

Quality Rating and Improvement System

TECHNICAL PROPOSAL

Capacity:

Clark County has demonstrated both a capacity and an ability to link community organizations, mobilize existing networks and maximize existing resources and infrastructures.

Clark County, located in Southwest Washington, continues to be one of the fastest growing counties in Washington State. In spite of its rapid growth, or perhaps because of it, Clark County has gained a reputation for being a community of partners.

Organizations from many different sectors have a long history and rich tradition of working together to leverage resources that improve the quality of life in Clark County. This has been demonstrated by committed partnerships that are improving the lives of Clark County's youngest residents.

Organizations supporting young children and their families include a wide array of child care providers (centers and family care), Early/Head Start, ECEAP, public and mental health, early intervention, school districts, family resource centers, public libraries and governmental agencies.

Educational Service District 112

ESD 112 is the lead agency for this proposal. Located in Vancouver, Washington, the ESD manages over 275 programs, most of which are grant funded. ESD 112 provides monitoring for all of its programs as required in the Administrative and Operational Guidelines, which are more stringent than most federal grant requirements. ESD 112 consistently meets all administrative requirements for managing federal grant programs including the single audit requirement, fund accountability, contract compliance, and program performance as dictated by federal guidelines.

ESD 112 is not only a strong local partner but is part of a statewide ESD early learning resource delivery system. As one of nine ESDs in the state, ESD 112 is able to focus locally and, at the same time, provide leadership through its statewide ESD network. The nine ESDs are now working together to coordinate a statewide system of support and professional development to child care providers and to serve as a crucial bridge to the K-12 system.

The ESD 112 fiscal reporting structure allows each program to receive customized reports and track budgets at the program level and has a dedicated Budget Analyst that provides budget planning and review. This enables effective contract management with

school district and community partners. ESD 112 has managed state and federal grants for 30 years. Grants have included Corporation for National and Community Service, National Science Foundation funding focused on improving science education in grades K-12, 21st Century Community Learning grants to provide after school services to youth in rural economically disadvantaged communities, and most recently, a U.S. Department of Education 'Teaching American History' grant in partnership with Washington State University.

Educational Service District 112 is not only an effective lead agency but also participates in a variety of initiatives as an effective, supportive partner in the early learning, K-12 and post-secondary arenas. Children Youth and Family Services, a division within ESD 112, manages both the Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium and the Child Care Resource and Referral program. ESD's partners include dozens of state, local and community-based organizations that helped develop and support these two leaders within the local, state and national early learning community.

Child Care Resource and Referral (CC R & R)

A program of ESD 112, CC R & R is Clark County's public child care information and referral agency. Our vision is to lead community efforts so that all families can find and retain quality child care. CCR&R provides direct training and support to all licensed child care providers, and fields over 7,000 calls annually for information and referral services.

For 15 years the CCR&R program has developed innovative support services for child care providers and families. One example is ESD 112's pioneering development of the family child care Provider Networks as a program enhancement that builds capacity and increases quality care in Clark County. The Provider Networks improve care quality and stabilize the supply of family childcare services in Clark County. Quality improvements promote healthy development for children, increase retention of qualified providers, strengthen relationships between providers and parents, and enhance each provider's business practices.

Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium (SWCCC)

In 1989, Clark County's business, education and civic leaders joined Educational Service District 112 to take an extraordinary step: they launched the first of what has now become the largest community-run child care system in the United States. Today, this effort is recognized as one of the "best and brightest" examples of local, state and federal government programs addressing one of today's toughest issues: child care.

The Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium, whose mission is to build "relationships with children, families, and communities which promote children's development as confident, competent learners, has been recognized as an exemplary program by the Ford Foundation and has been presented with the "Innovations in American Government Award" by the Foundation. Accessibility, affordability, and quality are key areas the Consortium addresses through quality programs that focus on the needs of the child.

A natural pilot for Washington State's QRIS the Consortium now operates 27 centers in Clark and Cowlitz counties serving over 2,000 infant-through-school-age children and their families. SWCCC has over 200 employees, including assistants, teachers and center directors supported by trainers and a curriculum specialist. Programs are integrated to include children with special needs, the Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), Full Day Head Start, Early Head Start, and Mildly Ill Child Care. Weekend care and extended-care hours are also available.

SWCCC centers all operate under a single provider number with the DSHS subsidy system. For continuity and service the Department of Early Learning has designated one licenser working with the entire network of centers. This structure, which promotes consistency and continuity and quality for families and schools where most centers are located, will act as the lead organization for piloting QRIS measures. SWCCC opens an average of one or more centers each year and is well-positioned to provide feedback to both the region and the state.

Of the 2000 children served by SWCCC Centers approximately 450 children (and their families) receive a child care subsidy. This large number of children under a single management umbrella offers a strong opportunity for common measures and practices dealing with parent input, employee training and professional development, data gathering and evaluation.

In January 2001 over 400 community leaders came together for an "Every Moment Counts in the Life of a Child" community forum that featured the latest research on early childhood brain development. This forum issued a call for action to improve outcomes for the County's youngest children, including increasing the numbers of children entering kindergarten ready to succeed.

