.

EarlyLearner.net

Another highly regarded screening and assessment tool from Pearson Education is its EarlyLearner.net Web site. The site features activities and childhood development tools based upon 30 years of research by the esteemed High/Scope® Educational Research Foundation. EarlyLearner.net's online resources include a child's portfolio, which allows parents or caregivers to track a child's progress over time; parenting resources include the EarlyLearner Observation, which provides a quick, interactive checklist designed to help parents and teachers better understand their child's developmental strengths and abilities.

"Sing, Spell, Read and Write"

The Pearson Learning Group (PLG) also offers assessment tools and early reading texts, including "Sing, Spell, Read and Write," the complete beginning-literacy curriculum for grades preK-2 that has helped tens of thousands of children become independent readers.

Intervention: Scientifically Validated Curriculum Tools

Pearson Education's instructional materials include the Waterford Early Reading Program, a research-based multimedia program from the Waterford Institute, and the Waterford Early Math & Science Program, both of which provides a personalized learning experience and involves both parents and teachers. Pearson Education also offers the interactive Successmaker™ - used by over 17,500 schools - which serves preK-8 learners online with more than 6,000 hours of standards-based instruction in reading/language arts.

Another example of effective and caregiver-inclusive programs is "Read Together, Talk Together," an innovative reading program series that empowers teachers and

caregivers to actively engage children in a dialogue while reading children's books. The reading materials themselves draw from the rich collections of children's books from Pearson's Penguin Putnam and Dorling Kindersley.

Finally, KnowledgeBox, an interactive, digital library of multimedia resources, features dynamic video, software, text resources, Internet links and lessons to captivate students' attention with meaningful, engaging, quality content that aligns with state and national standards.

Professional Development

At the core of the success or failure in a child's education life is, of course, the teacher. A national survey of 438 colleges and universities finds that early childhood teacher preparation programs will not be able to meet growing federal and state calls for better-trained early childhood teachers. And in 30 states adults can begin caring for young children in child-care centers with no prior educational training beyond high school graduation.

Pearson Education supports teachers at all levels with a variety of resources like Prentice Hall textbooks and online companions, and Skylight Professional Development, which offers courses and advanced degrees both on-line and on-site, as well as staff development workshops that address assessments and standards, literacy, mentoring and technology. Allyn & Bacon/Longman, another Pearson imprint, offers a host of books by award-winning authors, as well as supplementary materials, Web companions, training and support at the college and post-graduate level.

"We must truly engage all parties in our mission to improve early childhood learning - and that means children, teachers and administrators, our government, our scientists, parents and caregivers as well," said Kathryn Costello, President of Pearson Education's Early Learning Group. "The only way to obtain meaningful results is to start early with scientifically proven programs like those our group has acquired and developed over the last few years."

Sources: National Research Council, National Center for Education Statistics, National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center, Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing