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Kindergarten Readiness: A Checklist for Parents and Teachers

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KINDERGARTEN READINESS:
A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

A Project Report
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education
Master Teacher

by
Monica Rose Wolfe
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ABSTRACT

KINDERGARTEN READINESS
A HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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The standards for kindergarten are being raised each year. Kindergarten is no longer a place for play and socializing. Instead, children are expected to read, write and use mathematical concepts. Using the questionnaire to evaluate a child will allow for communication between parents and teachers as to whether or not the child is ready to take on the new challenges of kindergarten. Providing feedback for parents as to what their child needs to work on to be adequately prepared for kindergarten, will help children to be more successful at the beginning of their school years.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The standards for kindergarten are being raised each year. Kindergarten is no longer a place for play and socializing. Instead, children are expected to read, write and use mathematical concepts. These expectations are becoming more and more prevalent in our society. Governor Gray Davis of Sacramento, California stated in *The Los Angeles Times* October 8, 2000, the expectations of kindergartners have increased dramatically over the years. Who is going to teach these children the skills needed for beginning kindergarten? Parents need to participate in helping their child learn to get along with others, share, say the alphabet, hold a pencil, and even write their name. Some children are not ready to learn or exhibit these behaviors and skills even when they are five years old. In some cases, it would benefit the child if they stayed home for another year instead of attending kindergarten with the new higher standards. A child who has just turned 5 at the beginning of the school year will most likely have a lot more trouble than a child celebrating their 6th birthday in the first few months of kindergarten. Karnofsky and Weiss (1993) state studies showing a positive connection between students that are older in their class and higher percentages of success. As stated in the *Columbian*, a Vancouver, Washington newspaper, on September 5, 2000, "More than a third of Oregon's 40,300 kindergartners will arrive at the schoolhouse without orientation or adequate preparation. And by almost all accounts, this lack of readiness puts children at risk of school failure"

(p. C3). Throw into the equation a lack of parental involvement and you have an even wider gap.

Kindergarten teachers need a way to assist parents in determining if their child is ready for kindergarten or not. Providing a handbook for parents and teachers will help bridge communication. By filling out a questionnaire this will allow parents to see exactly what their child knows and what they still need to work on. It will also let parents know that their child may need another year at home or in pre-school. If a child is age eligible for kindergarten, but appears to not fit in socially or academically, the teacher will have a reference point with which to open conversation with the parent. Having a conversation with a kindergarten teacher from my district, I was able to ask her what she recommends when a child does not pass the readiness test that is given in the spring. Katie Heigh says:

Unfortunately, if they are five they have the right to begin kindergarten, no matter how we feel about it. What I do is give them some suggestions of things that they can do to help prepare their child for school in the fall
(personal communication, May 21,2001)

PURPOSE

We currently do not have a handbook like this nor an assessment that evaluates children when students enter kindergarten. For my master project I am going to produce a handbook that will allow my school to screen students that may not be ready for kindergarten and will also provide feedback to the parents. Having this important data will allow us to communicate with parents about their

child's academic level and social behavior prior to kindergarten. This will also help us when we are suggesting to parents to hold their child back for another year and not enroll them in kindergarten so early.

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Kindergarten Readiness tests: assessment of child's level of preparedness for a specific academic or preacademic program (Freeman, 1990).
2. Readiness: the achievement of physical, mental, emotional, social and empirical development along with the developmental maturity to integrate subskills into a desired skill (Ryan, 1996; Moore et al, 1979).
3. Small motor skills: small muscle movement including holding a glass, crayons, pencils, scissors, pasting, etc. (Karnofsky and Weiss, 1993).
4. Large motor skills: large muscle movement including running, hopping, throwing, etc. (Karnofsky and Weiss, 1993).
5. Tactile skills: skills that enable a child to learn through touching or being touched (Karnofsky and Weiss, 1993).
6. Spatial skills: skills which children learn from moving about his or her environment (Karnofsky and Weiss, 1993).
7. Delayed entry: children whose parents enrolled them in kindergarten after the eligible age to start school according to the guidelines of their school district (West, Meek, & Hurst, 2000).
8. Retained in kindergarten: children who attended two or more years of kindergarten before entering first grade (West et al, 2000).

