

Developing Effective Early Learning Programs: Thinking Strategically

Six Shifts in Thinking + Four Critical Constants for K-12 Educators

For many K-12 educators, developing effective early childhood education strategies requires some significant shifts in their thinking about the importance of early learning and the role of public schools in helping children have high quality early learning experiences. At the same time, it is important for educators to hold on to four “critical constants” which have always guided effective early education strategy. These shifts in thinking, as well as the four critical constants, are summarized below.

Six Shifts in Thinking

1. Shift in understanding of importance of early learning

From: “Add-on luxury”

To: “Key strategy for closing student achievement gap”

2. Shift in view of relationship between pre-kindergarten and K-3 years

From: “Separate, unconnected phases of child’s life”

To: “Two stages in a continuum of learning”

3. Shift in definition of early childhood education

From: “Preschool for special needs children and half-day kindergarten”

To: “Services for children and families birth through third grade”

4. Shift in attitude re: public schools’ involvement in early education

From: “Legally mandated services only”

To: “Services that help young children – especially academically at-risk children – have high quality early learning experiences”

5. Shift in definition of school readiness

From: “Children ready for schools”

To: “Children ready for schools and schools ready for children”

6. Shift in recognition of need for community partnerships

From: “We can do it alone”

To: “We can’t do it alone; the only way to be successful is working in partnership with parents, community early learning providers, and other community partners”

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Four Critical Constants

1. Parents are their children's first and most important teachers.
2. Early childhood education must address all domains of development: physical well-being, health and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; cognition and general knowledge; language, literacy, and communication.
3. Successful programs use research-based practices, assess results, and use outcomes data to continuously improve programs.
4. Mutual respect and trust are key to building required relationships with parents and community early learning providers.