A child's life is like a piece of paper on which every person leaves a mark.

~ Chinese Proverb
Acknowledgements

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A very special thank you is extended to all of the children and families who contributed to this effort through sharing time, experiences, and photos.
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With a land area the size of Rhode Island and Connecticut combined, Cochise County consists of 6,219 square miles. This geographically diverse region was created in 1881 by carving out the eastern portion of the previously existing Pima County to the north. Cochise County, named after the famous Apache Chief, Cochise, is well known for its year round temperate climate, the unusual flora and fauna of the high desert, and it happens to sit right in the middle of the annual migration path of several rare Hummingbird and Butterfly species. Peppered with ghost towns and due to its colorful history, Cochise County has been depicted in numerous movies and novels, with many of those movies filmed at the location in which the actual events took place. It is a diverse and serene area, where past and present are consistently complimenting one another.

The incorporated cities in the county include Tombstone, Benson, Willcox, Huachuca City, Sierra Vista, Bisbee, and Douglas. Sierra Vista is the largest of these, partly because it includes the historic Ft. Huachuca, home of the legendary Buffalo Soldiers. Cochise County is also one of three counties in Arizona that does not have an Indian Reservation included within its boundary.

Tombstone is well remembered for the history-making gunfight at the OK Corral but also happened to be the original county seat and had the first established school house in the state. In 1908 the Bisbee Board of Health was so concerned about the number of smallpox cases that they ordered all school children be vaccinated against the highly contagious disease thus spawning a movement across the nation to do the same. In the same year Bisbee High School Alumni launched the first scholarship movement for children in Arizona.

Historic Bisbee, also known as the Queen of the Copper Camps, used to be the largest city between St. Louis and San Francisco. The mines of Bisbee have the distinction of being the most lucrative in the world for gold and copper. The Lavender Pit is still open to the public for tours, giving a glimpse into the mining industry of yesterday. Today Bisbee is home to many artists, writers, and people who seek to live surrounded by a piece of the old west.

Douglas, which sits on the border of Arizona and Mexico, depicts the traditions and culture that were originally part of the population when the Gadsden Purchase occurred in 1853. In 1902 the Arizona Rangers were called in to clean up this remaining gun slingin town that had been declared "tougher than Tombstone could ever hope to be".

Willcox, originally named Maley, made its fame with being the cattle capital of the nation and still to this day holds the largest weekly cattle auction of its kind.
The city of Benson has always enjoyed a heavy flow of traffic both by stagecoach and later railroad from the beginning of European exploration. As silver, gold, and copper flowed out of the mines of Bisbee and Tombstone, and with all southwestern railroads leading to and through Benson, the town was poised to be labeled "The Gateway to the Land of Cochise". Today Benson is still a stopping point for those traveling the east/west corridor.

It is easy to see the diversity that Cochise County enjoys. But this unique and beautiful landscape also brings forth some challenges when it comes to ensuring that all of the members of the community are equally served. The geographic, social, and cultural diversities that are prevalent in this county bordering Mexico force the use of innovative ideas to bring accessible, affordable, and high quality care to the children of Cochise County.
How did this all begin?

Since taking office in 2003, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, along with the State School Readiness Board, has made Early Childhood issues a priority in her administration. For the first time in Arizona's history, children's care, education, and health have been brought to the forefront as well it should be. With school achievement scores consistently below the national average and one of the worst dropout rates in the nation, Governor Napolitano is making tremendous headway in changing the way Arizona thinks about and deals with those critical early years of development in children. This shift in thinking will ultimately create a better outcome for Arizona's youngest community members.

In 2004 the Arizona Early Education Funds (AEEF) was established at the Arizona Community Foundation with the support of funding partners statewide to help communities build the quality and capacity of early childhood care and education for children birth through age five. In March of 2006, Learning Summits were held statewide to garner interest and participation in what was to become the beginning of a vast movement in this much needed arena. By July of 2006, AEEF had approved and awarded funding to six counties in the state to assist in implementing the State School Readiness Board's five year Action Plan. Cochise County was one of these counties. Upon receiving funding, these counties were charged with building collaborative Regional Partnerships borne out of the community and for the community. Thus the birth of the Cochise County School Readiness Partnership (CCSRP). This grassroots approach has been extremely successful in creating buy-in and ensuring that the unique needs of Cochise County are acknowledged.

During the November 2006 election, Arizona voters made it clear that they supported this movement by the passing of Proposition 203, now known as First Things First. At last, the state of Arizona as a whole is focusing on what scientific research has already shown: The early experiences of a child have long lasting effects on that child's ability to do well in school and in life.

From its inception, the Cochise County School Readiness Partnership (CCSRP) wanted to ensure that the goals of the Partnership were aligned with those of First Things First. These goals include improving the QUALITY of early childhood development and health programs; increasing ACCESS to preventative health care and screenings; offering SUPPORT and EDUCATION to parents and families concerning early childhood development and literacy; increasing the COORDINATION of the programs that exist for this age group; and providing PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT and TRAINING for early childhood service providers. There is also the concern of increasing the AWARENESS of what high quality early care, education, and health looks like. It is apparent that much work needs to be done.

Now, nearly two years after its inception, the CCSRPM has grown substantially to include a culturally and geographically diverse group of community members from all walks of life with one common goal: That all children in Cochise County begin school safe, healthy, and ready to succeed.
According to the funding criteria of the Arizona Early Education Funds, one of the core activities of the second year of funding was the implementation of a strengths-based community assessment in each county in the state.

The Cochise County School Readiness Partnership decided early in the community assessment process that it was extremely important to gather the perspectives of as many diverse stakeholders as possible. This meant implementing a range of community consultation activities across the county—including focus groups, key informant interviews, and parent and kindergarten teacher surveys. Through this community consultation plan, the CCSR has attempted to create a broad and deep picture of the status of children in the county, as well as to gather perspectives that will assist in providing direction to the community.

Data sources utilized in the process included:

**Public Data Sources:** To generate a quantitative portrait of children ages pre-birth through five years, the Community Assessment Team utilized several publicly available data sets, including the 2006 Census and the 2005 and 2006 American Community Survey. Also, data was accessed from a wide range of sources, including the Department of Economic Security and the Arizona Department of Education.

**Key Informant Interviews:** In order to generate information from a range of perspectives, and from a geographically diverse population, 20 interviews were conducted with representatives from various related fields, including childcare, education, health, and safety. Typically these interviews lasted one hour and were conducted by phone. Informants were asked to give their perspective on the state of early childhood education, health and school readiness. In addition, they were asked to comment on promising practices and programs currently offered in the community.

**Focus Groups:** As part of this project, six parent focus groups were held. These focus groups were designed to gather perspectives from parents from diverse geographic and economic backgrounds. The parents who participated all had children under the age of six. Parents were asked to comment on access to prenatal care, special needs supports, and pediatric medical and dental services. They were also asked for their perspectives on priorities from early care, education, and health in the region.

**Parent Survey:** Because the Partnership hoped to gather perspectives from diverse communities of parents, a survey was developed and distributed through childcare centers and at community events. In total, 122 surveys were completed by parents, including migrant parents, parents of children receiving early education services, parents of a faith-based organization, and rural families. The results of the survey are included in this assessment.

**Kindergarten Teacher Survey:** In order to gather the perspective of area kindergarten teachers, the CCSR partnered with Sierra Vista Public Schools and the County School Superintendent's office to distribute the Kindergarten Teacher Surveys. The survey captured the opinions of kindergarten teachers county-wide.
A goal of completing this community assessment was to identify “benchmarks” against which progress could be measured in the coming years. The partnership began with a set of indicators identified by the Governor’s School Readiness Board. Additional items were then added that the group felt would give a clearer understanding of some of the very specific challenges that the county faces. While some of the data in this latter set is available, in other cases the community will need to identify ways of tracking information and thereby measuring growth.

---

### Demographics (All numbers reflect county-wide data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population: Number of people in Cochise County in 2005 and the demographic breakdown %</td>
<td>127,757 66% urban 34% rural</td>
<td>US Census Bureau Quick Facts (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population: % of children under age 5</td>
<td>9071 7.1%</td>
<td>US Census Bureau Quick Facts (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeownership: % of homeowners</td>
<td>70.30%</td>
<td>US Census Bureau Quick Facts (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Completion of High School: % of parents</td>
<td>79.50%</td>
<td>US Census Bureau Quick Facts (2000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ready Families - Describes a child’s family context and home environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Education Level: % of births to mothers with less than a 12th grade education</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Arizona Department of Health Services, Annual Report (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income Children: Average monthly enrollment of children birth through 5 receiving WIC services</td>
<td>1,069</td>
<td>Arizona Department of Health Services, Monthly Report (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Births to Teens: Number of births to mothers 19 years old or younger</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>Arizona Department of Health Services, Annual Report (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Abuse and Neglect: % of substantiated child abuse and neglect cases among children birth to age 6</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>Child Welfare Reporting Requirements, Semi-Annual Report, (10/01/06-05/31/07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in Foster Care: % of children birth to age 6 in out-of-home foster care placement who have no more than two placements in a 24-month period</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Child Welfare Reporting Requirements, Semi-Annual Report, (10/01/06-05/31/07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Parents’ Responsible for grandchildren Number of grandparents that are responsible for children from birth to age 4</td>
<td>1164</td>
<td>American Community Survey (2006) Error Margin (+/- 325)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in Foster Care: Number of children birth to age 6 in out-of-home foster care placements</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>Child Welfare Reporting Requirements, Semi-Annual Report, (04/01/06-10/30/06)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Ready Children - Describes % of kindergarten teachers who express a concern about student school readiness with regard to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Concern Percentage</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Well-Being and Motor Development</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher Survey Cochise County (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Emotional Development:</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher Survey Cochise County (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Learning:</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher Survey Cochise County (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Development:</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher Survey Cochise County (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognition and General Knowledge:</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher Survey Cochise County (2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ready Early Care and Education - Describes the availability, quality, and affordability of proven programs that influence child development and school readiness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children Enrolled in an Early Education Programs:</td>
<td>% of 3 and 4 year-olds enrolled in a center-based early childhood care and education program (including childcare centers, nursery schools, preschool programs, Head Start programs, and pre-kindergarten programs)</td>
<td>34% Kids Count (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Enrolled in an Early Education Programs:</td>
<td>Number of 3 and 4 year-olds enrolled in a center-based early childhood care and education program (including childcare centers, nursery schools, preschool programs)</td>
<td>1681 American Community Survey (2006) Error Margin (+/- 751)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Education Teacher Credentials:</td>
<td>% of early childhood teachers with a bachelor's degree and specialized training in early childhood</td>
<td>32% &lt; H.S., 33% H.S. or GED, 25% CDA, 19% BA/S or MA/S Degree, S*CCEEDS Registry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Salary for Early Childhood Teachers:</td>
<td>Beginning salary @ 7.00/hr. w/High School diploma @ $7.50/hr. w/CDA or Associates degree @ $9.00-$9.50/hr. w/Bachelor's degree or higher &gt;$9.50/hr.</td>
<td>Phone survey of Cochise County Childcare Centers, Preschools, and Headstarts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DES Early Childhood Home Providers Average Income:</td>
<td>$17.00-$20.00 per child/per day (4 child limit)</td>
<td>DES Childcare Market Rate Survey 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accredited Childcare Centers:</td>
<td>Number of childcare centers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)</td>
<td>1 National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accredited Family Childcare Homes:</td>
<td>Number of family childcare homes accredited by NAFCC</td>
<td>2 National Association for Family Childcare (NAFCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready Health Services - Describes the availability, quality, and affordability of proven programs that influence child development and school readiness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health Insurance:</strong> Number of children birth to age 5 enrolled in AHCCCS</td>
<td>4187</td>
<td>AHCCCS database (February 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Birth Weight Infants:</strong> Number of LBW newborns (&lt;2,500 grams) (5.5 pounds)</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>Arizona Department of Health Services, Annual Report (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to Prenatal Care:</strong> % of births to women who receive late or no prenatal care</td>
<td>17.40%</td>
<td>Cochise County Community Network Team-Findings and Recommendations, March 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immunizations:</strong> % of children ages 19-35 months who have been fully immunized</td>
<td>Unavailable to team at time of publishing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Well-Child Visits:</strong> % of children under age 6 who received a well-child check-up in the past year</td>
<td>Unavailable to team at time of publishing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developmental Screening and Assessment:</strong> Number of children birth to age 3 with a comprehensive developmental screening</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>Easter Seals Blake Foundation Annual IPP Report, (2006-2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developmental Assessment of Children:</strong> Number of children birth to age 3 in the care of the state child welfare system who received a developmental assessment through Early Intervention (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Easter Seals Blake Foundation Annual IPP Report, (2006-2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Ready Communities - Describes community resources and supports available to families with young children. |
|---|---|---|
| <strong>Young Children in Poverty:</strong> % of children under age 5 living in families with income below the federal poverty threshold | 34.2% (Number of children, 3102) | US Census Bureau Quick Facts (2005) |
| <strong>Supports for Families with Infants and Toddlers:</strong> % of infants and toddlers who received services through Early Head Start | 4.3% (Number of children, 135) | Child-Parent Centers Annual Report (2006-2007) |
| <strong>Access to Childcare Subsidies:</strong> % of eligible children under age 6 receiving childcare subsidies | 63% (787 total) | Department of Economic Security (DES) |
| <strong>Partial Funding of Early Childhood Centers:</strong> Number of childcare centers accepting DES childcare subsidy | 22 of 38 | Childcare Resource &amp; Referral (CCR&amp;R) |
| <strong>High-Quality Childcare and Early Education Programs:</strong> % of childcare and early education classrooms (ranked at the top level in a statewide quality rating system) | Unavailable to team at time of publishing |
| <strong>Early Childhood Centers Enrollment Availability:</strong> Number of families on childcare waiting lists | 0 | DES Childcare Administration |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ready Schools</strong> – Describes the critical elements of schools that influence child development and school success.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class Size Average:</strong> teacher/child ratio in K-1 classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIMS:</strong> % of 3rd graders who meet, or exceed the state standards in reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIMS:</strong> % of 3rd graders who meet, or exceed the state standards in writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIMS:</strong> % of 3rd graders who meet, or exceed the state standards in math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Education:</strong> % of 1st graders who receive support services in special education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Grade Reading Scores:</strong> % of children with reading proficiency in fourth grade as measured by the state’s proficiency tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Ed. and Early Intervention:</strong> % of kindergarten children enrolled in special education (not previously enrolled in Early Intervention or preschool special education services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Enrollment Population:</strong> Number of school aged children who were enrolled during 2006/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Dropout Population:</strong> Number of school aged children who dropped out during 2006/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Dropout Rate:</strong> % of students who dropped out of school during 2006/2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A four page Community Assessment Parent Survey was completed by 122 parents throughout Cochise County. In addition to demographic information, respondents were asked what kind of childcare they utilize (if any), the challenges they face as a parent/caregiver, the ways in which their child would be best prepared for kindergarten, and the best method to encourage reading activities. In addition, individuals who completed the survey were asked to rate a total of eleven services in terms of importance.

The majority of individuals who completed the survey were mothers (86%). Fifty-seven percent (57%) of respondents indicated that the mother was the primary caregiver followed by Mother and Father equally (35%), Father (5%), and Grandparent (3%).

