



The Kindergarten Readiness Crisis:

What School Leaders Can Do
Before Children Arrive



Kristen Weatherall & Dayna Lewis, Local Leads



The view from the trailhead: **Kindergarten isn't what it used to be.**



We see more
children who
struggle with
language.



We see more
children who
struggle with
**regulating
emotions.**



We see more
children with very
little **critical thinking**
and **problem solving**
skills.



You're not alone.
This isn't a local problem.
It's a national challenge.



What's wrong with
today's children?



Focuses on **intervening**
once they arrive.

What happened
BEFORE they got
to kindergarten?



Focuses on building systems
before children arrive.

— THE KINDERGARTEN READINESS CRISIS: —
What School Leaders Can Do Before Children Arrive

Y-Axis: Brain Architecture Growth

**90% of brain
development happens
before age five.**

Day 1,825

X-Axis: The first 1,825 Days of Life (Ages 0 to 5)

• School starts at age five. Learning starts at birth. •

Readiness is heavier than the ABCs



The issue isn't intelligence. It's opportunity.

WHAT ARE PROVIDERS

Doing to Help?

1

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS



CLASS

Building responsive, nurturing interactions and supportive classrooms.

2

HIGHER QUALITY PROGRAMS



QUALITY RATING SYSTEM

Promoting continuous quality improvement through support and coaching.

3

INTENTIONAL INSTRUCTION



HQIM

Using high-quality instructional materials to deliver engaging, research-based learning.

4

BUILDING EARLY LITERACY



LAUNCHPAD

A phonological awareness program building early literacy foundations.

5

DEVELOPING THE WHOLE CHILD



- Executive Functioning
- Self-Regulation
- Emotional Security
- Curiosity & Problem Solving
- Language & Social Interaction

Providers aren't waiting until kindergarten.
They're building readiness every day.

The quality of the guide determines the success of the hike

High-quality interactions matter more than expensive materials.
Children thrive when adults consistently:

1



Engage in responsive relationships.

2



Encourage exploration and curiosity.

3



Expand conversations and oral language.

4



Extend critical thinking and problem-solving.

Anchor insight: Readiness is not a checklist. Relationships drive learning.



Where Did Our Kindergarteners Come From?





How connected is your elementary school to everything that happens before this final step?

Birth



Speech

Infant Care



Sleep



Nutrition

Toddler



Preschool



Trauma

State-Funded Pre-K



Play



Books



Relationships



Understanding the Campsites in Our Forest



Rural Child Care Program

Trail Hazards: Staffing shortages, high turnover, long family work hours.

Disconnect: Rarely receives K-12 readiness expectations.



Family Child Care Home

Strengths: Deep family relationships, natural play-based routines.

Disconnect: Feels entirely disconnected from the public school system.

State-Funded Pre-K

Strengths: Strong instructional routines, CLASS observations.

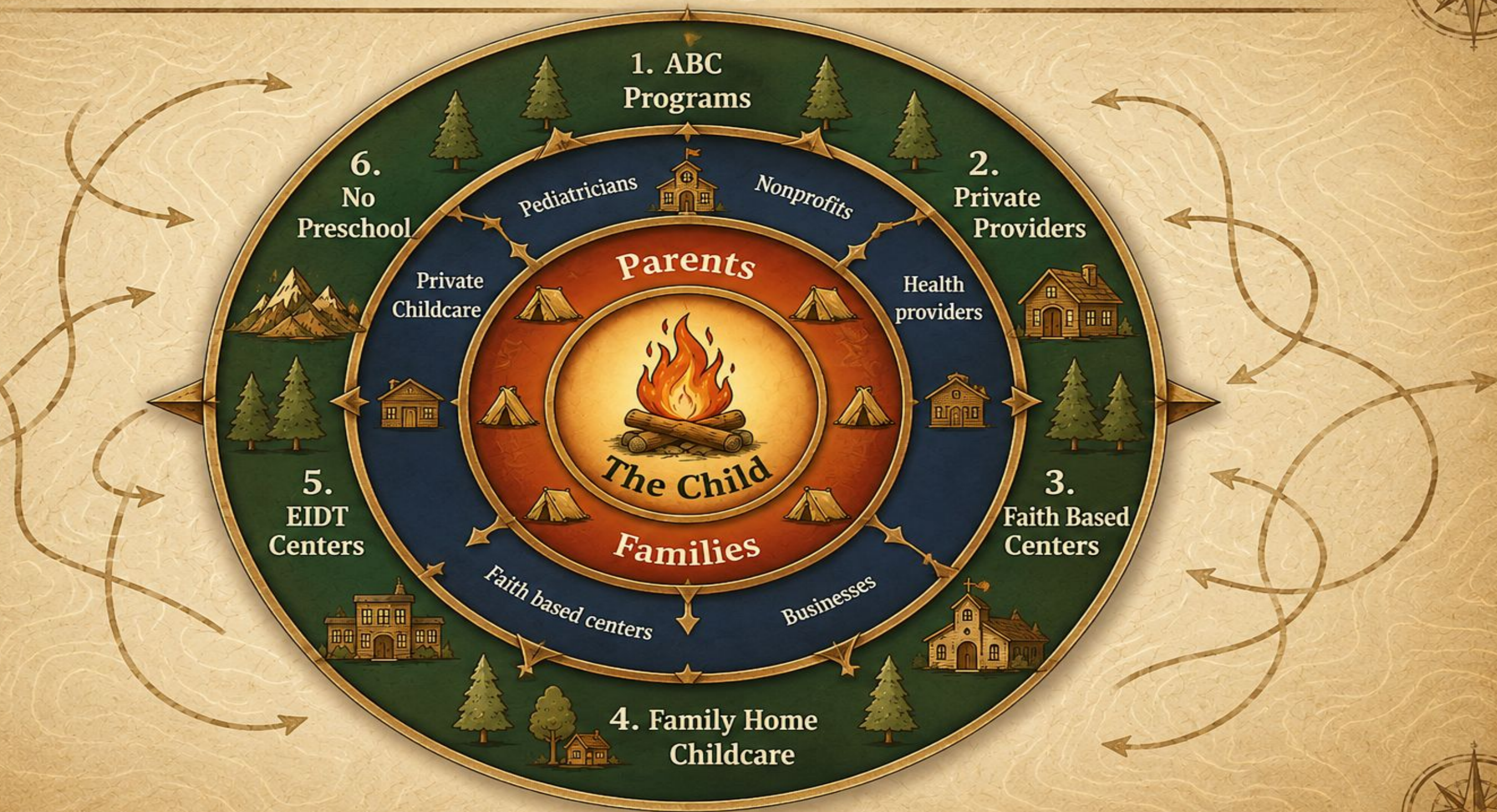
Hazards: Transitioning kids into much larger elementary settings.



Every provider is working within unique strengths and constraints. When schools understand them, transitions become smoother.



Whose job is kindergarten readiness?



Whose job is kindergarten readiness?



Everyone's. Elementary schools cannot own kindergarten readiness alone.

Phase 1: Charting the Territory

Strategy 1: Know Your Community

-  Map where children spend ages 0–5.
-  (Public Pre-K, Private childcare, Family childcare, Head Start, Home).



- ☒ Partners
- ☐ Visit Centers
- ☐ Build Relationships
- ☐ Map Ecosystem

Strategy 2: Know the Providers

-  Step out of the K-12 building.
-  Visit their centers.
-  Learn the directors' names.
-  Transition from strangers to partners.

Phase 2: Lighting the Campfire

Strategy 3: Invite Them In.

Childcare directors sitting beside kindergarten teachers, planning and learning together.

Strategy 4: Host a Pre-K Collaborative.

Schools act as conveners, not competitors. Discuss transitions, literacy, and enrollment together.

Strategy 5: Support Childcare Teachers.

Open school professional development, literacy training, and behavior supports to early childhood partners.

Phase 3: Guiding the Families



January



Strategy 6: Meet Families Earlier.

Move engagement from August to January, March, May, and Summer.



Strategy 7: Kindergarten Readiness Events.

Host family literacy nights, school tours, bus experiences, play dates, and screening events.



Strategy 8: Share Expectations.

Provide simple, accessible readiness guides. Tell parents exactly what foundational skills their children need.



August



Two Ways to Climb the Mountain

Model A: The Old Way



Intervene with children once they arrive.

Model B: The New Way

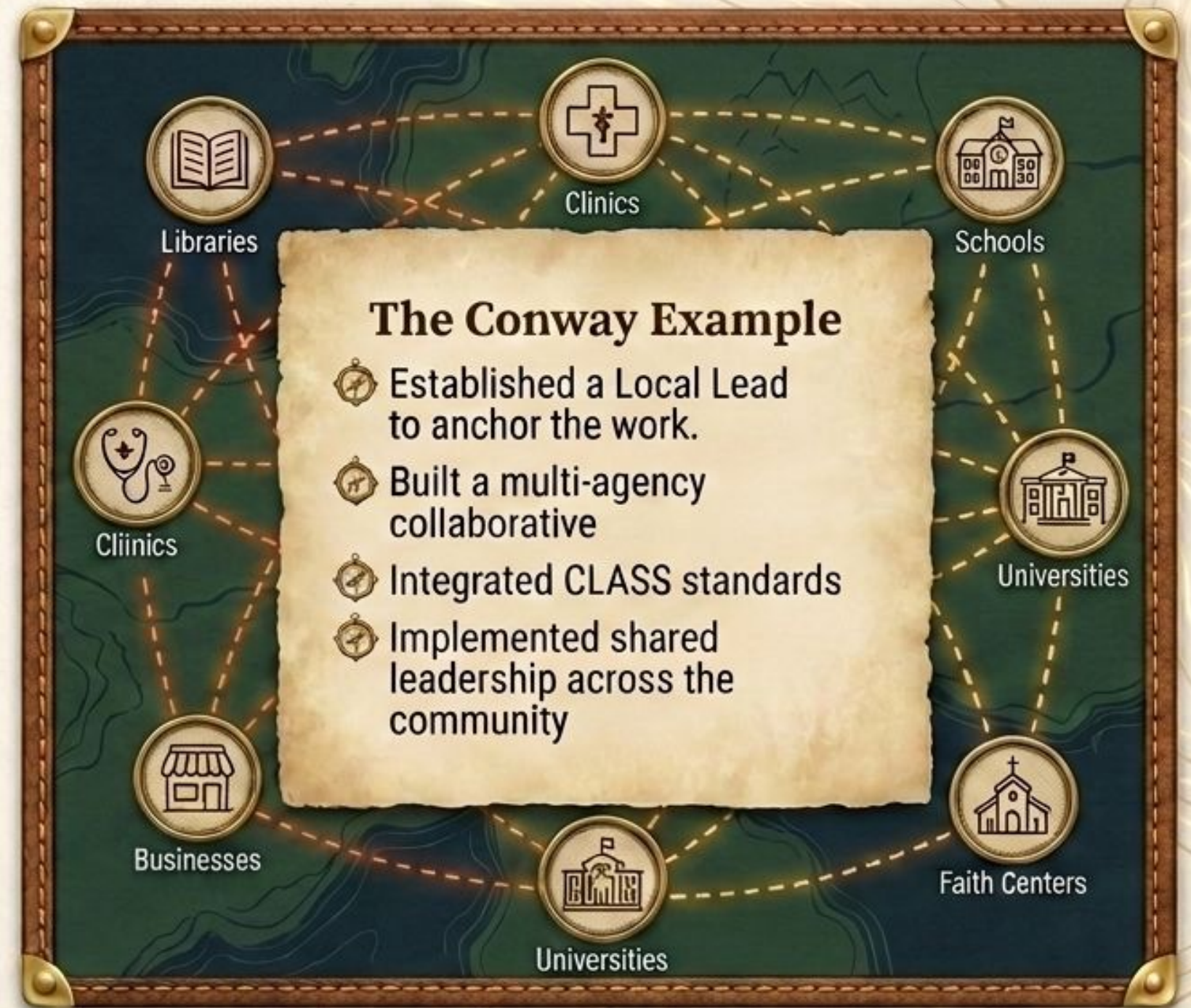


Preparing children before they arrive.