The following August saw six early childhood agencies convene a meeting and affirm the need for fundamental system changes in order to achieve kindergarten readiness - and that these kind of changes would, in turn, require a new level of collaboration among multiple and diverse service providers. It would also require closing what was then a "deep disconnect" between early learning and K-12 education in the County.

The result was a consortium, Support for Early Learning and Families (SELF), a collaboration of organizations with a simple mission: *Working together to build a community that nurtures the full potential of our youngest children.* ESD 112 (through Child Care Resource and Referral and Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium) was one of the six founding members of SELF.

Due to SELF's work, Clark County is now building an early learning system that affirms parents as a child's first teacher, that enhances the quality of early learning care and that prepares children for success in school and life. Since 2001 the SELF community collaboration has grown to include twenty-two community partners (see page 14).

Environmental scans have targeted a variety of demographics ranging from Russian and Spanish speaking parents, to low-income families, voters, teachers, childcare providers, and childcare center staff and parents.

Scans include community needs assessments (Head Start), resource needs surveys (CC R & R and Referral), parent surveys (Southwest Washington Childcare Consortium and OSPI-funded ESD 112 Readiness To Learn Project). Additional survey and evaluation instruments are currently under development.

In 2006 SELF and ESD 112 jointly conducted an extensive community-wide assessment of Clark County families and service providers that revealed several specific challenges facing parents, providers and support organizations as they attempt to build an effective early learning system. Among the findings:

- A disconnect exists between early childhood research and practice.
- Parents and service providers need to be aware of, and connected to, available resources.
- Home care providers often feel isolated and lack support
- Immigrant, non-English speaking families face particular challenges.
- Parents, children, providers and schools are not always aligned with regards to school readiness guidelines and goals.

The SELF Ready Schools Advisory Committee, with ESD 112 playing a leadership role, recognizes that to have a lasting positive impact on school readiness in Clark County there needs to be a system and mechanisms for connecting all of the key stakeholders. Through grant dollars from the Foundation for Early Learning and the Clark County Early Learning Fund awarded to ESD 112, this advisory group is creating a set of Kindergarten transition standard operating procedures. This process includes identifying gaps in services and subsequent goals using the Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping process to help inform the work.

Parents Communication, Connections and Leadership

➤ Communications. ESD 112 and more than 20 of its partners provide resources and information to parents and families through various channels including web-based and print newsletters, resource websites, parent representatives on advisory boards, childcare resource and referral programs, provider networks and local schools.

A key source for parents to access early learning info is through the DEL-funded *Born Learning* campaign in Clark County. This campaign is managed by ESD 112 and implemented through the SELF collaboration. A key element is Early Learning Resource Corners found at 10 public locations across the county; including five at public libraries. Each Resource Corner provides informational materials that support a parent and caregiver's success as their child's first teacher. Each Resource Corner has *Born Learning* campaign publications that show parents and caregivers how to turn everyday moments into fun learning opportunities and support their healthy development from birth to the start of school. The Resource Corners also have resource binders on

subjects like School Readiness and Literacy, Medical and Dental, Child Care and Child Development. Many of the materials are available in Spanish and Russian.

➤ Connections. Day to day contact provides a great opportunity to connect with parents as they drop off and pick up children. Each SWCCC child care center has its own parent advisory group. Parent surveys conducted by Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium Centers indicated an increased interest in accessing information and resources through electronic channels, both website and email. This is consistent with feedback from parents being served by other partners.

Some parents, who lack computer Internet access or knowledge, prefer to receive communication in print form, which will continue to be provided.

Child Care Resource and Referral also provides phone services for parents, handling 7700 local calls for assistance and information in 2005.

➤ Leadership. ESD 112 and the many SELF partners value the importance of parent voice and leadership in the provision of program services. Many of the partners currently integrate parent leadership teams and advisory groups into their program services. Examples are:

- Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium. Each Center has a Parent Advisory Committee and a parent serves on the Board of Directors of Children Northwest (SWCCC's parent agency).
- Educational Opportunities for Children and Families. EOCF has a Policy Advisory Council (PAC) to guide its Early/Head Start and ECEAP service provision; the PAC has several parent representatives.
- ESD 112 Readiness To Learn Project. The Project has convened Kindergarten Transition Teams for each of the five participating elementary schools and each Team has parent leader representatives to ensure a strong parent voice in the planning and provision of services.

Representatives from these and additional parent groups will participate on the Project Team and in project planning and implementation. An additional component will be the creation of the Key Parent Communicator Network consisting of 10-15 parent representatives from key partners. Key Parent Communicators will provide both input into the planning process and disseminate information to other parents and partners. See additional information on page 15 and 16.

Cultural Relevance

In a March 2007 Schools Readiness Transition Plan survey a number of parents reinforced the importance of having materials available in their native language. A variety of print publications include a culturally relevant resource tabloid for parents available in three languages: English, Spanish and Russian. Brochures and pamphlets also provide parent information regarding additional resources and specific program support for early learning opportunities. Support for Early Learning and Families (SELF)

as well as individual programs and partners have created information and resource materials and brochures.