Most of the individuals who completed the survey were from Sierra Vista (43%) and Willcox (35%). Other towns that were represented included, Hereford (11%), Bisbee (1%), Ft. Huachuca (4%), Cochise (2%), Bowie (1%), Huachuca City (3%), and Tombstone (1%).

In what town do you live?
Fifty-one participants were White (42.1%), fifty-two participants were Hispanic (43%), eleven participants were of Mixed ethnic origin (9.1%), five of the participants were African American (4.1%), and two individuals were Asian American (1.7%).

The educational levels of the individuals who completed the surveys were fairly evenly distributed. Twenty-five percent (25%) had completed some high school, twenty percent (20%) were high school graduates, twenty-seven percent (27%) had attended some college, while twenty-two percent (22%) had earned a college degree, and five percent (5%) had acquired an advanced degree. One individual completed school up to eighth grade.

Over forty-three percent of respondents were Hispanic.
The majority of respondents earn under $20,000 (37%), followed by $20,000 - $35,000 (21%), $35,000-$50,000 (18%), above $75,000 (15%), and $50,000-$75,000 (10%). In terms of the number of children, most of the individuals have two children (33%), followed by one child (32%) and three children (21%). Eight respondents have four or more children (7%), and seven respondents have five or more children (6%).

Over half of the individuals who completed the survey currently do not use childcare (54% do not use childcare compared with 46% who do).

Of the individuals who do use childcare, twenty-four individuals use family or friends, twenty people use a childcare center, and four individuals use a home care provider. When asked where they found helpful information, family members, doctors' offices, church, Head Start, and the Blake Foundation were all listed as sources. Family members and doctors' offices were the most common sources of information.

The second half of the survey focused on caregiver needs and challenges. Forty-six percent (46%) listed "managing stress" as a challenge, followed by "finding quality childcare" (32%). Eleven percent (11%) listed both "getting healthcare" and "money problems" as challenges they face as parents/caregivers.

When asked "What would most help to get your child ready to start kindergarten", an overwhelming 72.4% responded, "Access to a quality preschool program".

The final part of the survey requested that each participant rank a number of services. Results from the section are displayed in the adjacent table.
## List of Services Ranked by Need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Not a need at all</th>
<th>Not much of a need</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>A pretty big need</th>
<th>A very big need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Natal Services</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Classes</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Classes for Grandparents</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-lingual Parenting Classes</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Childcare</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services for Children with Special Needs</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental Services for Children</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Services for Children</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence Supports</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services for Teen Parents</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse Services</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kindergarten Teacher Survey

Kindergarten teachers in Cochise County completed a survey about school readiness. The teachers were asked about students' ability to recognize the relationships between letters and sounds, basic shapes, sequencing patterns, and their ability to follow directions. Next, the educators were asked about the amount of class time devoted to helping the students catch-up, how long it takes to catch-up, and the percentage of students who fully catch-up during the school year. The teachers were also asked about the importance of quality preschool programs as well as parents' understanding of school readiness. In terms of assisting children not ready to enter kindergarten, the educators were asked to identify important interventions.

How long have you been a Kindergarten teacher?

The teachers were asked how long they had taught in elementary school. Most of them (67%), have been an elementary school teacher for ten or more years, and forty-four percent (44%) have been teaching kindergarten for ten or more years.

Fifty-three percent (53%) of the educators had received a Bachelor's degree, forty-one percent (41%) had received a Master's degree, and one individual had a Ph.D. When asked how many children were enrolled in their kindergarten class, the answers varied from 3 students to 38 students. Most of the teachers have classroom sizes between 21 and 24 students.

Each educator was asked to assess what percentage of students are able to master certain tasks upon entering kindergarten. Most of the teachers surveyed (76.5%) stated that less than a quarter of children entering kindergarten can recognize the relationship between letters and sounds.
More children are able to recognize basic shapes (seven teachers stated between 26%-50% and six teachers stated between 51%-75% of students are able to recognize basic shapes). Upon entering kindergarten, very few students are able to either count beyond 10, sequence patterns, or use nonstandard units of length to compare numbers (less than half of the children). Similarly, according to the teachers, the majority of students are in the moderate to difficulty range for following directions.

Seventy-one percent (71%) of the teachers feel that less than half of all incoming students are ready for kindergarten.

In the past five years, describe the percentage of K students ready for school.

Of the teachers who have been teaching for five or more years, only 17.6% believe that the percentage of students ready for kindergarten has increased.

Most of the teachers surveyed (76%) feel that over half of class time is devoted to helping children catch-up, and while most of the teachers (62%) feel that over half of the students manage to catch-up by the end of the school year, only one teacher feels that over 80% of students manage to join their “ready” peers. When it came to helping kids achieve the important benchmarks, the respondents listed the following interventions as helpful: small class size, teacher aids, additional health/education family services, tutors, and special training for kindergarten teachers. And, a vast majority of teachers (77%), feel that parents are not aware of what makes a child ready for school.

In general, do you think parents know if their child is not ready to start K?