9. Academic kindergarten: direct teaching of specific discrete skills, particularly in reading and math, which children are expected to master before going to first grade (Egertson, 1987).
10. Child-Centered kindergarten: does not base activities on the learner of discrete skills, but rather follows the mission of moving each child as far forward in his or her development as possible, as well as some characteristics of academic kindergarten (Egertson, 1987).

Chapter II

Review of Literature

INTRODUCTION

Many parents are asking the question, "is my child going to be ready for kindergarten?" Within that question lie many variables such as age at entrance, academic skills, social skills, and physical skills. Parents need to know how to prepare their child for their first year in school. Shana and Bill Rogford are quoted by Hodges when talking about their son; "We wanted to be sure we weren't pushing him into a stage he wasn't quite ready for" (<http://preschoolerstoday.com>). They mention that they have been "obsessed most about deciding whether or not he was really ready for kindergarten" (<http://preschoolerstoday.com>). As with many parents the Rogford's feel their child's education is important in ensuring success. Making sure their child is ready for school is a high priority. KidSource says, "Children who fit comfortably into their kindergarten have a rewarding and productive year, thus beginning their elementary school years with a positive attitude about academics" (www.kidsource.com)

In the LocalMom.com Archives, it is stated that:

Some educators are increasingly alarmed that children who aren't ready to start kindergarten begin anyway and suffer because of it. These children may have trouble with daily school routines, often interrupt the teacher or revert to toddler behavior such as thumbsucking or bedwetting.

(<http://www.parenting-qa.com>)

Educators would rather have a child stay home for an extra year to gain more skills rather than have that student not engaged in learning. With the variety of levels for educators to teach to in the classroom, it would be more beneficial for the child if parents took the time to determine if the child should become better prepared prior to kindergarten. Sandra Crosser (1998) suggests giving students "an extra year to mature so that they will not suffer from the academic disadvantages of being among the youngest children in a class".

Preparing children for kindergarten is in the hands of the parent. Some parents choose to send their child to prekindergarten, nursery school, preschool or day care, while others do not. In turn, the kindergarten curriculum has to adapt to the varying levels of incoming students. At KidSource OnLine, Loanne R. Nurss explains:

In the past kindergarten was the initial school experience for children, its focus was on the child's social adjustment to school. Kindergarten was usually a half-day program whose curriculum and activities were separate from the rest of the school, and whose purpose was to prepare the child for first grade. Now kindergarten is an integral part of the elementary school's curriculum and the focus has shifted from social to cognitive or academic. (<http://www.kidsource.com>)

From the Columbian on September 5, 2000, a survey was done on kindergarten readiness three years ago. This survey "showed that 42 percent of entering kindergartners were not adequately prepared for school in one or more of six areas" (One-Third, 2000). To show how varied the abilities of students entering

kindergarten, "another study was done in Washington County in 1997 showing that 49 percent of children did not have enough exposure to books and early literacy to prepare them for kindergarten" ("One-Third", 2000). When "kindergartners are unprepared for school [they] risk becoming frustrated and having their eagerness to learn snuffed out" ("One-Third", 2000).

Having varied backgrounds presents a challenge for educators to fulfill the educational need of their students. Knowing that some students may not have prekindergarten experiences is one reason some districts have incorporated a readiness test to gain more knowledge of students prior to the entrance in the school system. Felicia Hodges writes for preschoolertoday.com. She states that "some districts even test children before or shortly after the school year has started" (<http://preschoolertoday.com>). Along with that, Evelyn B. Freeman states "school systems around the country are using various types of tests to assess children prior to kindergarten entrance, during the kindergarten year, and at the end of it" (<http://preschoolertoday.com>). By asking a few questions educators are able to meet the needs of students better. Educators can also help parents realize what their child knows and needs to learn. For example, if a child does not know how to write their name prior to entering kindergarten, parents can work with their child knowing that is one skill they need to know at the beginning of kindergarten. Some findings Crosser (1998) states about delayed entry into kindergarten include:

Small-scale studies of limited geographic areas suggest that delayed kindergarten entrance involves anywhere from 9% to 64% of the eligible

kindergarten population (Meisels, 1992). However, data collected for the large-scale national Household Education Survey indicated that 9% of the first- and second-graders had been held back from kindergarten.

The few weeks and months before the entry into kindergarten make a large difference in a child's social and emotional skills. Knowing this, we need to make certain children born close to the cut off date for kindergarten entry they need to make up for the discrepancy in social and emotional development.

Prekindergarten experiences or lack thereof, are a vital piece of the kindergarten puzzle. Knowing which skills are needed, and those in which a child is lacking is key to kindergarten success.

PARENTS' NEEDS AND CONCERNS

Most parents are concerned with the preparation of their child for kindergarten. Many ask questions about what to do to prepare their child for the upcoming school year but there are a few that do not know who or what to ask. Those parents who are concerned with the readiness of their child are seeking answers by logging onto web sites, contacting local school districts, and writing to local newspapers. This gives them and their child a chance to be better prepared before the start of school. One online resource, KidSource.Com, has mentioned a few of the concerns for kindergarten readiness that parents have been asking:

- What is the date cut-off for entrance to kindergarten?
- "Is my child ready for kindergarten?"
- "What are the readiness factors for kindergarten?"
- "Should I send my child to school with a late summer or early fall birthday?"
- What are my options if I wait?

Parents that have the money and resources to put their child in a prekindergarten program have an advantage to those who do not. Findings show that money and school readiness is interrelated. Crosser (1998) reports parents with high socioeconomic status have a tendency to keep their child back a year from kindergarten more so than those in a low socioeconomic level do. As quoted in *The Huntsville Times* news article Sally Hershberger adds "and while that connection has nothing to do with inherent talent, [money] has

everything to do with classroom performance and standardized testing” (<http://www.ai.com>). However, the National Center for Educational Statistics states “when demographic, socioeconomic, and developmental factors were taken into account, the differences in school performance between delayed-entry students and other students were small” (West et al, 2000,). Egertson (1987) notes that parents find programs for their child that will fit the needs and prepare the child for kindergarten. Moore et al (1979) make a point from, about age and how children's experiences will help them:

Brenner and Stott generalized that the older a child is, the better he will function and structure his environment and the more he will have in experience and understanding of the world. And the greater his body of knowledge *before* he goes to school, the more successful he will be at the beginning and in subsequent school years (p.89).

When talking about prior experiences to starting school, Moore et al (1979) point out that most children who are late to enter school, will quickly function at a standard academic level, even if they had little or no formal training (p. 101). In an article by Challen Stephens about kindergarten readiness, Teri Stokes says “she can see the difference that preschool can make. It affects school behaviors like knowing how to line up, playground politeness, taking turns” (<http://www.ai.com>). Egertson notes that it is not uncommon to find prekindergarten programs that have more sit-down activities, and pencil and paper tasks to prepare children for kindergarten. Stokes also points out that “the positive experience that a child has in kindergarten, has to do with their prior

experiences" (<http://www.al.com>). Harriet Egertson (1987) states that educators are more likely to find students that have had prekindergarten experiences outside of the home now, compared to the past. This also ties in with the age of a student upon entrance for kindergarten. PreschoolersToday.com makes the statement:

While school districts rely on age as the determining factor, some educators believe that the most important aspect to determining if a child is ready for kindergarten is how much previous experience he or she has had in a school setting (<http://preschoolerstoday.com>).

When talking about the entrance age for kindergarten there are varied answers. Some districts have a late date in August whereas as others wait until December. Moore et al (1979) says, "School entrance age laws appear to be generally arbitrary" (p. 86). They also discuss entrance policies from the U.S. Data showing some states allowing children to enter as young as age four, or children exempted as late as age nine (p.86). LocalMom.com Archives suggests looking at the local school district or at the U.S. Department of Education to find out the age requirements (www.parenting-qa.com). LocalMom.com Archives also makes a great statement that says "Since school officials can only make recommendations, the decision about school readiness is solely up to a child's parents" (www.parenting-qa.com). Parents are the best judgement for a student's eventual success in kindergarten. Parents are the ones that know their child the best. Educators ask parents many questions about the child prior to the beginning of school to gain information that will benefit the child in the long run.

KidSource.com reports that "kindergarten is a significant step on the path of education. A little consideration and planning on [the parents] part can make this step a rewarding and successful time for your child" (<http://www.kidsource.com>).

Another question commonly asked by parents: Is my child ready for kindergarten? As educators we can only predict if they will be ready by administering a readiness test, including looking at the child's past educational experiences. A child's birth date does not always show that they are ready for kindergarten. As quoted by Cindy Kranz in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, Kevin Boys, an assistant superintendent, says, "It's such an individual matter. I've always held the belief that it's more about the individual child and their readiness, instead of a magical date you pick out of the air" (<http://www.enquirer.com>).

Crosser (1998) agrees, "there is no clear-cut evidence that delaying kindergarten for the youngest entrants will provide some magical academic advantage" (p.2)

Many schools have developed readiness questionnaires or checklists to let a parent know if their child is on the right path to being prepared for kindergarten.

At familyeducation.com, Gesler and Eberts say, "There is really no true formula that determines when a child is ready but using a checklist can help you to see how your child is doing at acquiring the skills needed for kindergarten"

(<http://www.familyeducation.com>). There are many different checklists and questionnaires available for parents to use. Parents wanting the best program and knowing if their child is ready for kindergarten or not, "has led to the widespread use of screening and readiness tests prior to kindergarten entrance to determine whether children are likely to be successful in school (Egertson,

1987). Freeman (1990) states the results from standardized readiness exams use a child's developmental age and are used to determine placement for the child. These standardized tests can be used either prior to kindergarten or after a year in kindergarten. Many of them are looking at the same types of behaviors. KidSource.com states:

Readiness for kindergarten depends on a child's development of social, perceptual, motor, and language skills expected by the teacher. It also depends on the curriculum's degree of structure, the behavior required by the instructional program, and expectations of what is to be achieved by the end of the program (<http://www.kidsource.com>).

Parents often wonder "what if my child does not score well on the checklists or questionnaires." Brenda Sanders, an elementary school principal is quoted in Hodges article at preschoolerstoday.com as saying, "some children are late bloomers, whether they were born in September or January" (<http://preschoolerstoday.com>). Parents should listen to those who work with their child. It is important to hear from those people that know what skills are needed to be successful in school. They can then focus on the skills needed rather than their child's score. [Preschoolerstoday.com](http://preschoolerstoday.com) makes the point that:

If your child attends preschool it is recommended that you pay attention to what the teachers have to say. The way a child is in preschool is likely to be continued in his/her kindergarten year. If the preschool teacher suggests holding your child back for a year then parents should consider

that. Another suggestion is to ask questions of those that work with your child” (<http://preschoolerstoday.com>).

Karnofsky and Weiss (1993) agree, that talking to people the child is involved with will give a better idea of what the child is capable of doing. They also point out that “a professional may have another perspective that will help you” (Karnofsky and Weiss, 1993). A parent may not be able to objectively evaluate their child’s readiness.

If a child does not attend preschool or if a parent is still unsure about placing their child in kindergarten now or waiting a year, LocalMom.com has some good warning signs of children that most likely are too young to attend kindergarten that can be considered.

- Preschoolers that have difficulties with separation from parents, having bathroom accidents, clinging to teacher, crying easily, do not follow classroom routines.
- Kindergartners that do not want to go to school, go back to thumbsucking and bedwetting, do not wait for their turn to talk, can not follow a routine, are not able to stick to one activity for a length of time.
- Children who may be small, difficulties with fine motor skills, do not want to interact with other children, or cry and throw tantrums for no reason at all (<http://www.parenting-qa.com>).

Once parents have taken into consideration the readiness checklist or questionnaire, the recommendation from preschool teachers, and the list of warning signs they may make the decision to keep their child home for another

year. They then would like to know how to work and prepare their child during the year at home. A well-rounded routine is important, with an emphasis on the specific social, motor or academic skills needed. PreschoolersToday.com has a recommendation from Brenda Sanders to “make sure your child is involved in other activities” (<http://preschoolerstoday.com>). Sue Dinwiddie also has some suggestions for another year at home for development. Continue with or involve your child in a stimulating prekindergarten program; staying at home and not giving your child a chance to develop interactions with other children is doing a disservice to your child (<http://www.kidsource.com>). Dinwiddie also suggests conversing with the prekindergarten teachers to insure your child is not being forced into an academic program if they are not ready (<http://www.kidsource.com>). In the Cincinnati Enquirer, Cindy Kranz talks with Mrs. Millspaugh about her decision to hold her son back from kindergarten in 1999. Mrs. Millspaugh says that she was “happy with the decision to hold her son back because he was not interested in numbers and letters until last year” (<http://enquirer.com>). The ultimate decision is up to the parent as to when their child enters kindergarten. Jennifer Mafiosi makes a strong point for parents to remember when making that decision, “If [a student] is behind in kindergarten, they are behind in first grade. It’s just a cycle that’s hard to get ahead” (<http://enquirer.com>).

ACADEMIC SKILLS

Because kindergarten has changed its focus from play and social learning to more academics, it is becoming much more stressful for parents to find the

right fit for their child. Governor Gray Davis of Sacramento California is quoted in *The Times Mirror Company; Los Angeles Times 2000*, "Kindergarten today has become much more academically rigorous than it was originally intended to be" (Pilot Program, 2000). Crosser (1998) notes that as the standards continue to increase for kindergarten, which included five and six-year-old students, the program will become developmentally inappropriate for those children. Freeman (1990) notes research "kindergarten teachers and administrators do not believe that academic kindergartens best serve the needs of young children" (p. 32). Parents should consider this, "Relax. While you want to get [the] decision right, if you put a kid in too early, kindergarten is the best grade to repeat. Beyond that, repetition gets less successful because there are more special issues" (Jameson, 2000). Kindergarten teachers that are teaching the new standards present a more academic environment rather than having a developmentally appropriate social environment for five and six year olds. Harriet Egertson (1987) reports that an academic environment is "characterized by the direct teaching of specific discrete skills, particularly in reading and math, which children are expected to master before going to first grade" (p.2). This makes for large group activities directed by the teacher. While some students learn that way not all children learn by direct instruction.

When children enter at the "prescribed time", parents often wonder if that will affect the child's learning. It was also shown in a 1995 survey that children who had delayed entry to kindergarten, were less likely to repeat first or second grade. Noting the differences in abilities and age, at each grade level, Moore et

al (1979) state that the “chronological difference of nine to eleven months” can be found in any classroom. The academic achievements of a group of children were tested from kindergarten through sixth grade. They were tested using the “Stanford Achievement Tests. The older [students] achieved more than the younger [students] in all subjects at all grade levels, except for one zero difference” (Moore et al, 1979, p.98). Forester did a study on students from kindergarten through high school and found that students, who entered into kindergarten at a young age and were bright, had difficulties in junior and high school (Moore et al, 1979, p.99). Some of the findings that Forester reported were students being “physically immature and emotionally unstable, [not performing] as well socially, behaviorally, academically, and not in leadership roles” (Moore et al, 1979, p.99). Further more, “Forester concluded that early entry could even have an adverse effect later in adult life” (Moore et al, 1979, p.99). Another study was done on students with early entry, summer birthdays, and those that were delayed entry a year. The results presented by Crosser (1998) indicate that boys with summer birth dates were better off academically if they were held back one year. The greatest advantage for them was in reading. There was no significant difference for math. Girls, in both reading and math, did not show significant differences in reading or math. On the other hand, Freeman (1990) notes a study done that shows by third grade students showed no significant differences in “academic performance or school adjustment”.

Having a variety of activities for children to engage in makes the learning more adaptable for students. “The wide range of physical, social, and intellectual

characteristics represented in a group of contemporary beginning kindergartners makes an informal, flexible approach to the kindergarten curriculum necessary” (<http://kidsource.com>). When looking at programs for kindergarten, parents can inquire about a child-initiated environment which allows for more time and expansion of activities (Egertson, 1987). Because of the varying abilities parents should look at the “complexity of the material ranges from easy to difficult” (Egertson, 1987). It is important to match a program to a child. Egertson (1987) suggest “advocates of developmental kindergarten programs should emphasize the effectiveness of an active learning setting for advancing children’s growth and development” (p.3). If the program does not match the child’s abilities, he or she may have many difficulties performing regular schoolwork, which may lead to retention. There have been a high percentage of retained children that had their parents contacted by the teacher or school in the last year because of schoolwork problems. The percentage decreased for non-retained pupils. Parents need to do some investigation as to what the program is going to be for their child. Knowing what is to come for a child will make a big difference for the child's outcome in years ahead. Crosser (1998) makes the point that academic scores are just one area that should be looked at. She says the “physical, social, and emotional development” are all areas that should be considered too. The *Los Angeles Times* makes a great observation about the program matching the child’s style:

Kids have different learning styles. A child who’s a hands-on learner is not going to do well in a structured, all-day, sit-at-your-desk kindergarten.

Some kindergartners are very academic, others allow more freedom to move around and play. And remember kindergarten was once the first transitional step from home to school but preschool now takes that role.

Kindergarten is now more like first grade (Jameson, 2000).

MOTOR SKILLS

When looking at young children and their ability to succeed in kindergarten, an important area is fine and gross motor skills. Fine motor skills include hand-eye coordination skills, holding a pencil, crayon or scissors, and tracing small objects. Gross or large motor skills include walking, running, catching a ball, standing on one foot, and skipping. Joanne Nurss (1987) makes the statement "teachers expect children to develop certain physical skills before they enter kindergarten" (<http://www.kidsource.com>). Parents wonder why their child needs to know some of these skills prior to kindergarten. Young children use their brain to work their muscles, which in turn help them to be successful. Karnofsky and Weiss (1993) report that "in kindergarten a child's brain, muscles, and eyes accustomed to working together enable a child to print letters within lines and to recognize letters of the alphabet when arranged together to form words" (p. 28).

In kindergarten students write, color, use blocks, hop, skip, and jump to increase their motor skills. Many of the sit-down, table activities use a child's small motor skills. "Group play requires large motor skills. Having these skills will help your child feel more confident and fit in better with other children (Karnofsky and Weiss, 1993). Karnofsky and Weiss, (1993) also suggest not

pushing students into learning motor skills because students learn at different rates, some learn small motor faster, others learn large motor faster.

Another important skill that is used in kindergarten is tactile skills. Kindergarten students learn a lot through touch, both touching and being touched. Teaching students to begin to read is a main goal for kindergarten. This is done through teaching of the letters and sounds. Karnofsky and Weiss (1993) state many students learn letter shapes by touching. They suggest combining tactile experiences with all learning to be most beneficial.

SOCIAL SKILLS

It is difficult to predict how a child will interact with his or her peers at the beginning of kindergarten. Some children have been interacting with others their age since they were very young, yet for others kindergarten is their first experience to fully interact with a large group of children. When a child enters kindergarten and had not developed appropriate social skills, it makes it difficult for the teacher and the classroom environment. Having to go back and teach students basic social skills takes time away from teaching academics. Stephens, in *The Huntsville Times*, writes about a child that has entered kindergarten with a low score in impulsivity, "the teacher will have to rewind and teach him to sit and wait, to line up and listen, taking time away from academics" (<http://www.al.com>). When a teacher has to take the time to go back and teach those skills, that student has to make more growth for the year than other students. They not only have the academic pressures but they also have the social pressures to fit in. This can create emotional turmoil for a child. Academics are important but a

child's "emotional development "is even more important for their education (Karnofsky and Weiss, 1993). This is especially true of young 5 year olds entering kindergarten. In Hodges article for PreschoolersToday.com, Brenda Sanders states she can see the difference between students that have not been in prekindergarten programs because they have difficulty with group play and some school day routines (<http://preschoolerstoday.com>). Sanders says this is "because [kindergarten] involves sharing and learning how to work cooperatively with others" (<http://preschoolerstoday.com>). A child without these vital social or emotional skills will suffer in terms of the kindergarten program.