In addition, several agencies (Child Care Resource and Referral and Children's Home Society) engage Outreach Coordinators to work specifically with Clark County's two largest immigrant communities (Latino and Slavic residents). The focus is on Spanish speaking parents and Russian speaking child care providers (CCR&R) and Russian speaking parents (CHS) and their families.

A strong example of ESD 112's capacity to provide culturally-relevant services is the Provider Network model. The Provider Network's partners have significant experience working with the full breadth of the county's diverse child care providers. The project has been designed to reflect the values imbedded in culturally competent work in diverse communities, as follows.

- Network events and meetings are a warm, welcoming place where a variety of communication styles are encouraged and supported. Ample opportunity is available for informal networking, sharing of feelings and experiences, and affirming individual contributions.
- Recognizing that the provider community has distinct cultural needs, the model has been adapted to not be solely geographic. A culturally specific Slavic Provider Cohort currently exists and is facilitated by a bi-lingual bi-cultural mentor.
- The model is neighborhood-based, enabling providers to have easy access to meeting locations and build bonds with peers in the same geographic area. The meeting locations are in facilities that are accessible to people of all physical abilities.
- Implementation of culturally responsive training curricula is a priority of the Network. Utilizing an adult learner model, trainers will ensure that all information is relevant to the families that are served by the child care providers and that providers are connected to resources and support that honor their individual cultures, beliefs and practices. Each training will start by gathering information about the families that are served by the providers in order to best address needs.
- In Clark County, 87% of child care providers accept children on child care subsidy, and approximately 12% of children under 13 years of age are living in poverty. Through the Provider Network, child care providers will have access to information and resources available to low-income families and information offered through trainings will be sensitive to the needs of this population.

Educators and Early Learning Programs:

The ESD 112 Child Care Resource and Referral database indicates there are currently 411 family home and center programs operating in Clark County with a total operating capacity of 9,790 slots. These programs and sites are reporting 2,090 vacancies.

Currently Clark College and CCR&R are leading the efforts within SELF in preparing a professional development survey to assess the needs of early learning professionals and service providers. Clark College is also providing module classes as an option within the Clark County Provider Network and to SWCCC as part of the DEL Higher Education Bridges Project, connecting family home providers and child care providers to higher education. Statewide course outcomes assessment was developed through a consortium of community/technical colleges.

Clark County provides numerous opportunities for early learning educational and professional development including higher education opportunities through Clark College, Washington State University Vancouver and Warner Pacific College.

A new partnership with Olympic ESD makes online training available through QWEST.

ESD 112 and various partners coordinate and offer a wide range and level of STARS training. A more detailed picture of levels of education and professional development opportunities will be provided through the professional development survey due to begin in November 2007. This survey also includes level of education of trainers.

What Early Educators Need

ESD 112 has experience assessing the needs of child care providers. In November 2003 CCR&R conducted a needs assessment of home-based providers that indicated strong interest in strengthening their skills in child guidance, parent communication and child development; and for support from experienced peers and mentors. These providers expressed the desire for hands-on support to enable successful implementation of classroom training. They sought opportunities for peer interaction to overcome isolation and for problem solving.

A Focus Group of community stakeholders¹ was held in January 2004 on the topic of family care provider needs. Input was secured concerning the barriers that providers face in achieving quality care and stability, as well as the potential strengths, challenges and benefits of the Provider Network model. Time, money, access to training and isolation were seen as the greatest barriers to quality. Lack of cash flow, help with licensing requirements and lack of a support system were seen as the greatest barriers to stability.

According to initial feedback, educators would benefit from a network of resources and materials that promote consistency across the county and the state. This could be facilitated through a statewide Early Learning Education resource network, an Early Learning training cadre housed at each of the nine ESDs, and statewide information system that would link key organizations.

¹ Stakeholders included Clark College, Washington State University Vancouver, Clark County Family Child Care Association, Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCCEL) and the Fort Vancouver Regional Library District.

Additionally, this network could also have connections to the statewide Community/Technical College system connecting educators to established career pathways with bridges to Higher Education. Through local collaboration, planning efforts can be responsive to local community needs by providing a variety of in-depth training opportunities.

Partnering with K-12

ESD 112 maintains a close working relationship with each of the nine school districts in Clark County. ESD 112 supports policy makers, administrators, teachers and students through numerous programs, training, technical assistance and resources.

Among ESD 112's successful K-12 partnership services in Southwest Washington communities are:

- National Science foundation grant to improve science education in grade K-12,
- Goals 2000 grant funding TELDEC technology grant,
- Northwest Services Academy/AmeriCorps bringing national service to the Pacific Northwest, health screenings for children, in-service to parents, birth-to-three special education, jobs for disadvantaged youth,
- Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium (SWCCC) with the development of 27 child care centers, specialized transportation, business partners consortium, and energy management services.
- For the past 20 years, ESD 112 has operated a federal JTPA now WIA program employing more than 800 youth per year in a four-county job training program. This program employs a full and part-time staff of 25 and operates on a \$1.2 million budget. For 2 years a career academy has trained WIA participants to work in child care centers. Participants received STARS training, Food Handlers CARD, HIV training and beginning skills in child development in supervised settings.