When asked about preschools, ninety-four percent (94%) of the educators agreed that developmentally appropriate preschool programs are important in preparing a child for school. However, the teachers indicated that only a minority of students (25% or less) actually attended a developmentally appropriate preschool prior to entering kindergarten.
FOCUS GROUPS

As part of the assessment, members of the CCSRP conducted a number of focus groups, facilitating groups of childcare providers, parents, foster parents, and other professionals. These focus groups provided an opportunity for those working in the field and those with young children to offer their insights and shine a spotlight on both community strengths and needs.

Provider Focus Group Summary

Reasons for working with children

Childcare providers were first asked why they chose to work with young children. Overall, the childcare providers are passionate about helping children. “Children are my life.” “When they (children) finally ‘get’ something, they really light up.” “I worked as a teacher’s helper and got hooked on kids.”

Services with greatest impact

When asked what services they felt had the greatest impact on children’s development, responses included:

- A predictable, stable and consistent environment
- A caring environment
- Long and flexible hours
- Bilingual opportunities
- Rules and structure
- Role models

Most important thing to improve the quality of life for children

When asked about improving the quality of life for children, the childcare providers emphasized the importance of nutritious, yet tasty meals. One individual stated, “Could’t we get a contract from Sodexho for variety or collaborate with food servers in the community? The food we receive at the center comes from Phoenix and is bland.”

Another childcare worker mentioned that it would be convenient for families if available services were housed in one location, especially considering the rural nature of the county as well as the lack of public transportation. She also stated that DES hours are limited.

A few of the individuals mentioned that affordable, accessible medical and dental care would greatly enhance the lives of children. One person commented, “Many people can’t afford dental care. Dentists want the money up front. A lot of people are just over the limit of being able to get financial assistance – some two year olds are coming in with black teeth!” Another individual suggested that a “one-stop process for medical care applications” would be less intimidating.
Parenting education was also stressed as vital to the health and wellbeing of the children of Cochise County. It was suggested that incentives would help encourage parents to attend, and that staff should be available to watch the children. One woman suggested, “Parenting classes need to be short, offer food, and provide good guest speakers. The information needs to be applicable to the real life of parents, and the class should be held on a regular day of the month for a set amount of time.”

Support for children with special needs

The individuals participating in the focus group were asked what would make the biggest difference in the support that children with special needs and their families receive in their community. Many of the individuals agreed that the services should be local and more coordinated, available, and efficient. Statements included, “Integrated preschool is great; however, the numbers are too high and people are being turned away”. “There is confusion as to where the child is supposed to go and when and in what order”. “There are not enough services and the services that exist are not very coordinated. People fall through the cracks.”

Availability of training and other ways to improve job performance and satisfaction

In the focus groups, the childcare workers were asked what would “help them do their job better”. The improvements listed were 1) more money, 2) increased staffing, 3) more qualified staff, 4) localized training opportunities, 5) benefits such as health insurance, and 6) a travel allowance.

Support

When asked if the educators received support in developing curricula and materials, the responses included:

- Not really, but S*CCEEDS and Child & Family Resources are helpful
- Poor quality of classes at Cochise College
- Inconsistent teaching ability at Cochise College
- More streamlined process to renew the CDA certificate
- Classes should be more affordable

Professional development

When asked what would encourage the childcare educators to receive a CDA certificate or ECE degree, many individuals mentioned the expense of taking classes, so stipends would be helpful.

Workplace enhancement

When asked to list the three most important things that could be done to improve the workplace for childcare providers, the responses were:

- More bathroom breaks!
- More staff
- Fewer work hours
- Less stringent/more realistic state rules, ie. you’re not allowed to put a child down with a bottle, but that’s what they’re used to
- More support/respect from parents
School-readiness support

The childcare providers were also asked to list the three most important things to help ensure that children are healthy, safe and ready to succeed upon entering school. The group decided that in order to achieve school readiness, children need:

- Economic stability
- Appropriate socialization
- A sense of security – parents lack money and are afraid of the Border Patrol
- An understanding of boundaries
- A high self-esteem, independence, and confidence
- To attend a quality preschool – even if a parent stays at home
- Agencies and parents to work together – to network and come up with solutions.

Parent and Foster Parent Focus Group Summary

Parents and foster parents participated in a number of focus groups throughout Cochise County. The questions and topics presented at these focus groups differed from those presented to the childcare workers. The parents and guardians were asked to identify their children's milestones as well as discuss their experience with pediatric medical and dental care, preschools and to discuss issues concerning school readiness.

Learning and Milestones

At the beginning of each focus group, the participants were asked to identify their proudest moments as they related to their child's learning. Several of the participants mentioned the moment their child became potty trained, as well as the first time he or she recognized a number or letter. Several of the parents also reminisced about their child's first steps. When asked how they contributed to their child's learning, the participants replied, “By modeling”, “By being patient”, “By being supportive”, and “Making sure they had good nutrition.”

Preschool Arrangements

When asked what kind of preschool arrangements were currently being utilized, many of the parents stressed the importance of leaving their children in a safe, caring environment. It was emphasized that their children enjoy the experience and were comfortable with the provider(s). Some of the parents left their children with friends and relatives, while others used childcare centers. The parents who utilized childcare centers appreciated the fact that their children were taught some basic skills in an effort to help them prepare for kindergarten.

