

# LEADING THE WAY: P-3 EDUCATION IN COLORADO

## WHO:

**SHELLEY SMITH**

*Director of Early Childhood Programs  
Eagle County School District*

**ERIKA DONAHUE, Principal**

*June Creek Elementary School, Eagle County Schools*



**SHELLEY SMITH**

## WHERE: Eagle County School District

an innovative school district serving nearly 7000 students Pre-K through 12th grade from Vail to Dotsero, including Red Cliff, McCoy and Bond.



Eagle County School District's vision is to prepare all students to be global-ready graduates who will be successful in their careers or college experience and contribute to their communities in positive and effective ways.

## GOALS:

### *Create Alignment.*

Eagle County School District is working to improve alignment by implementing the use of a shared assessment system, Teaching Strategies GOLD™, in kindergarten classrooms. A common assessment system creates a shared language across two potentially disconnected early learning experiences, which promotes understanding and communication around students' strengths and progress.



**ERIKA DONAHUE**

### *Address the perception that Kindergarten is no longer DAP.*

One challenge has been addressing concerns about the ability to meet the Colorado Academic Standards within a developmentally appropriate framework. Resources from the P-3 Leadership Cadre participation were used to facilitate conversations about, and strengthen developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten classrooms.

As kindergarten teachers become more knowledgeable and intentional about implementing developmentally appropriate practices, students are more likely to experience aligned instructional practices across early learning settings. And, while working to ensure that classroom self-assessments were being completed for Colorado Preschool Program ECARE full-day kindergarten slots, it was noted that teachers become more aware of expectations to deliver developmentally appropriate practice during the process of completing the required self-assessment forms. Therefore, by introducing and/or reinforcing developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten in a variety of ways, and supporting implementation and teacher buy-in with the purchase of appropriate classroom materials, Shelley Smith observed "teachers are definitely moving towards more of a center-based learning approach."

**“When educators are better equipped to plan for and provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences, students continue to engage in active learning experiences that support development and build skills and competencies in meaningful ways.”**

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## LESSONS LEARNED:

- Shelley found that utilizing the resources provided by the P-3 Leadership Cadre helped her to take a stronger lead in the alignment from preschool to kindergarten.
- She has learned that expanding her knowledge and expertise of what really is expected of kindergarten has been critical in the support she provides teachers as they work to fully meet the needs of students.
- In addition, it is clear that improving vertical alignment helps to clarify core priorities for educators working to meet the needs of individual students and supports a more comprehensive and cohesive experience for students and their families.

## NEXT STEPS:

Kindergarten teachers will continue working with private providers and even cross-train through professional development to promote alignment. In addition, the plan is to expand their reach to the Family Friend and Neighbor (FFN) providers. Recognizing that students enter the District with a wide range of experiences with formal education means that strategies to support P-3 alignment must be varied and proactive.

If the resources were available, Erika Donahue, principal at June Creek Elementary would implement a co-teaching model making it possible to have two teachers in each classroom.

“ While transition meetings were in place prior to the start of the P-3 Cadre experience, it is clear now that the processes associated with the implementation of the assessment system in kindergarten classrooms have promoted a much better working knowledge of where students are developmentally when they come into their program, what to focus on next and how to use assessment in a formative way to modify instruction in ways that are more responsive and systematic. In fact, starting this year, kindergarten teachers are using the TS GOLD™ report card which is more informative and family friendly than report cards used in years past. ”