Children shouldn't have to overcome a disconnected system.
Adults should build a connected one.

Phase 4: Expanding the Forest

**Strategy 9:
Build Community
Partnerships.**
Engage libraries,
pediatricians,
businesses, universities,
and faith leaders.



Let's Take a Look Around Our Campsite

Building Connections That Lead to Kindergarten Success



How many early childhood directors do you know by name?



How many have visited your school?



How many have ever been invited to your school?



How many have received your kindergarten expectations?





A simple step
— you could take —
tomorrow



— is to —
connect with
your Local Lead.





Local Leads: Connecting Policy to Providers



Local Leads were established as regional partners to bridge the gap between state policy and local providers.



System Alignment



Strengthening regional early learning systems by aligning public agencies, private providers, and community organizations toward shared goals.



Quality Improvement



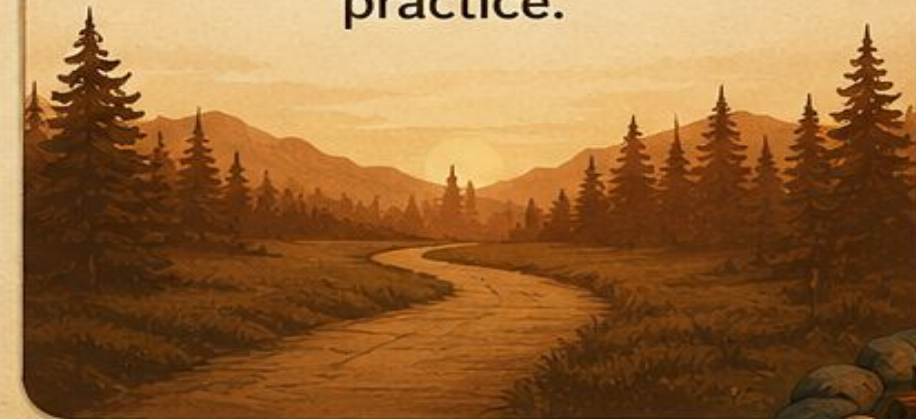
Guiding providers through **CLASS** classroom observations and coaching cycles to elevate instructional quality across the region.



