

## SMART BEGINNINGS CORE PRINCIPLES



School readiness is both a public and private responsibility. **A strong early childhood system engages leaders from both the public and private sectors.** A body of leadership composed of key leaders and senior-level decision-makers, representing major public and private sectors of the community, can most effectively address the community's school readiness issues, break down barriers to development of a cohesive early childhood system, contribute to the execution and monitoring of a strategic plan, share accountability, and garner diverse community investment to address early childhood needs.

**Cross-sector collaboration is essential to maximizing resources and driving improved efficiencies, effectiveness, and quality.** Collaboration among diverse public and private service providers results in more efficient and effective delivery of early childhood services.

**Smart Beginnings promotes a comprehensive approach to early childhood systems building by serving as non-partisan community "conveners" for multiple stakeholders and bringing focus, expertise, and attention to early childhood issues.** Children develop within the context of their family and the broader community. Resolving complex early childhood issues requires the cooperation of parents and families, schools, child care providers, the faith community, higher education, business, and other community assets such as social services, libraries, and museums. Smart Beginnings efforts and activities align with the VECF Theory of Change.

An early childhood system demonstrates stewardship of resources and accountability through **a commitment to evidence-based programs and practices.** Evidence-based programs and practices integrate the best available research within the context of the child, family, and community.

**Data-driven decision-making** guides all Smart Beginnings strategies and investments. Community level data and effective metrics and measurement are essential tools for informing both need and efficacy of community investments in early childhood.

**Identifying targeted outcomes and focusing on results** are the foundation of a strong, sustainable early childhood system. Use of targeted outcomes leads to greater knowledge about what works and what sets of interventions and services are associated with the desired result or impact on a specific early childhood issue.

**A strong two-way structure**, characterized by effective communication between local and state levels, can forge both local buy-in and state-level support for policies and practices that facilitate local partnerships, identify gaps in services and information, and promote innovative solutions to state and local barriers. This structure is dynamic by nature, grows and evolves as state and community leaders learn from each other and from collective efforts to impact early childhood issues. The network of Smart Beginnings communities contributes to and informs state level policies in powerful ways.

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**Ready for School. Ready for Life.**