

Align Southern Indiana

Executive Summary

Align Southern Indiana (ASI) is the backbone collective impact organization bringing five counties in Southern Indiana-Clark, Floyd, Harrison, Scott, and Washington-to achieve agreed-upon long term outcomes for the region resulting in transformational change. Using a collective impact model created by the Alignment USA Network, ASI Governing Board members identified goals and initial long-term outcomes in five foundational areas of focus, based on research, data, and input from hundreds of community leaders across the region.

One of the foundational areas of focus was Education, with the goal of being an integrated educational model from cradle to career to meet our region's needs. After speaking with the 12 Superintendents from the five-county area and hearing their most pressing concern was the number of children entering Kindergarten ill-prepared to learn, the first Long Term Outcome chosen was "Every child will be Kindergarten Ready." A Kindergarten Readiness Alignment Team (ATeam) was assembled with teachers, counselors, administrators, extension agents, childcare providers, librarians, and representatives from initiatives including Imagination Library and On My Way Pre K. These individuals defined Kindergarten Readiness in four major areas: numeracy, literacy, social and school skills. Upon successful adoption by all public school districts, the ATeam worked to create an assessment tool used to measure skills in those four areas. In the fall of 2019, three schools piloted the assessment tool, and the results were analyzed. Only 15% of students scored 100% in all four areas. Furthermore, students who receive free and reduced lunches underperformed their counterparts in every section of the assessment. Females outperformed males in literacy, and males outperformed females on numeracy. Utilizing this information, plans were underway for Fall 2020, with the expectation each school district would assess at least one Kindergarten class in each of the elementary schools. Fall 2020 proved a bit challenging with COVID; however, there were an additional three schools assessing students. Results are due September 15 and will be assessed upon receipt. Our goal is to have one classroom in each of the 28 elementary schools in Clark, Floyd, and Harrison counties assessed in Fall 2021.

Once these skills were determined, the ATeam set about trying to find ways to assist children in acquiring these expected skills. Given families can have a tremendous impact on children's learning and should be their child's first teacher; a Family Assistance sub-team was formed to consider resources for families. With assistance from a Duke Energy grant, family assistance bags were assembled with useful tools: playdough, crayons, scissors, and dry erase packets with learning worksheets, dry erase markers, and information on using these items to teach skills to their child. Along with the grant, Duke Energy also funded the development of videos showing every day skill application with tasks such as folding towels (counting/coloring); identifying shapes around them, etc. These bags were to be handed out at district Kindergarten registrations in Spring 2020 with the expectation these would be used during the summer in preparation for the Fall start. COVID made spring registrations online and therefore, those bags were distributed the first week of school. Our goal is to have bags ready to distribute during the Spring 2021 Kindergarten registrations.

Another important influence on the readiness of students is Child Care Providers. Each school districts has designated a Child Care Provider (CCP) liaison who will act as the contact person between providers and the school district. Semi-annual events for each of the three counties to strengthen the relationship between districts and childcare providers have been organized and began in September 2020. The goal is to keep providers abreast of changes in laws, expected Kindergarten skills, social and emotional topics while providing them with Kindergarten worksheets from the districts to assist in mastering those expected skills.

Professional development activities are included, and with 204 registered provides in the three counties, there has been great interest. Surveys conducted on those already held indicated a strong desire for enhanced communication with the local districts.

To lessen the trauma of transitioning to Kindergarten, Camp Kindergarten was piloted in two schools in the summer of 2020. Incoming Kindergarten students have the opportunity to become familiar with their school facility, acquaint themselves with welcome rituals, counting and routines that will soon be part of their everyday. Studies have shown students who participate in Camp Kindergarten become leaders, mentor their peers, and have a more successful transition to school. Pilot sites have seen the lessening in negative social and emotional behavior. Approximately 150 students attended the three, half-day formats where students acclimated themselves to the building, cafeteria process, bus behavior, and hallway process. Post survey given to parents and teachers showed an overwhelmingly positive experience.

A new outreach to benefit families as teachers, Block Parties, are events for parents and children guiding them through using blocks as a tool to learn math, science, new words and prereading skills, social skills and physical skills. Beginning in Spring 2021, this recognized program developed by the University of Wisconsin and the Southern District Family Living Program would be offered to parents of all 28 elementary schools in Clark, Floyd, and Harrison counties through the local Purdue Extension Service.

Our request is for \$87,000 to serve Clark, Floyd, and Harrison counties over two years by providing family assistance bags for students at Kindergarten registrations, block parties for all families of Kindergarten students, Semi-Annual Child Care Provider events, Camp Kindergartens to 50% of districts in Year 1; 50% of districts in Year 2

Twenty of the 28 elementary schools in the three counties have 50% or greater of their students from economically disadvantaged households (Indiana Department of Education), with one as high as 89.2%. According to the Brookings Institute, fewer than 48% of children living in poverty are ready for school. That is a gap of 27% with children from moderate/high family income. Long term consequences of being ill-prepared to begin Kindergarten include only a 60% chance of graduating from high school. To be successful as citizens, we need our students entering kindergarten ready to learn.