State-to-Provider Link

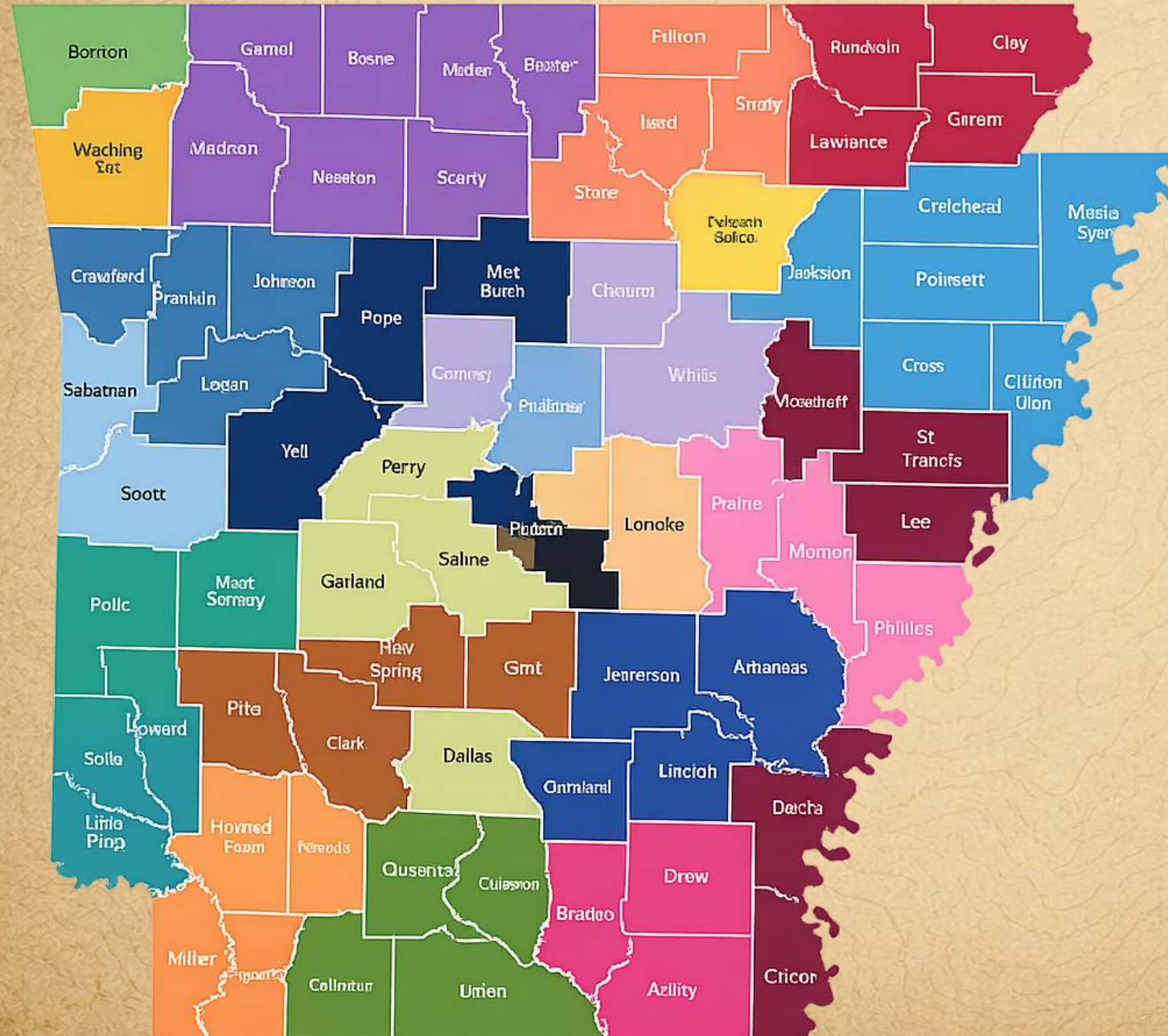


Serving as the direct conduit between state initiatives and frontline providers — translating policy into practice.





Connecting with Your Local Lead



Scan here'-
-to find your-
Local Lead!



Your Expedition Toolkit

- Kindergarten Readiness Partnership Checklist
- Transition Practices Menu & Calendar
- Birth-to-Five Community Mapping Template
- Kindergarten Readiness Indicators Handout
- Local Provider Contact Directory

Ready-to-use frameworks to begin bridging the gap tomorrow.

COMMUNITY
ECOSYSTEM
MAP

TRANSITION
STRATEGIES
VOL. I

TRANSITION
STRATEGIES
VOL. I

Check List

- Check List**
- ☐ Classroom & Neighborhood
 - ☐ Transition & Calendar
 - ☐ Birth-to-Five Community Mapping Template
 - ☐ Kindergarten Readiness Indicators Handout
 - ☐ Local Provider Contact Directory

Feedback Schedule

- Feedback Schedule**
- ☐ Kindergarten Readiness Indicators Handout
 - ☐ Local Provider Contact Directory
 - ☐ Birth-to-Five Community Mapping Template
 - ☐ Kindergarten Readiness Partnership Checklist
 - ☐ Transition Practices Menu & Calendar

- Feedback Schedule**
- ☐ Kindergarten Readiness Indicators Handout
 - ☐ Local Provider Contact Directory
 - ☐ Birth-to-Five Community Mapping Template
 - ☐ Kindergarten Readiness Partnership Checklist
 - ☐ Transition Practices Menu & Calendar



The Next 30 Days of the 1,825-Day Journey

What can your school do before a child ever enrolls?

