



MORRISTOWN HAMBLEN

# Ready by 6

## Executive Summary

### The Idea

The Hamblen County Foundation for Educational Excellence and Achievement's (HC\*EXCELL) "Cradle through Career Initiative" found that Hamblen County's children were entering school not sufficiently prepared, affecting student potential and achievement. Research

shows that development occurs at a remarkable pace during the first five years of a child's life, and early learning in the Preschool years is instrumental to social, emotional, and cognitive development. Additionally, Head Start and Early Start programs have demonstrated significant social and economic returns for families and communities.

The **Ready by 6** Strategic Plan has been developed with the goal of facilitating early childhood learning and preparing Hamblen County's children for school and life. Three guiding principles help to steer the **Ready by 6** mission: (1) Community support and engagement are vital to the success of our children and community sustainability; (2) Families are our children's first teachers; and (3) Children deserve to enter school with the tools and skills needed for success in the areas of cognitive, creative language, physical and social/emotional development. In order to address these principles and appropriately engage the Hamblen County community, the **Ready by 6** Steering Committee utilized the VMOSA (Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies, and Action Plans) planning method. This method was designed with meaningful community change in mind, allowing for the completion of short-term goals while maintaining the long-term vision.

The Strategic Plan focuses on intersectional aspects of childhood health and development in order to ensure that children are properly prepared for school and will transition K through 12 smoothly and successfully. To meet this goal, **Ready by 6** addresses four key elements of childhood health and development: Early Learning, Financial Stability, Health Equity and Secure Housing. **Ready by 6** will engage the Hamblen Community to create an appropriate foundation for early childhood success and school readiness, based on these four elements. Financial stability and socioeconomic status have also been linked to physical and psychological health. Poverty hinders childhood nutrition and can also lead to lower self-esteem and lower school achievement. Health disparities, frequently resulting from factors such as poverty, negatively affect a child's ability to learn and develop. While physical health disparities, such as malnutrition, can directly inhibit a child's development, addressing mental health disparities is vital in ensuring a child's social and cognitive development. Secure housing allows children to learn and grow in a safe and stable environment in their Preschool years. Homelessness and low-quality housing can result in physiological stress on children, hindering emotional and mental development. Because the first five years of a child's life are so vital to development, addressing these foundational aspects of a child's life is fundamental to promoting school readiness and success.

Education is the passport  
to the future, for tomorrow  
belongs to those who prepare  
for it today"

- Malcom X.

### The Process

During the spring of 2015, HC\*EXCELL invited three organizations to be financial partners in creating a strategy to increase the number of Morristown and Hamblen County children entering school prepared to learn. The **Arconic Foundation, (formerly the Alcoa Foundation), City of Morristown** and the Walters Foundation accepted the opportunity to support this important community initiative. Next, the Foundation offered organizations involved in impacting the general health and wellbeing of prenatal to five-year-old clients and their families the opportunity to assist in a participatory process to develop a Morristown Hamblen strategic plan for increasing the number of children entering school prepared for success. Those accepting formed a Steering Committee. From February 2016 until June 2016, the committee met regularly, collecting and reviewing local, regional

and national strategic plans for prenatal through early child care. "First 5 Riverside 2016-2021" was selected as the model for the Morristown Hamblen plan.

After selecting the model, the committee gathered data regarding Morristown Hamblen's demographics, early childhood care providers, and early childhood care needs and resources to help committee members identify significant gaps in services and needs for local early child care families. Once the local and regional information had been collected, the committee reviewed a number of strategic planning models before agreeing upon VMOSA. This model was instrumental in assisting the committee in producing the Morristown Hamblen **Ready by 6** strategic plan.

During September of 2016, the committee hired a consultant to assist in conducting Community Parent Focus Groups, Early Child Care Provider Surveys and developing additional components, as well as strategies, for completing the plan including possible benchmarks and sustainability components. Committee members and consultants led and developed a report from information received during nine focus group sessions along with a report of feedback received from 22 of the 41 early childhood care providers and educator organizations.

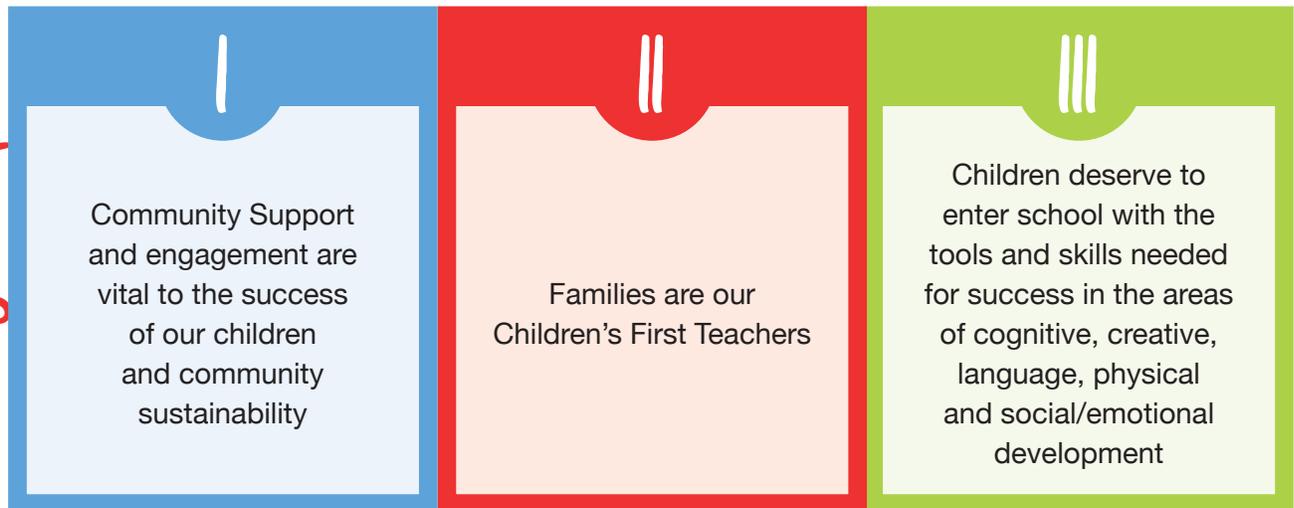
In January of 2017 additional consultants were hired to assist in data analysis, strategic plan writing, and graphic design. During this phase survey results were synthesized and used as a basis for the development of strategies and actions.

# Ready by 6 Strategic Plan

**VISION** – All Children Ready by 6

**MISSION** – Engage the Morristown Hamblen community in strengthening systems to ensure delivery of appropriate services that will promote the development and wellbeing of prenatal to five-year old children and their families

Guiding Principles



## Strategic Partners



WALTERS FOUNDATION