SUMMARY

Knowing the questions to ask and the people to ask will help parents feel better about their decision for kindergarten. If a child has been in a prekindergarten program then that facility will be able to assist in giving advice to the parent as to what is best for the child. The readiness questionnaire will provide guidelines and a more definitive view of the child skill level. Parents and educators should look at the child's age and the abilities prior to kindergarten, as well as the information from other people that work with the child. It is best to remember the decision for a child's placement in kindergarten ultimately falls on the hands of the parents. Teachers and school districts can make strong recommendations but parents have the final decision. Brenda Sanders is quoted by Hodges in an article written for preschoolerstoday.com, "You know your child. Don't be afraid to do what's best for him or her. You know your child better than any school district ever could" (<http://preschoolerstoday.com>).

Knowing the correlation of students achievement and preparedness for kindergarten, many educators want to encourage children who are not ready to attend kindergarten stay at home and wait for a year. Being prepared for education is of utmost importance to all students, especially those just beginning their education.

Forty-two percent of Oregon's entering kindergarten students were not adequately prepared for school in one or more of six areas: physical well-being; language arts; attitudes about learning; cognition and general knowledge; motor development; and social and emotional development (One-Third, 2000).

A readiness questionnaire, conversations with educators and consideration of skills may well have helped these Oregon students.

Chapter III

PROCEDURES

Raising standards each year for kindergarten means less time socializing and more focus on academics. But are the students ready? Being a kindergarten teacher and not knowing a student's academic performance level or social skills makes it difficult to begin teaching. This year we found many low achieving students, grouped together with behavior problems. This made for a classroom full of low academic and low social emotional skilled children rather than being able to split them up in different classes to make a better environment for them. This challenging situation has created a need for some creative teaching. We are not able to meet the needs of each child with these varied levels. Having some type of assessment may allow the teachers to spread the students out over different teachers.

In discussion with another kindergarten teacher we feel that some students are not ready for kindergarten. I explored other avenues of creating more equality among the classroom and with parents. In doing so, I developed a checklist tool that will allow us to have a communication piece with parents. The assessment will help us explain to parents that their child is not ready for kindergarten and help them to better prepare their child before school starts. Another benefit will be to spread the needs of students among different teachers.

Looking for kindergarten readiness articles and assessments on the World Wide Web got me wanting to research more. I found many schools that already use such assessments that were available for me to view. Also in my research I

searched ERIC to find research about kindergarten readiness. Many authors favored having a kindergarten screening of some kind.

After researching I found that other schools have a kindergarten readiness assessment. Since our school currently does not have an assessment tool that evaluates children when they enter kindergarten, I came up with the idea of having a kindergarten readiness handbook. In that handbook, I would like to include three components a parent questionnaire and a teacher assessment of the student and a suggestion packet for parents to help their child become prepared.

Within those three components would be areas that have been researched: motor skills, social behaviors, academic skills, and parent need/concern. These areas will contain skills or behaviors that children are expected to have developed prior to beginning kindergarten.

Chapter IV

INTRODUCTION

Creating a questionnaire for parents and teachers to evaluate children will help in the communication process for placing children at the beginning of kindergarten. Some parents will be able to help their child to prepare over the summer for the new challenges of kindergarten. Other parents will make the option to keep their child home from school for another year prior to the start of kindergarten.