1. One provider relationship I will strengthen this month:



2. One transition practice our school will improve:



3. One new family engagement strategy we will launch before registration:

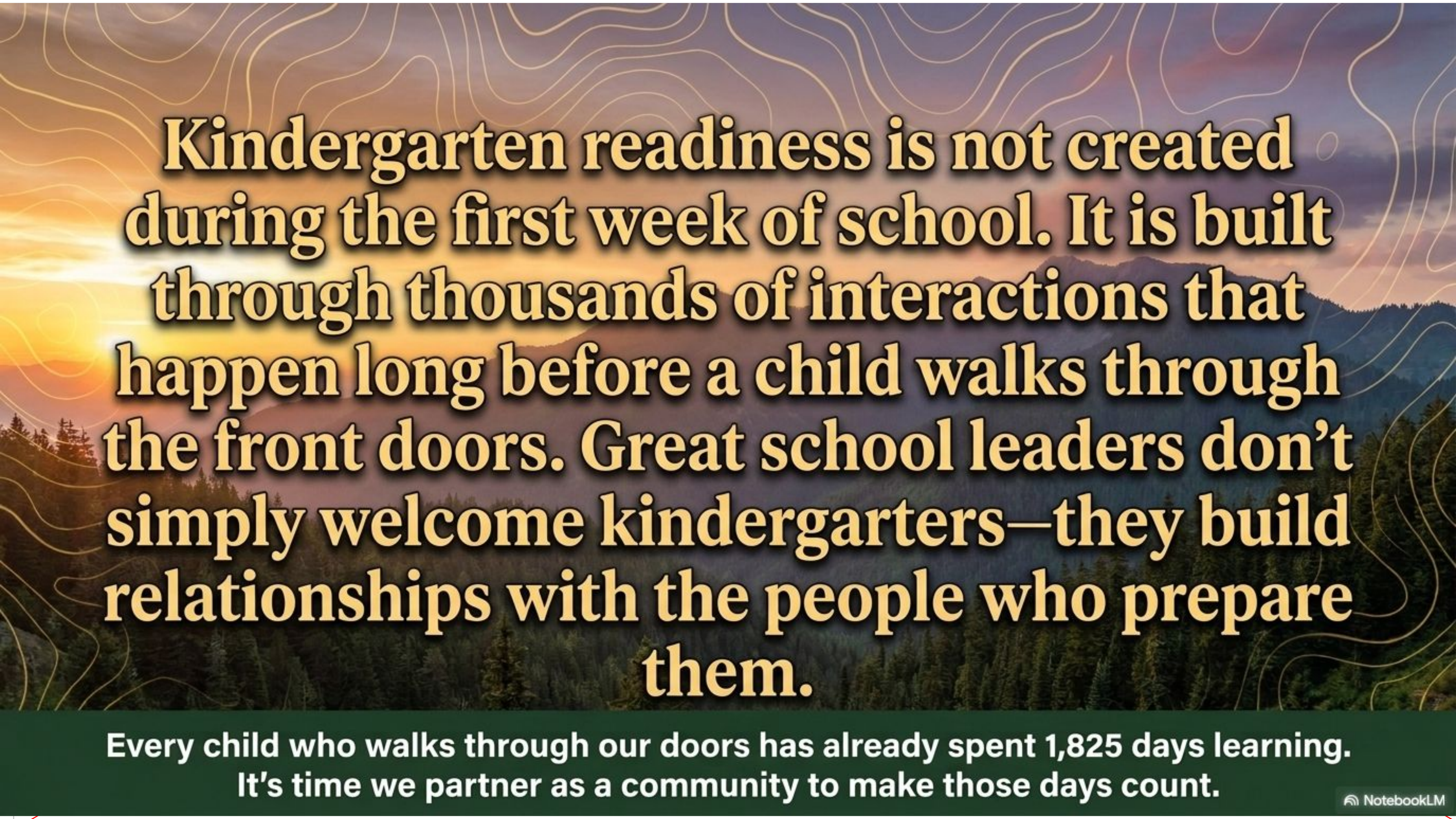




4. One new community partnership I will pursue:







Kindergarten readiness is not created during the first week of school. It is built through thousands of interactions that happen long before a child walks through the front doors. Great school leaders don't simply welcome kindergartners—they build relationships with the people who prepare them.

Every child who walks through our doors has already spent 1,825 days learning. It's time we partner as a community to make those days count.