



Tennessee School Readiness Model

Tennessee’s school readiness model emphasizes that the state’s children will be ready to succeed in school only when families, communities, and schools work together on their behalf throughout the early childhood years¹. This document provides specific guidance for what communities, schools, and families can do to support learning and development, but does not describe all possible examples. Further, the model provides indicators of what “ready children” know and are able to do across the birth-5 age span, but does not detail nor overemphasize them. For “readiness” is not seen solely as a condition within a child, but is a condition that exists when communities, schools, and families collectively create a nurturing environment for child development starting at birth.

Ready Communities. A ready community is one that holds high expectations for the organizations that provide services to protect young children’s health and well-being, such as early childhood service agencies, social services agencies, health and mental health care services providers and other children’s and family services agencies. A ready community supports such organizations by working to assure them resources that strengthen their capacity to serve children’s and families’ changing needs. Ready communities, including businesses, faith based organizations, early childhood service providers, community groups and local governments, work together to support children’s school and long term success by providing families affordable access to information, services, high quality child care, and early learning opportunities.

In Ready Communities:

Children have access to high quality early care and education programs

- Center based programs, family and group child care homes achieve high quality ratings through the TN Department of Human Services’ quality rating system and/or are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) and other state approved accrediting bodies.

- Child care programs have policies and practices that support social-emotional development, child nutrition, physical activity, and other healthy habits.

Teachers in early care and education programs are well prepared to work with families, children, and elementary schools in their communities

- Professional development opportunities responsive to changing community needs are provided on a continuing basis.
- Communication and collaboration with schools where children will attend kindergarten are encouraged and supported.

Agencies and organizations provide family services related to physical health, mental health, and family support

- Caregivers of infants with disabilities or developmental delays identified through screening are connected with support services such as the Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS).
- County health departments and other health care providers offer access for child wellness, immunizations, and preventive education services.
- Community partners work together to support families, promote resilience, and increase awareness of child abuse and neglect.

Agencies and organizations provide leadership and focus for early childhood issues in their communities

- Businesses, faith-based and community organizations sign the pledge to support school readiness at *kidcentraltn.com*
- Libraries, recreation centers, museums, and parks offer early learning opportunities.
- Businesses, recreational facilities, faith-based and community organizations become child health friendly, providing smoke-free environments, healthy food choices, and support for family activities that prevent unhealthy behaviors.

Community leaders gather data regularly to assess the status of children, families, schools, and community resources and use these data to improve program planning and to direct resource allocation

- Manageable indicators are identified that are valued and important enough to measure and to track over time.
- Reliable data reports are provided on an annual basis, with results available by the local, county, and/or city level.
- Ongoing commitments are made to improve the quality of existing data over time.

Ready Schools. A ready school accepts all age-eligible children and provides a seamless transition to a high-quality learning environment with rich, age appropriate learning opportunities that build children’s confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities. School policies support the continued physical, intellectual, and social/emotional well-being of children and encourage avoidance of high-risk behaviors and habits. Children in ready schools are led by skilled teachers, who recognize, reinforce, and extend children’s strengths and who are sensitive to cultural values and individual differences.

In Ready Schools:

Kindergarten children engage in high-quality learning experiences that are connected to and build on their experiences throughout their earliest years

- Schools develop formal working transition plans between community early childhood settings and kindergarten to address alignment of curriculum and teaching practices, and school readiness expectations.
- Children entering kindergarten are assessed for progress toward the academic and developmental goals reflected in the TN-Early Learning Development Standards (TN-ELDS) and Common Core State Standards.
- Schools conduct annual school readiness events that engage kindergarten teachers, early childhood professionals, families, children, businesses, faith-based and community organizations.
- Schools have kindergarten standards that are communicated to families and provide the basis for information exchange with families through activities such as home visits, telephone calls, questionnaires, and kindergarten visitation days.

School policies and practices address the diverse and individual needs of students

- Teachers engage in professional development activities that develop and cultivate sensitivities and special skills needed to work with the diverse families and children in their community.
- Classroom activities help to build bridges between various cultural and family backgrounds and to create a shared culture in the classroom.

Schools and teachers engage families as partners in their children's development and education

- Schools and teachers have multiple strategies to involve parents and family members in their children's education and well-being, on an ongoing basis.
- Schools communicate to families in their home languages and use culturally responsive interactional strategies.
- School staff partner with parents/family members in creating policies, practices and programs that ensure optimal intellectual, physical, and social/emotional development of children.

Ready Families. In a ready family, adults understand they are the most important people in the child's life. They are deeply engaged with the child and advocate on his or her behalf. Parents and other family members support children's well-being by interacting with them positively and frequently, taking a strong interest in all aspects of their welfare, development and learning. Recognizing they are the child's first and most important teachers, they provide steady and supportive relationships, ensure safe and consistent environments, promote good health, and foster self-esteem, confidence, determination, and self-control.

In Ready Families:

Family members interact with children to help them develop listening and communication skills and to express their feelings, needs and wants

- Family members read to children every day.
- Family members engage children in conversations about their daily activities and encourage them to express themselves.
- Family members take children to reading and community events at libraries, parks and museums.
- Family members sign the pledge to support school readiness at kidcentraltn.com

Parents and family members act as advocates for their children in all aspects of their lives

- Family members participate in early education program events and activities.
- Family members follow their children’s progress and speak up on their behalf.

Parents and family members ensure their children are healthy

- Parents schedule regular wellness visits and immunizations for their children, and follow through with recommended action needed.
- Family members provide foods to their children that promote optimal brain and body development and limit the consumption of unhealthy foods.
- Family members visit *kidcentraltn.com* for information about child health, education, development, and available resources for families.

Ready Children. A ready child is prepared intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically within the eight developmental domains addressed in the Tennessee Early Childhood Early Learning Developmental Standards (TN-ELDS): *Language, Social Emotional, Physical, Approaches to Learning, Math, Science, Social Studies, Creative Arts*. These standards reflect what research says about the pathway of development and learning from birth through age 5 and the importance of understanding that progress toward school readiness begins at birth.

To Be Ready Children:

Ready children are healthy physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively

- Children enjoy listening to stories and discussing what happened.
- Children understand that rules and routines are part of our daily lives.
- Children ask questions and are curious to find answers and solve problems.
- Children relate well to peers and adults.
- Children enjoy running, drawing, pretending, climbing, and other play activities.

In order to give our children the best chance for success in school and beyond, **communities, schools,** and **families** must hold each other accountable to promote these goals and measure progress toward reaching them. In order to define, assess, and track school readiness, we must set objective, research-based benchmarks for each component of school readiness and develop clear strategies for measuring progress towards these benchmarks.



ⁱ Many states have developed a definition of school readiness with widely varying intentions and thus widely varying content. Tennessee’s Children’s Cabinet and Early Childhood Advisory Council wish to acknowledge that this statement draws heavily in conceptual approach from the *National School Readiness Indicators Initiative: A 17 State Partnership* and in format from the state of Virginia.