Special Needs

Parents of children with special needs were asked to discuss the adequacy of the programs available to their children. Overall, the focus group participants were satisfied with the services available. Members from a focus group held in Sierra Vista commented, “My child, who was born underweight, gets occupational, physical and speech therapies. The many needs of my child are getting met.” “Kids in foster care sometimes get care faster than the biological children.” However, the experience of other parents was
different. Some parents found it difficult to access services. "There needs to be immediate recognition and services for the needs of the special needs children". "Schools don't know what to do with special needs kids – they kick them out". "The special ed, teachers need better training".

When asked what agencies offered valuable services for children with special needs, the following agencies and personnel were listed: The Blake Foundation, Happy Times Day Care, SEABHS, and licensed workers.

**Medical and Dental Care**

The focus group participants were asked if they had a place to take their child for regular check-ups. For lower income parents, AHCCCS was available, but apparently difficult to attain. Many of the parents stated that there was an extremely long wait to get an appointment to see a doctor. "Usually takes 2-4 weeks to get an appointment". "It takes between 1 ½ months to 3 months to get a physical".

It was even more difficult for the parents that did not have insurance for their children. One foster parent stated, "My biological kids do not get care because we do not have any insurance". Another parent said, "It's hard when we don't have insurance. We have to take our children to Mexico."

The following clinics were mentioned as places the parents sought medical care: Agua Prieta, Chiricahua and Cananea Clinic.

In terms of dental care, the parents of foster children had better access to services. "It's easy for us to get a dentist with the foster kids". Again, the parents with AHCCCS had a much easier time receiving care. "With AHCCCS it's easy to access dental care". However, some parents with AHCCCS had to travel long distances to find a dentist that accepted the insurance. A parent from Willcox said, "I have to travel to Sierra Vista: they don't have a place here that takes AHCCCS." Families without insurance went to Agua Prieta and Cananea for care.

**Sources of Information**

When in need of parenting advice and information, the focus group participants turned to a number of sources, in particular teachers, doctors, family members, educators from childcare centers, SEABHS, Child Protective Services (CPS), the Blake Foundation, community groups, and the internet.

**Additional sources of Information**

When it came to enroll their children in school, parents listed the following sources of information: the radio, word of mouth, the newspaper, networking meetings and support groups, childcare providers, PS MAPP handouts, and the internet.

**Needed Services**

When asked what additional services were needed to assist parents, the parents mentioned the following:

- Quality childcare – available to all
- More health fairs
- A clinic that offers free services
• More special education services
• A greater number of pediatric specialists in Cochise County
• Drug Treatment
• Drug Awareness and Education
• Anything in Douglas – nothing is available
• A recreation center for older kids
• Transportation services
• Educational services to help us understand what is needed (health and learning – wise) for the children to be ready for school
• Parenting classes tailored to teens
• Mediation services
• Playgroups for networking
• Breakfast programs in schools
• Early assessment for every child

Available Services

When asked what services were currently valuable, the participants listed the following:
• WIC
• Happy Times Center – for young children
• SEABHS
• DES Childcare

Information Dissemination

When asked how to disseminate the information, the focus groups suggested that information be available through the school, the bilingual doctors, at the library, and on the radio.

Top Needs

Parents who participated in the focus group were asked what three things would make parenting a better experience. Their responses were narrowed down to include:

• Medical services for all
• Parenting classes
• A centralized location to gather relevant information
• More quality preschools
• Better paid and qualified preschool and school teachers
• Public assistance – minimum wage earners don’t qualify for assistance because they make too much money
• Better jobs – so that we can make more money and provide better things for our children and families
Key Informant Interviews

Some of the most insightful comments regarding the health and well being of preschool-aged children came to light during the one-on-one interviews. Members of the CCSR interviewed a cross section of representatives from the community. Interview questions included:

1) What community resource or service has the most significant positive impact on children pre-birth through age 5?

According to most of the health care providers, HeadStart is the most valuable service. "HeadStart is valuable because it is comprehensive, proven, works with parents, provides resources, and prepares parents to help their children become successful". However, many believed that HeadStart should be available to more families.

2) What are the biggest issues facing children ages 0-5 and their families in Cochise County?

The healthcare professionals stressed the need for greater parent education. They believe that vast numbers of parents lack information regarding developmental milestones, immunizations, and safety. There was also concern that large numbers of women do not receive prenatal care, due in part, because of a physician shortage. One of the physicians mentioned that access to care is a big problem; barriers include lack of time, money, transportation, language comprehension, and knowledge of how the health care system operates. Widespread drug abuse and domestic violence also negatively impact this age group. Teen pregnancy is also a problem.

3) Are things getting better? Are we making any progress? To what do you attribute that change?

5) What are some of the benchmarks (indicators/data elements) we should be using as a community to know we are on the right track?

This section will divide the key informant interview responses into three sections by specialty: healthcare professionals, childcare professionals, and educators.

Healthcare Professionals

1) What community resource or service has the most significant positive impact on children pre-birth through age 5?

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3) Are things getting better? Are we making any progress? To what do you attribute that change?
Some improvements were noted. Many of the individuals who were interviewed feel that there is a better understanding of child development, at least among childcare workers and educators. There is also an increased awareness of the need for prenatal care. One physician mentioned the value of home visiting services.