The nine school districts in Clark County serve approximately 90,000 students k-12. Thousands of young children enter Kindergarten each year. At this time only two Vancouver elementary schools are eligible for the Full Day Kindergarten funding available through the Washington State Legislature and OSPI.

The Kindergarten options in Clark County range from full day/tuition based, to 1/2 day programs, to full day district sponsored programs. Many schools are currently in the planning process to move to full day kindergarten. They are addressing many issues, including kindergarten curriculum and readiness assessments and have had discussions about a common assessment in Clark County. Schools look to the ESD for assistance and support for their early learning and kindergarten programs.

SELF promotes a neighborhood-based service delivery model that builds on existing services and secures new resources to achieve an improved, effective early learning system. Elementary schools are a critical part of the delivery system, serving as "community learning centers" in targeted geographic areas. These community learning centers not only house community-sponsored child care and preschool programs but

also serve as family resource centers, supporting and empowering parents as their children's first teachers.

SELF's Ready Schools Advisory Committee focused on systems improvement and professional development among early learning and K-12 educators. Through on-going dialogue and self-assessment, the Advisory Group identified coordination, assessment and system integration as key elements in achieving a *Ready Schools System Development Project* model that creates the necessary infrastructure to ensure sustainability.

The identified System Integration needs included:

- A profound lack of on-going cross-systems communication and joint professional development opportunities exist for early learning providers and public school teachers
- Early learning providers and public school staff currently operate in a siloed fashion. Little continuity of curriculum and instruction exists. Furthermore, local stakeholders act with different definitions of school readiness as it pertains to children entering kindergarten.
- Outreach and inclusion of families in the transition process is uncoordinated and inefficient.

The assessment also determined the need for a Unified Assessment Design for Kindergarten entry. This was informed by the following information:

- For many children, the public school setting is their first experience with any assessment. Oftentimes the assessment reveals delays that should have been addressed prior to kindergarten entry. The delay in receiving necessary services results in children who begin formalized instruction drastically behind their peers. Research indicates that children who start kindergarten behind all too often never fully catch up.
- School districts have little assessment information on incoming kindergarten students. Districts report a need for a baseline assessment for evaluation purposes. Having such information would put later assessments in a child's education into a more meaningful context and better inform the comments regarding young children's progress through the early primary grades.
- Districts report that less than ½ of all incoming children are registered for kindergarten in May. This presents significant challenges in planning for the needed number of classrooms and teachers let alone planning for the instruction of individual children.

By strategically addressing the elements described above, Clark County partners and ESD 112 seek to create a seamless system of early childhood education and transition into the public school setting.

Professional Development

Numerous professional development and educational opportunities currently exist within Clark County. These include:

SELF has a compelling vision that is shared by ESD 112: *Clark County is a place where our youngest children are valued. The community makes a significant investment of time and financial resources for our youngest children. Children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. The early learning and public school systems are closely woven and interdependent.*

In 2003 SELF published the *Clark County Early Learning System Plan* to serve as a road map for efforts to improve outcomes for Clark County's youngest children. One of the four pillars of the Plan's System Model was Provider Support and Education. This included quality standards; professional development, training and support; and caregiver and child retention.

The *System Plan* was revisited in 2006 and strategic priorities adopted consistent with the *Kids Matter* framework. SELF brings together Clark County organizations, businesses, and individuals to build a Ready Community that supports efforts to achieve Ready Families, Ready Children and Ready Schools. The overall goals of these Strategies are: *Children Ready for Success in School and Life.*

The SELF Ready Children strategy is directly aligned with the goals of this QRIS RFP. The Strategy's objective is: *Enhancing the quality of early learning care and development so all children thrive in positive environments.* The Strategy's projected outcome is: Families will have access to high quality, affordable child care and early education programs staffed by providers and teachers who are adequately trained and compensated. A key element of the Ready Children strategy is:

- *Support development of the Quality Rating and Improvement System in Clark County.* QRIS provides a voluntary rating system for parents to consider when selecting early learning care providers.

In just six years SELF efforts have garnered more than \$3 million in new early learning investments and leveraged numerous other partner resources that have enabled Clark County to better prepare our youngest children for success in school and life.

Through these and other collaborative efforts Clark County has not only demonstrated its commitment to early learning, it has created the infrastructure to support such efforts. And, through the Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium's numerous centers, Clark County has an ideal vehicle for piloting a Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Environmental Community Scans

ESD 112 and its partners have designed, organized and implemented a wide range of environmental scans utilizing surveys, focus groups, research and data gathering to support districts, schools, professional development programs, childcare resources and referrals, early learning programs and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Surveys have employed both paper and electronic data gathering and reporting.

