

# SomerPromise: A Campaign for Student Success

## KINDERGARTEN READINESS

FRAMEWORK FOR SOMERVILLE STUDENT SUCCESS							
Key transition years							
Birth 1-4 years	K	Grades 1-3	Grades 4-7	8	9	10	Grades 11-12+
Kindergarten Readiness	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Literacy	High School Readiness	Graduation and College/Career Readiness				
Family and Community Engagement Family-Student Supports							

**INTENDED IMPACT:**  
More children are ready for kindergarten.

**AT A GLANCE**

- In the fall of 2012, Somerville Public Schools' student population included 441 incoming kindergartners.
- 45% (198) of these kindergartners were determined as likely to need intensive instructional support to achieve subsequent reading goals.

## Kindergarten Readiness: Importance and Relevance

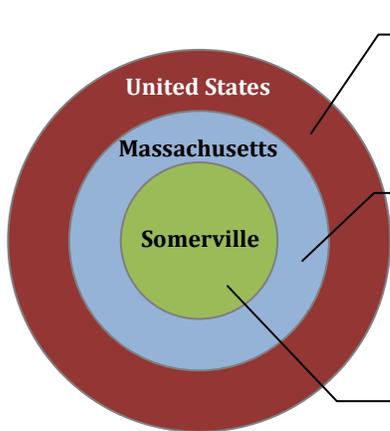
### WHY KINDERGARTEN READINESS?

The first five years of a child's life lay the foundation for future development. Researchers, educators, parents and policy makers agree that a child's future academic success is strongly supported by being ready to learn and prepared to participate in kindergarten. However, children vary widely in their resources and opportunities for development. Low-income children tend to be at a particular disadvantage, in part because they are less likely to participate in high quality pre-kindergarten programs, which research shows is critical to kindergarten readiness. Studies have shown that 50% or more of the educational achievement gaps that exist between low-income children and their peers are present at kindergarten entry.<sup>1</sup> In order to give children the best chance of succeeding in school and graduating from high school ready for college and a career, it is essential for communities to invest in children's early years.

**Research on What Works  
to Address Kindergarten Readiness**

- Engaging families in various ways (for example, by guiding parents in their support of children's literacy outside the classroom, sharing data on a child's performance in the classroom, and making parents aware of the challenges associated with the transition to kindergarten)
- Engaging service providers in the community in order to coordinate services for children and develop a collaborative approach
- Increasing program quality through teacher training and education

### HOW IS KINDERGARTEN READINESS CURRENTLY BEING ADDRESSED?



**Nationally:** Through the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) fund, established in 2011, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health & Human Services have awarded a total of \$500 million in grant funds to 14 states, including Massachusetts, to improve early learning.

**In Massachusetts:** With \$50 million in RTT-ELC funding, the state is focused on strengthening early learning services, which includes expanding the use of program quality ratings and standards, creating an early learning and development assessment system (including a kindergarten entry assessment tool), and increasing family and community engagement.

**In Somerville:** As one of five communities statewide to receive a portion of RTT-ELC funds (\$160,000), the city is working to improve coordination of early learning services in the city. Plan highlights include identifying best practices and gaps in services, developing and implementing a system to connect service providers to one another, and implementing a professional development system.

## Status of Kindergarten Readiness in Somerville

Somerville Public Schools (SPS) currently offers preschool, known as SMILE, for roughly 180 children. The remaining 260 students attend preschool offered by Head Start or private providers, or do not attend preschool. In the fall of 2012, 90% of incoming kindergartners had attended some type of preschool (although the hours, structure, and curriculum of the programs vary).

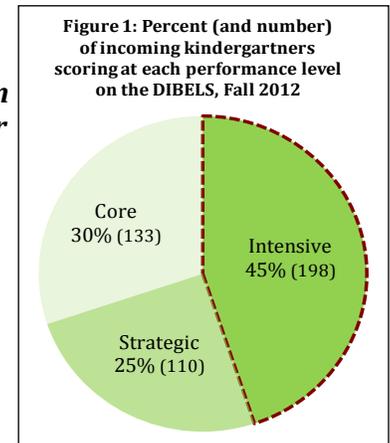
Somerville is committed to a “whole child” approach to understanding and addressing kindergarten readiness, taking children’s academic and social-emotional needs into consideration. The city is still exploring how best to define and measure the different dimensions of kindergarten readiness. For now, SPS uses both a screening tool that assesses basic numeracy and the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS), a set of measures that assess reading and pre-reading skills. DIBELS is a good indicator of the level of instructional support kindergartners are likely to need in order to succeed academically.

### HOW MANY KINDERGARTNERS IN SOMERVILLE ARE NOT WELL-PREPARED?

- Figure 1 shows the distribution of scores on the DIBELS for Somerville’s 441 incoming kindergartners in the fall of 2012. **Forty-five percent (198) scored in the high risk category, “Intensive” level on the DIBELS, indicating a need for intensive instructional support to achieve subsequent early literacy goals.**

### WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO KINDERGARTEN READINESS IN SOMERVILLE?

- **Data indicate that income is a critical factor in Somerville, just as it is in other communities.** In the fall of 2012, 61% of kindergartners who were eligible for free and reduced lunch (a proxy for low income) scored at the “Intensive” level on the DIBELS versus 18% of children who were not eligible.
- **Research shows that other factors – health, home environment, family stability – influence early school readiness.** It will be important to further understand what is happening in Somerville that sets children up for success and puts them at risk.
- **Programs across the city need to move toward operating at the same high level of quality and effectiveness.** Effective early education can enhance readiness if programs are prepared to support the learning and development of children with a wide range of experiences. Currently, most early education programs in Somerville participate in the Massachusetts Quality Review and Improvement System (QRIS) and have submitted at Step 1 or Step 2, with Step 4 being the highest current possible step. Given the diversity of children and families in Somerville, each program serves a different population of children. As a result, some programs will need to be able to offer more and different types of support, which will require better use and alignment of resources city-wide.



## Somerville’s Plans to Address Kindergarten Readiness

SomerPromise has identified three initial approaches to addressing kindergarten readiness, to be further defined by a working group made up of city, school, and community members.

1. **Address family-student support needs.** Work with community partners to identify and prioritize research-based family support strategies for young children accordingly.
2. **Increase access to pre-K for low-income families.** Start to move toward universal pre-K targeting families who have not enrolled their children in any setting and would be eligible for free and reduced lunch.
3. **Improve program quality in all settings.** Based on the QRIS, raise program quality across the board to develop an early childhood system of education and care that will meet the needs of Somerville’s diverse population.

For information on how to support kindergarten readiness in Somerville, please contact Anna Fox Doherty at [adoherty@somervillema.gov](mailto:adoherty@somervillema.gov) or 617-625-6600 x2341.



<sup>1</sup> David and Lucile Packard Foundation; Kauffman Foundation; Ford Foundation; Rhode Island KIDS Count. Getting Ready: Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative: A 17 State Partnership. 2005. [www.gettingready.org/](http://www.gettingready.org/)