4) What programs and policies seem to be making the most positive difference in the lives of young children? What are some things the community should be aware of and invest more in?

One of the healthcare providers praised lay health workers for their efforts in providing services to clients who live in rural, isolated areas. “Promotoras (Spanish-speaking lay health workers) programs are great at serving the diverse needs of families.”

The Love and Logic parenting class was listed as a valuable program. In addition, mandatory requirements for childcare workers were considered beneficial.

The following is a list of services that the individuals suggested need more support:

- In-services (specialized trainings) for rural physicians and other health workers
- Parenting classes
- Programs for children with special needs
- Nutrition programs

5) What are some of the benchmarks (indicators/data elements) we should be using as a community to know we are on the right track?

The healthcare workers suggested the following indicators be used to help assess the state of families with young children:

- Decrease in the number of CPS reports
- Lower number of sex-related cases
- Decrease in crimes
- Increase in the number of children who enter kindergarten “ready”
- Lower teen pregnancy rate
- Higher number of “quality” childcare
- Increased attendance of parenting classes
- Lower DUI rates

Notable Quotes

“I think that the Chiricahua Community Health Center (CCHC) provides quality health care. CCHC has just joined the Children’s Health Network, which will bring more resources to the County. These are huge steps forward.”

“The community needs more quality childcare centers.”

“Wesleyan Preschool provides positive, motivational education with a focus on school readiness.”
Childcare professionals

1) What community resource or service has the most significant positive impact on children pre-birth through age 5?

The following services were listed by childcare professionals as having a significant impact:

- WIC
- Free immunization programs
- DES Childcare programs
- Child and Family Resources
- Blake Foundation
- Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP)
- HeadStart

2) What are the biggest issues facing children ages 0-5 and their families in Cochise County?

The childcare professionals echoed many of the concerns stated by the healthcare workers namely, teen pregnancy, lack of transportation, poverty, domestic violence, prenatal drug use, isolation, and a limited number of professionals available to deal with the all of the problems.

3) Are things getting better? Are we making any progress? To what do you attribute that change?

Many of the childcare professionals interviewed referred to the increase in the understanding of brain development as an important achievement. It was also mentioned that increased knowledge regarding medical conditions such as gum disease, folic acid deficiency, diabetes, and hypertension was beneficial to pregnant women.

4) What programs and policies seem to be making the most positive difference in the lives of young children? What are some things the community should be aware of and invest more in?

In reference to beneficial programs and policies, one individual stated, “Prop 203 and First Things First will revolutionize the state of Arizona. Historically Arizona has not put a lot of emphasis on early childhood education. The school readiness that we will see will be amazing.” Many of the childcare professionals mentioned the value of additional training and education.

5) What are some of the benchmarks (indicators/data elements) we should be using as a community to know we are on the right track?

In answer to question 5, the childcare professionals suggested the following indicators:

- Lower incidence of pre-term labor
- Higher number of children who enter kindergarten “ready”
- Fewer reports of domestic violence
- Fewer crimes reported
- Higher DECA assessment scores
- Fewer babies who test positive for drug exposure
Notable Quotes

“I have a mom that is addicted to the internet . . . so her two year old has not bonded or attached to anyone. This child is now behind developmentally. This mother is preoccupied with her boyfriend, drugs or anything else that comes up.”

“The geography of the region makes transportation more difficult. This leads to increased poverty and isolation.”

“Unfortunately, many non-working moms think preschool is not for their child. Yet, I have seen that early intervention at birth-3 has the greatest impact.”

Educators

1) What community resource or service has the most significant positive impact on children pre-birth through age 5?

Once again, HeadStart was mentioned as being a valuable service to children. One individual commented on the dedication and good will of community members. “Our community really stands behind our schools. Whenever there is a need, the schools direct families where to go to receive the help they need.” Other community resources included: the Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse, Child & Family Resources, the Chiricahua mobile unit, and Sierra Vista Regional Health Center – KidsCare.

2) What are the biggest issues facing children ages 0-5 and their families in Cochise County?

The educators who were interviewed came up with a list of issues that included:

- Lack of health insurance
- Lack of quality childcare
- Lack of early childhood education – especially for parents regarding brain development and milestones
- Language barrier
- Teen parents
- Lack of utilization of services by parents who are afraid of deportation
- Lack of affordable housing – increase in homelessness

3) Are things getting better? Are we making any progress? To what do you attribute that change?

In terms of positive strides, one educator mentioned the fact that some low income housing developments are starting to pop up in the County, although affordable housing needs to be available for families that fall into the gap. Another educator commented on the CCSRP, stating, “The voters voted for the funding of this initiative. That shows that many people want to see change and improvement. The Partnerships and Prop. 203 are very important and will make a difference.”

4) What programs and policies seem to be making the most positive difference in the lives of young children? What are some things the community should be aware of and invest more in?
While specific programs and policies were not named, it was expressed that there are many good programs for families with young children available in the county. Although these resources are available, they often operate in isolation. The passing of Proposition 203 will help coordinate the existing efforts and build the inertia to create change.

5) What are some of the benchmarks (indicators/data elements) we should be using as a community to know we are on the right track?