- A full array of STARS training offerings.
- Ready Children, Ready Schools, Ready Families
- Parents as Teachers
- Clark College ECE certificates
 - Applied Science and Applied Science-Transfer degrees
- Bridges (Clark College/ESD CCR&R)
- Provider Network Training and Technical Assistance
- Southwest Washington Childcare Consortium (27 child care centers)
- SWCCC/Dept of Labor and Industry- Apprenticeship Program
- Promoting First Relationships (SWCCC, EOCF, Clark College)
- Washington Scholarship
- Annual SW Tapestry Conference
- Clark College Opportunity Grant – Scholarship for ECE career pathway

Three professional development elements are described more fully as follows:

- The annual Tapestry Conference is a professional development partnership of Southwest Washington agencies (including ESD 112 and the Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium) who jointly sponsor a 300 person conference to celebrate and honor child care providers' commitment to children and families. The event includes numerous workshops, guest speakers and resources.
- Promoting First Relationships. Led by Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium, this project focuses on the attachment bond between children and caregivers as the beginning point for healthy growth and development which promotes the child's capacity to learn. Caregivers learn crucial concepts that help them understand why it is so important for children to become attached to their caregiver, what helps children grow as capable and confident learners, and how to engage children in nurturing and responsive interactions.
- Bridges. Provider Network members access higher education to enhance child care quality through an innovative partnership between Clark College and Child Care Resource and Referral. The "Bridges" curriculum provides mentor time, training and evaluation for providers through participation in the Guiding Behavior course.

Professional development is also a key focus of Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium's programs. Through Washington State's Apprenticeship Program 200 employees of the childcare centers have the ability to attend community college (Clark) with a reduced tuition rate (40% reduction). Employees also have the opportunity to receive STARS training in-house through on-site registered STARS Trainers who provide nap time curriculum and evening trainings. Trainers have also worked with Clark College and Washington State University Vancouver in providing classes toward both Associates and Bachelors degrees in Early Learning.

ESD 112's Child Care Resource and Referral led the development of a neighborhood-based system of Provider Networks for home-based childcare providers, a

recommended and proven strategy that addresses the quality care and professional development needs identified in Clark County. Provider Networks address the professional development goals identified in the *Clark County Early Learning System Plan* and by Educational Service District 112's Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) program.

Provider Networks engage providers at various points along the professional development continuum, with a variety of tailored supports and services, including mentoring, training, technical assistance, and consultation. Provider Networks are responsive to the input from home-based childcare providers who cited strong interest in having peers to talk with, mentors to consult, and opportunities to continue learning through shared experiences with other providers. To date four Provider Networks have been convened in Clark County; including one specific to Russian-speaking family care providers.

The Provider Networks' family child care provider members benefit from two types of Professional Development:

- Provider Network members access higher education to enhance child care quality through an innovative partnership between Clark College and Child Care Resource and Referral. The "Bridges" curriculum provides mentor time, training and evaluation for providers through participation in the Guiding Behavior course.
- Training helps to inform providers how to support school transition and to strengthen their ability to effectively participate in Kindergarten transition services and connect them to family support services. In addition, support is provided to convene early learning (child care, Early/Head Start, ECEAP) leaders to identify steps that will strengthen and integrate current efforts to achieve the goal of preparing children for success in school and life.

In 2005 Child Care Resource and Referral conducted 51 trainings – for 714 providers.

Child Care Resource and Referral also a partner with Olympic ESD has offered a new professional development partnership to the other ESD providing online training to childcare and early learning providers. ESD 112 staff are currently training to be facilitators to support this online professional development opportunity.

Another long-standing professional development opportunity available to Clark County early learning and K-12 professionals in the ESD 112 region is *Education After Hours*. This program provides a space for learning best practices, along with a sharing and networking opportunity.

Evaluation and Assessment

ESD 112 and SELF partners have a strong track record of evaluating and assessing its early learning projects. It is a common practice to contract with Washington State University Vancouver to fulfill this function.

For a project's impact to be measured it is imperative that a unified and systemic evaluation framework be designed and implemented. This results in a process to analyze data collected and to systematically utilize the data to determine program changes that will enhance community services. The goal is to move beyond the limited information provided by enumerating program outputs in order to determine how each specific initiative – such as Provider Networks, Kindergarten transition services, etc. - demonstrates a positive impact on school readiness.

The measurement tool selection process and the overall evaluation methodology is commonly designed through coordinated efforts of ESD 112 and Washington State University Vancouver (WSUV). The individual service providers are responsible for collecting and inputting data, to be submitted to and tabulated by WSUV. The evaluation process is both qualitative and quantitative; providing for a formative evaluation during the program's first year start-up period.

In August 2007 the ESD 112-managed Clark County Provider Network, established a 2007-2008 Evaluation Plan. Developed by Jane Lanigan, Ph.D the evaluation plan has been designed to assess the overall success of the Clark County Provider Network Project. A table outlining the activities, measurable output and outcomes, tools, analyses and evaluation schedule is available in the Appendices as is the Year 1 Evaluation Summary.

SELF Ready Schools Advisory Group is focused on kindergarten transition and creating conversations between early learning professional and providers and Kindergarten programs. In addition, the Annual Tapestry Conference has been expanded to include early elementary teachers creating additional opportunities for conversations.

Another example of an evaluation to assess and improve the quality of childcare is the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale used by the Provider Network

Currently Clark College is developing an Environmental Science course with legislated funds that will count as a science transfer for BA degree and meet the needs of providers in early learning through 2nd grade. This will be part of the general education requirements. The course is targeting science theory and curriculum with a focus on birth-to-eight year olds.

