



THE SCIENCE FOR A BETTER START

## Children deserve the best start in life

### Early Childhood Matters

Scientific research confirms that experiences between birth and age five can stimulate brain development and significantly affect school readiness.

Children who start school healthy and ready to learn are more likely to succeed and are less likely to develop behavioral, health, and academic problems. And, every dollar invested in early childhood development is estimated to return between seven and sixteen dollars, including reduced future education costs, saved welfare expenses, and future tax revenue generated by responsible, working adults.

These discoveries about the importance of the early years have led to an explosion of interest in early childhood, among researchers, child advocates, and policymakers. Head Start and Early Head Start have expanded, several states have begun large birth-to-five initiatives, and most recently, President Obama pledged to create a \$10 billion national early childhood initiative, the largest new investment in early childhood development since the creation of Head Start nearly a half-century ago.

### There Are No “One-Size-Fits-All” Solutions

Innovative communities have developed many promising approaches for promoting school readiness. However, no one has found that elusive “silver bullet” that works equally well, everywhere. That’s because communities face different obstacles to school readiness, and they require different approaches. The best solutions are developed at the community level, by concerned advocates and leaders working to apply the latest science to local conditions.

**From a national perspective, the challenge is to match proven school readiness solutions with the unique needs faced by communities throughout the nation.** Transforming Early Childhood Community Systems (TECCS) was developed to address that very challenge.

*Policymakers and  
early childhood  
advocates must  
**invest wisely**  
and promote  
**accountability***



## TECCS helps communities develop *local* school readiness solutions

TECCS is fundamentally different from other early childhood development programs. In fact, TECCS isn't a "program" at all. It's a *system* for identifying local needs and crafting solutions in collaboration with local leaders—all while promoting accountability and accelerating our national understanding of what's needed to bring children to school healthy and ready to learn.

TECCS has three core components:

### 1. **Mapping Community School Readiness Needs**

The TECCS process begins when a coalition of community leaders decide that they want to use school readiness outcomes data to help drive a community wide effort to improve early childhood development.

TECCS starts by identifying local challenges, using the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a tool developed by researchers at Canada's Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University. The EDI measures five key factors (also known as "domains") known to affect school readiness:

- Physical health and well-being,
- Social competence,
- Emotional maturity,
- Language and cognitive development, and
- Communication skills and general knowledge.

By combining EDI data collected by Kindergarten teachers with health, economic and other data on resources available at the census tract level, TECCS helps local communities map their needs and service gaps on a highly localized basis. For example, they might determine that early literacy and language acquisition is a particular challenge in one neighborhood, but poor nutrition is the leading obstacle to school readiness in another. This assessment data becomes a roadmap for local action.

### 2. **Working With Local Leaders to Develop and Implement Solutions**

TECCS experts review EDI reports with coalitions of local leaders working to promote school readiness. When those coalitions aren't yet in place, TECCS helps communities build them, encouraging involvement by a wide range of participants—parents, health and education leaders, law enforcement, business, and more.

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To develop strategies for overcoming the obstacles uncovered, community coalitions combine their local knowledge with TECCS' national expertise on early childhood issues. For example, if language development were identified as the leading obstacle to school readiness, communities might introduce early literacy programs in child care centers, Reach out and Read programs in pediatrician's offices, and other literacy and language enhancing programs in the other places children are likely to spend time. They might even expand local adult literacy programs or add reading circles for families with the youngest children at the local library so parents can do more to help their children at home.

The community school readiness mapping process is repeated regularly to measure progress, identify emerging challenges, and guide local strategic planning and systems improvement efforts. This regular monitoring promotes accountability and ensures that resources are invested where they are needed most.

3. ***Accelerating knowledge and sharing best practices***

TECCS spreads knowledge and understanding about school readiness by getting community leaders talking to each other and by interacting with national experts through a Collaborative Innovation Network (CoIN), a learning system designed to ease communication across sites and help great ideas for enhancing school readiness spread. The TECCS CoIN supports an online platform where community leaders share ideas, experiences, and tools, and solve problems with advocates in their own community and with their peers in other parts of the nation.

Researchers and other content experts also participate in these discussions, providing guidance on the latest science or just listening in to learn how communities are addressing their school readiness challenges.

To complement online communications, TECCS supports in-person meetings to share ideas, celebrate successes, and discuss challenges and lessons learned.

*Collaborative  
Innovation  
Networks **break  
down barriers**  
between  
communities,  
researchers, **and**  
**each other***



## Early results show TECCS makes a difference

The Early Development Instrument (EDI), from which the TECCS system was developed, has been used widely in Canada and Australia as part of a comprehensive strategy to improve school readiness. In pilot communities, use of the EDI significantly increased community awareness about the importance of early childhood and strengthened support among policymakers and the general public for new school readiness programs.<sup>i</sup>

TECCS is comparatively new to the United States and is currently being piloted in California's Orange and Los Angeles Counties. With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, TECCS will soon expand to target cities in Louisiana, Michigan, New Mexico, and Mississippi. And, thanks to a unique collaboration with United Way Worldwide, TECCS is scheduled for expansion into an additional eight states in 2010. Comprehensive evaluations are not yet available for early U.S. pilot sites, but community reaction has been very positive. The comments of Michael Ruane, Executive Director of the Orange County Children and Families Commission, are typical for early adopters: "The early implementation of the EDI component of the TECCS system served as a catalyst to jump-start a new era of school readiness improvement efforts aimed at working to bring children to school healthy, fit, and ready to learn."

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## What's Next for TECCS?

TECCS' immediate priorities are to expand our current pilot projects in California and begin our Kellogg- and United Way-supported work in up to 17 new cities and counties in 13 states over the next year.

Once the Early Learning Challenge Grant program is passed by Congress, we hope to work with individual states to implement the TECCS system as part of their school readiness improvement programs. TECCS seems an ideal match for the Early Learning Challenge Fund, with its emphasis on research-based metrics and data systems to track student progress. TECCS can also enhance the impact and integration of other parts of the federal early childhood agenda, by building local capacity to measure, map and monitor improvements in communities, providing important population metrics that can be used to know what's working and what needs to change.



## About TECCS

TECCS is a collaborative effort of the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities and United Way Worldwide. The UCLA Center is a multi-disciplinary research, policy, and systems improvement organization that includes faculty and staff from five schools and 12 academic departments on the UCLA campus. Our mission is to promote children's lifelong health, development, and well-being by creating and translating innovative ideas into optimal environments, systems, and policies.

The TECCS initiative is supported by the Children and Families Commission of Orange County, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the communities in which we operate.

TECCS is interested in forming new partnerships and recruiting additional communities. To learn more, please contact Lisa Stanley, Project Director, UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities, at [LisaStanley@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:LisaStanley@mednet.ucla.edu).



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<sup>i</sup> See Mort, J, *The Early Development Instrument (EDI) in British Columbia: Documenting Impact and Action in Schools, Communities and Early Childhood Development* 2009, Human Early Learning Partnership.