Possible suggested indicators included:

- Increased literacy rates among children entering kindergarten (need for baseline)
- Higher reading levels among students
- Lower crime rates
- Fewer school drop-outs
- Decrease in school suspensions

Notable Quotes

"It is harder and harder for a family to sustain an acceptable level of living that nurtures as well as enhances a child's health and success."

"The neighborhood school concept works. There has got to be a way to increase that neighborhood feeling where people can come together and share and get support. It works and has always worked. Why aren't we doing that?"
Throughout the one-year assessment period, a variety of people were consulted through various methods. Surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and county statistics were all used to assess the needs of children between the ages of pre-birth through 5 years in Cochise County. Despite the differences in income, marital status, careers, education, and occupations, many of these individuals had similar things to say regarding the pressing issues facing Cochise County.

One focus of the community assessment was to look at areas of strength in the community, as well as those that need improvement. Outreach strategies included opportunities for people to comment on promising programs and practices.

The following themes emerged:

**Strengths:**
Key informants noted that there are areas where progress is being made. What follows is not an exhaustive list but rather an opportunity to highlight some very good efforts underway in the county.

**School Readiness**
*HeadStart*—This is generally regarded as being a successful model program. Key informants, however, noted that although it does have impact and can make a difference in the lives of families in the community, it needs to be made available to more families.

*First Things First*—Key informants noted that the efforts of this initiative will surely focus the spotlight on early childhood development and health issues and have an impact on school readiness.

*Greater Understanding of Early Brain Development*—Many of the childcare professionals interviewed referred to the increase in the understanding of brain development as an important achievement. This will lay the foundation for the success of many future program interventions in the county.

**Health**
*High Quality Physicians*—Many of the family members and local physicians noted that they were satisfied with the quality of services being provided by local healthcare clinics.

*Increased Awareness of the value of Prenatal Care*—Among the health community there is general agreement that there is more awareness of the importance of prenatal care.
Challenges:
The need for quality preschools—This theme emerged over and over again. According to the kindergarten teachers surveyed, many children entering school lack basic knowledge and skills. In fact, ninety-four percent (94%) of the instructors agreed that developmentally appropriate preschool programs are helpful in preparing a child for school. Yet, interestingly, the teachers believe that there exists a disconnect between parents and educators. As revealed in the survey, seventy-seven percent (77%) of kindergarten teachers believe that parents are not aware of what it takes to make a child ready for school. However, when asked, seventy-three percent (73%) of parents indicated that quality childcare was either a "pretty big or very big need".

Healthcare—Analysis of the parent survey revealed that healthcare was ranked number two in terms of need, tied with dental care, and followed by the need for parenting classes. Many of the focus groups spent a lot of time discussing health care. While health care insurance for the underprivileged was available (AHCCCS), many families are ineligible: either they make too much money or their status in the country renders it impossible to receive insurance. To make matters worse, many people regard the application process as cumbersome. One individual stated, "There is not a system in place that provides adequate health care. There is a lack of universal health care. This is a failure to take care of our most vulnerable citizens. Health care is linked to economy; poverty plays a big role."

Geographical Challenges—Finally, several of the gaps in services for children pre-birth to age 5 years were blamed on the geographic make-up of Cochise County; it is a large rural County, peppered with mountains disrupting often remote and inhospitable landscapes. Physicians and childcare professionals commented on the difficulties related to providing services in a rural area. Individuals from both occupations stressed the need for more specialized training. However, receiving needed training is difficult. First of all, there is not enough staff. It is difficult to recruit physicians and childcare professionals to the area; especially individuals who are qualified. To receive the necessary training, these professionals must travel long distances. Even if the trainings were locally available, physicians and childcare professionals lack the sufficient number of staff for coverage. Childcare professionals, in particular, are underpaid and undervalued.
Conclusion

Cochise County is a rural area comprised of small, widely dispersed communities that, more often than not, consist largely of low-income families. The barriers that confront these families can often seem insurmountable. With no wide spread public transportation and many without insurance, young children often go without even the most basic medical and dental care. Substance abuse and domestic violence frequently interfere with the safety and emotional well-being of these children. Limited parent education and prevention services contribute to this cycle of neglect and abuse. Many families face the threat of being torn apart due to issues of nationality within the family group. At any time, the caregiver of some of these children can be deported, leaving broken families that are unable to care adequately for the children left behind. These issues and many more face Cochise County families every day.

The individuals who have conducted this assessment project and the myriad of organizations who have supported this effort are committed to investing in the future of Cochise County’s youngest children. This includes helping to establish policies that will further the cause of young children in this community, applying resources, and building efficient programs that will positively contribute to the care, education, and health of children birth through age five. Broad topics such as quality education programs that require providers to be certified, enabling those providers to be recognized for their value and professionalism, health care services that are accessible, affordable, and provide care to all young children, and parents’ access to information on early childhood development are a small sample of the many topics to be addressed in the future.

The challenges that face Cochise County and Arizona as a whole are complicated and varied, none of which can be solved without the dedication of an entire community. It is with this commitment that Cochise County will march forward and continue the work that has already begun to ensure that all children are safe, healthy, and ready to succeed in school and in life.
“Arizona must be more than a great state to grow old in. It must be a great state to grow up in.”
~Governor Janet Napolitano

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