Community and Potential Partnerships:

Clark County is recognized as a community of partners. Two of the over 100 community partnerships are Support for Early Learning and Families (SELF) and the Quality Schools Task Force.

- The SELF partnership has matured and been recognized as an effective model of an early learning community collaboration. One example of SELF's recognition is that in December 2006 Clark County was the first community invited to submit a funding proposal under the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's *Promising Models* program. This funding request is pending final

approval and may involve a co-investment from the Casey Family Programs of Seattle. ESD 112 is serving as lead agency for the funding.

- In 2007, when rapid growth and school sitings became an issue, an innovative collaboration emerged involving county and local municipalities, school districts, developers, builders and realtors. This group, the Quality Schools Task Force, examined the impact of growth on education in Clark County, including the implications of the Washington Learns recommendation for full day kindergarten. The Task Force determined to work together to coordinate an effective plan to address the needs of education as part of community planning and development and to try to mitigate the negative impact of rapid growth on schools' ability to provide a quality education for all students. This unique partnership approach caught the attention of others and with funds from the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) the Quality Schools Task Force published a planning guide, *Common Ground: Aligning Goals for Education and Growth* that not only chronicled the process in Clark County but was distributed statewide in an effort to assist other counties and educators to also partner to address quality education as part of an overall growth plan. This project will have relevant implications for the issue of capital investment for early learning programs so important in delivering quality programs.

The SELF collaboration has grown to include the full array of Clark County stakeholders engaged in the work of early learning and early childhood development. These committed partners now include:

- Arc of Clark County/PRIDE for Kids
- Battleground Public Schools
- Children's Administration – DCFS Vancouver
- Children's Center
- Children's Home Society of Washington
- Clark College
- Clark County Community Network
- Clark County Public Health
- Columbia River Mental Health Services
- Department of Early Learning
- Educational Service District 112
- Educational Opportunities for Children and Families
- Evergreen Public Schools
- Fort Vancouver Regional Library District
- Innovative Services Northwest
- Learning Avenues Childcare Centers
- Legacy Salmon Creek Hospital-LHS
- Southwest Washington Medical Center
- Vancouver Housing Authority
- Vancouver Public Schools
- Washington State University Vancouver
- YWCA of Clark County

Project Approach / Methodology - Draft work plan and project schedule

Methodology

A.

1. Environmental Community Scan:

The Clark County QRIS Project Environmental Scan will be designed and implemented by a broad-based, diverse Project Team comprised of center-based and family child care providers, parents, Early/Head Start providers, ECEAP providers, public school and public library representatives, higher education, and other key early learning stakeholders.

Key sources of information will include the ESD 112 Child Care Resource and Referral Database (includes all licensed caregivers in Clark County) and the Educational Opportunities and Families (EOCF, Early/Head Start provider) Community Needs Assessment (comprehensive every 3 years, with annual updates); along with surveys and focus groups involving child care providers, educators and parents.

a. Parents:

The Project Team will gather data on what parents want and need utilizing methods that parents prefer for getting information about early learning opportunities. These methods to be implemented by the Project Coordinator will include:

- Review existing needs assessments and documentation of parent needs. This information includes the Clark County Early Learning System Plan (SELF), previous focus group and survey results (ESD 112 Readiness To Learn project) and the EOCF (Head Start) Community Needs Assessment.
- Conduct parent surveys and six focus groups involving parents served by licensed child care providers and FFN (family, friends and neighbor care) informal caregivers. Information will be gathered through child care centers (SWCCC, Learning Avenues Child Care and other centers), family child care (members of the Clark County Provider Networks and Clark County Family Child Care Association), Early/Head Start centers and through elementary schools. Parents served by the informal caregiver system will be reached through the SELF Ready Families network of family support / home visitors employed by several agencies (ESD 112, EOCF, Children's Home Society, Clark County Public Health, Innovative Services Northwest). Survey formats will include both print (hard copy) and Internet-based (Survey Monkey).
- Cultural relevancy. Key cultural networks will be utilized as gateways to include specific ethnic and racial groups; with a particular focus on Latino and Slavic residents. The support of the Russian Provider Network, ESD 112 (Spanish speaking) and Children's Home Society (Russian-speaking) outreach workers and Latino Community Resource Group will be tapped.

The Project Team will ensure parent leadership (voice) in QRIS planning through the following methods:

- Project Team representation. Parent leaders will be represented on the project team from the Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium (parent member of the

SWCCC [Children Northwest] Board), the EOCF Policy Advisory Council, ESD 112 Readiness To Learn Kindergarten transition teams, Clark College and Clark County Provider Networks.

- Meetings of parent leadership/advisory groups. There will be scheduled presentations and parent voice input gathered from meetings of the EOCF / Head Start Policy Advisory Council, and several elementary Parent Teacher Associations /Organizations (PTA/Os).
- Key Parent Communicator Network. This network will consist of 10 -15 parent representatives from key partners. Key Parent Communicators will provide input into the planning process and disseminate information to other parents and partners.

b. Educators and Early Learning Programs:

The Project Team and Project Coordinator will gather the full range of information needed from educators and early learning programs. Data on existing early learning programs and educators will be secured through data from the ESD 112 Child Care Resource and Referral database. This comprehensive source has information on all licensed centers and child care homes, along with state and federal regulated providers; including the numbers of children served in these programs if their enrollment is at 100%.

