Kindergarten readiness is more than knowing letters and numbers.

Both genes and experience shape children’s brains. Supporting, caring and responsive relationships are central to lifelong health and learning, support brain development and buffer the effects of toxic stress and other risk factors.

Approximately 1,000 low-income children under five in Dane County are cared for by family, friends or neighbors, not in any type of accredited child care. These caregivers can benefit from information on brain development and their roles as a child’s first teacher.

Children with multiple risk factors show greater developmental delays. Risk factors include low family income, low parental education, single parenthood, and teen parenthood. Disparities in child outcomes are present as early as nine months and grow larger by 24 months across cognitive, social, behavioral and health outcomes. Chronic stress, such as that from extreme poverty, abuse or neglect, can be “toxic” to developing brains.

Our Strategies:

1. Parents are engaged, informed and supported in how to be their child's first teacher to help their children be developmentally ready for school.
2. Holistic family supports are focused on 13 specific geographic areas.
3. Children are screened for developmental delays and families are provided appropriate supports for children who show potential delays.
4. A community of practice is created to support practitioners, case managers, and resource centers for those serving families with children under age five.
5. Healthcare professionals are knowledgeable of community supports and can easily link parents to such supports.

Why it matters

Education is a cornerstone for success in school, work and life. Ensuring the youngest children of Dane County are cared for and have fun as they become prepared for school benefits the whole community. The most formative years in a child's development are from birth to age five and United Way is there from the beginning, with Born Learning – an initiative that helps parents, grandparents and caregivers in their role as their child's first teacher.

- There are about 30,000 children under age 5 in Dane County – an astounding 15% of them live in poverty.
- Parents and caregivers are a child's first teachers.
- Brain research continues to demonstrate the importance of the first 5 years of life as a foundation for future success.
- Academic achievement gaps begin within the first year of life, and are measured at 18 months. Some children are already 2 years delayed by age 5.
- Young children are our future and our future workforce. There are an additional 1,300 children who could benefit from home visiting if we had the resources to expand this work.

Will you join the fight today?

Full mobilization plan is available at www.unitedwaydanecounty.org/mobilization-plans
Indicators of kindergarten readiness

Although all children develop in their own unique way, experts agree that the following are indicators of kindergarten readiness.

- **Physical well-being and motor development**: physical abilities, gross and fine motor skills
- **Social and emotional development**: ability to interact with others and capacity for self-control, interpret and express feelings
- **Approaches to learning**: uses skills and knowledge, enthusiasm, curiosity, persistence on tasks
- **Language development**: communication and developing literacy
- **Cognition and general knowledge**: thinking and problem-solving and knowledge of objects and the way the world works

Significant adversity impairs development in the first three years of life—and the more adversity a child faces, the greater the odds of a developmental delay in their cognitive, language, or emotional development.

**Our plan**

- **Encourage play** (physical and mental) as a catalyst to learning
- **Change the community conversation** about early childhood to reflect the importance of the first five years on the developing brain and future success
- **Help the community connect the dots** between the relationship between early childhood and all other key issues such as the academic achievement gap, graduation, employment, and health
- **Develop cultural competence** as a key part of successful early childhood practices where it is lacking and celebrate where it is done well
- **Help the community play their role** to offer environments that support early learning and give parents and caregivers the information they need to provide the appropriate stimulating environment for their child.

**Aspirational goal**: 80% of our 4-year olds will be at age-expected development and ready to begin school by 2020