The Project Coordinator will gather samples of evaluations that have been done on the quality and availability of child care from the following sources:

- Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium. Child care quality evaluation.
- ESD 112 Child Care Resource and Referral. Availability evaluation as documented by the number of children in the Care Zone versus the number of licensed child care slots.
- EOCF Early/Head Start. Child care quality as shown in Federally-mandated evaluation process.
- Clark County Provider Networks. Child care quality as demonstrated in the Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS).

The SELF Ready Children Advisory Group is conducting a professional development survey that will gather information on educators' levels of education and professional development in Clark County (see Appendices).

The Project Team will design and distribute a survey and hold up to 6 focus groups (both center-based and family child care) that will gather information on what educators' need in their early learning environments, including curriculum, materials, learning environments, developmentally appropriate play areas and technical assistance.

c. K-12:

The Project Team, in collaboration with the SELF Ready Schools Advisory Committee, will gather information through surveys and interviews from Clark County's Public School Districts on community kindergarten program and future goals, including existing or planned full-day kindergarten programs; community relationship with K-12 as it

pertains to early learning; and ongoing communication and support for early learning educators and families. This effort will complement existing Ready School efforts to inventory Kindergarten transition efforts within the Vancouver, Evergreen and Battle Ground Public School Districts.

**d. Professional Development and Education Organizations/
Institutions:**

The Project Team will collaborate with the SELF Ready Children Advisory Committee to inventory professional development and educational opportunities now available to early learning providers in Clark County.

The Project Coordinator will utilize SELF's *Clark County Early Learning System Plan*, and collate the data from c. and d., to describe how professional development and education are linked to early learning and K-12 in Clark County.

The SELF Ready Children Advisory Committee, with Clark College taking the lead, will conduct a professional development survey (a draft of the survey is provided in the Appendices). This survey, to be finalized in November 2007, will provide key data on the professional development and educational needs of early learning professionals in Clark County. The survey will be revised to gather data required by the QRIS planning effort; including information on whether the current professional development and educational opportunities accessible in Clark County are making a difference in the quality of early learning opportunities children receive.

e. Community and Potential Partnerships:

The Project Team will partner with the Born Learning campaign and SELF Ready Families Advisory Committee to describe ongoing communication and support for early learning educators and families in Clark County. Clark County's early learning partnership – SELF – has a Ready Children strategy that specifically supports a QRIS pilot and planning effort in the community. SELF has stated its support for this QRIS planning and pilot project (see letter of support).

Sustainability

ESD 112 has a strong track record of sustaining its program initiatives. Besides the national model embodied by Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium, two additional examples of sustained early learning projects are the Readiness To Learn project (initially funded by a Federal grant) and the Clark County Provider Networks (initially started with in-kind resources).

Today the Readiness To Learn Project has funding from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette and the Clark County Early Learning Fund. The Provider Networks have funding from the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette and Clark County Early Learning Fund.

The SELF collaborative has a successful history of leveraging resources. Starting with a planning grant from the Foundation for Early Learning early in 2002 SELF has

successfully leveraged a federal Early Learning Opportunity grant (\$812,000) to implement school readiness and enhanced child care quality services. SELF partners contribute significant in-kind support through attendance at Strategy Advisory Committee meetings, work groups, and governance councils.

From its beginning in 2001, SELF has prioritized the need for building a system model for early learning services that can be sustainable over time. An exciting new development is the launch of the *Clark County Early Learning Fund* (CCELFF), partnership between SELF and the Foundation for Early Learning (FEL, Seattle). Now in its third year CCELFF is funded by an annual luncheon held each September at the Hilton Hotel in downtown Vancouver. CCELFF has raised \$500,000 in its first three years, local funds that have been matched 1:1 by FEL to create a total of \$1 million for early learning services. The local event committee is being chaired by Patricia Nierenberg, a FEL Board member and Clark County philanthropist.

SELF has a Communications and Development Council that is guided by a *Sustainability Plan* to promote community investment (time and money) in our youngest children and to build community capacity that increases local financial investment in early learning services. The Plan emphasizes the leveraging of community resources that have not traditionally funded services that assist families, schools and the community in preparing children for school.

ESD 112 and SELF partners believe it is essential that the services they initiate be sustainable over time. To this end, we endeavor to develop and implement a sustainable model of service delivery that emphasizes the building of capacity within the early learning and child care systems. ESD 112 and SELF anticipate that the Quality Rating and Improvement System will be sustained through government and foundation funding, including support from the Clark County Early Learning Fund.

Available Resources

Clark County is a community of partners focused on meeting the needs of children and families through cooperative programming. Through this cooperation an early learning system and resource network is emerging in Clark County. These partners include:

- ESD 112 as the lead connects:
 - Child Care Resource and Referral
 - Parents as Teachers
- Support for Early Learning and Families
 - 22 partners and member organizations
- Children Northwest
 - Southwest Washington Child Care Consortium Centers
- Clark College
 - Early Childhood Education Department
 - Child and Family Studies Center
- Educational Opportunities for Children and Families (EOCF) (Head Start)
- Washington State University Vancouver
- Fort Vancouver Regional Library District

- Columbia River Mental Health Services
- Vancouver Public Schools
- Evergreen Public Schools
- Department of Early Learning (Child Care Licensing)

Resources Needed

All of the critical pieces are in place in Clark County to successfully implement a countywide Quality Rating and Improvement System. A pressing need is for a central point of contact, a coordinator to manage all aspects of the program, to facilitate system wide communication and provide partner support and accountability. Another significant need is adequate funding from the state to execute Clark County’s implementation of its QRIS pilot project.

Current Infrastructure Components

The numerous partnerships, organizations, institutions of higher education and training and technical support programs are all currently in position and providing services to all stakeholders.

Strategies

Clark County has, over the years, gained much knowledge and experience in coordinating community-wide efforts to improve the quality of childcare and early education in our community. The Project Team for this proposal has activated the numerous networks and partnerships that are anxious to participate in this project. With these networks and systems in place, Clark County is ideally positioned to develop and achieve an implementation plan for a Quality Rating Improvement System.

Work Plan

The Project Coordinator and the Project Planning Team will implement the required Statement of Work and Timeline as follows:

Project Planning Team Task and Timeline	Date Due
Representatives from key partners (ESD 112, SELF, SWCCC, CCRR) convened to attend the Bidder’s Conference call and to discuss proposal. Agreement was reached to move forward.	October 8, 2007
ESD 112 hosted and expanded partner planning meeting to discuss details of the proposal and to assign responsibilities for gathering and disseminating information.	October 9, 2007
Project Team Members Identified	October 17, 2007
Five tentative planning sessions beginning November 7 th will be scheduled in the event that funding is received, in anticipation of the December 15 Statement of Work deadline to submit a local community QRIS planning approach and work plan.	October 19, 2007
Initial Project Team expanded to include broader set of stakeholders.	November 1, 2007

Project Coordinator identified	November 5, 2007
First meeting of expanded Project Team.	November 7, 2007
Five Planning Team meetings to develop initial pilot plan and compile resource and stakeholder lists	November 7 – December 12, 2007
Compile resource list and create community stakeholder groups for identifying and discussing plausible evaluation of quality and QRIS implementation. <i>NOTE: This activity will be implemented by the Clark County QRIS Project Coordinator; with input from the Project Team and SELF Ready Children Advisory Group - stakeholders.</i>	December 15, 2007
Submit a final draft of a local community QRIS planning approach and work plan, that describes and addresses all elements negotiated with DEL. <i>NOTE: This activity will be implemented by the Clark County QRIS Project Coordinator, with input from the Project Team.</i>	December 15 th , 2007 – January 15, 2008
Conduct a community environmental scan with community stakeholders, including parents, to identify needs and available resources necessary to maximize participation and effectiveness of the QRIS. <i>NOTE: This activity will be implemented by the Clark County QRIS Project Coordinator; with input from the Project Team and SELF Ready Children Advisory Group - stakeholders. Methods will include surveys, focus groups and community meetings.</i>	March 1, 2008
Compile results from environmental scan to discuss with other community QRIS implementers and DEL—meet and discuss with other implementers and DEL <i>NOTE: This activity will be implemented by the Clark County QRIS Project Coordinator; with input from the Project Team and SELF Ready Children Advisory Group - stakeholders. Methods to include written results circulated for feedback via email and community meetings.</i>	March 15th, 2008
Contract/project evaluation results and summary of lessons learned to DEL for acceptance and approval. <i>NOTE: This activity will be implemented by the Clark County QRIS Project Coordinator; with input from the Project Team</i>	June 1, 2008 Submitted with final invoice.
Ongoing Operational Task and Timeline <i>Theses activities will be implemented by the Clark County QRIS Project Coordinator and with support and input form the QRIS Planning Team.</i>	
Participate in State level coordination planning meetings or teleconferences and provide interim reports on progress and results with DEL staff	At least monthly, more often, as needed.
Provide answers to DEL QRIS regarding planning questions for	As needed, and to be

communities. Questions to address will cut across at least four (4) different principles and six (6) different aspects of quality early learning environments and will include:

included with evaluation results and summary of lessons learned.

Principles

- Development of whole child; early learning goals identified and tied to what children need to know and be able to do
- Cultural relevance
- Inclusion of all children, including school age and those with special needs
- Parent, family, and community involvement

Aspects of quality early learning environments

- Parent/Family and Community Partnerships
- Health and Safety
- Curriculum/Approach and Learning Environment
- Professional Development and Training of Providers, Directors and Staff
- Staff Compensation
- Management Practices
- Quality Improvement and Program Evaluation

Participate in establishing communication pathways within and across communities to facilitate QRIS planning and design.

Ongoing

Conduct and document local community planning efforts and meetings or teleconferences.

At least monthly, more often, as requested.

NOTE: This activity will be implemented by the Clark County QRIS Project Coordinator. The Project Team will meet at least monthly (more often in the initial months) and engage stakeholders throughout the project (surveys, focus groups, community level meetings).