Using this questionnaire at the spring gathering of parents will be the best way for parents to get a good look at their child's abilities and strengths. For those who do not attend, placing the questionnaire in the registration packet will make sure all parents will see it and to think about what is best for their child. Having parents and teachers talk about the importance of readiness will make it easier for parents to make the decision for the fall. This will also give parents the opportunity to gather materials needed to ensure their child will be successful at the beginning of kindergarten rather than waiting until the child has been in school for some time.

The checklist can be found in the appendixes.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

After looking at the research for kindergarten readiness the importance for open communication to parents is obvious. It is important to let parents of incoming kindergartners know what it is their child should know prior to the start of school. Many parents think that all pre-kindergarten programs fully prepare their child for kindergarten. Because of the discrepancies between programs, as well as varies levels of development, parents should complete a readiness questionnaire.

Research shows how beneficial a questionnaire can be. It not only lets the parents see what they need to work on with their child prior to kindergarten but it also provides educators with vital information for the beginning of school. I was aware of the higher standards for kindergarten, but I was not aware about how little parents know about these standards. Giving this information to parents in May, four months prior to the start of kindergarten, allows educators to explain the expectations for children entering kindergarten in the fall. This gives parents the chance to decide if their child needs to work on their skills over the summer or if staying home for another year will be better for the needs of their child.

After creating a questionnaire for parents to analyze their child's social skills, academic skills, physical skills and their math skills, it will be interesting to find out how parents will react to the amount their child knows and still needs to learn. My current elementary school is going to implement this questionnaire this spring during our kindergarten spring meeting and at registration, allowing us to

think about placement for children next year as well as a communication piece for parents.

In doing this project I learned most about the importance of educating parents on the standards for children entering kindergarten. In the past it was not until October of the school year that we were able to let parents know that their child is not ready for the pressures of school. By that time many parents say they are willing to work on the skills needed, but not willing to keep their child home for the year. The child already two months behind, at this point, may become frustrated and go through an emotional turmoil. This may lead to further struggles for the child during the school year and years to come. Letting parents know with time to work on specific skills will make the child's first few months of kindergarten more enjoyable for them and give them the advantage that they need.

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Appendixes

**Kindergarten Readiness:
A Checklist for Parents and Teachers**

Developed by:
Monica Wolfe
March 2002

Dear Parents of prospected kindergartners:

This checklist will help you decide if your child is ready for kindergarten. Many parents face this decision every year. This checklist is intended to help you assess your child's skills. It will help you determine if they are ready for kindergarten or if you need to help your child develop additional skills prior to admission.

Read each of the sections on the checklist and check off the skills your child is able to do well. Honestly evaluate each skill, as this will help you prepare your child for their school year.

When you are finished, count the checked skills to determine the recommendation for placement. Use the following chart to help determine what would be best for your child:

85% - 100%, 36-31, skills mastered – Ready to be in kindergarten without many interventions

70% - 84%, 26-30, skills mastered – Needs some interventions prior to the start of kindergarten

69% and below, 25 or less, skills mastered – Recommended to wait another year before entering kindergarten

You may use part 2 of the handbook to gather ideas for interventions to work with your child to prepare them for the beginning of kindergarten.

Please contact your current pre-kindergarten teacher or a Lakeland kindergarten teacher with questions or concerns regarding this checklist or your child.

Sincerely,

The Lakeland Elementary

Kindergarten Staff

Kindergarten Readiness Part 1: Parents checklist for their pre-kindergartner

Kindergarten it will be most beneficial to your child if they can do all or most of the things on the following list.

A. Concept Development

These skills are needed to allow children to construct their own understanding of concepts and relate their understanding to adults.

Can your child . . .

- recognize and/or name basic colors
- point to and name his/her body parts (head, shoulders, knees, etc.)
- tell first, middle and last name when asked
- tell the names and relations of immediate family members
- know basic names for things around the house

B. Physical Development

Providing daily opportunities for children to use their large and small motor skills will help them to be successful when using their physical skills in school.

Can your child . . .

- cut with scissors
- try to tie his/her shoes
- hold a crayon, marker, or pencil with their thumb and fingers
- trace or draw a line with control
- help dress her/his (coat, socks, shoes, etc.)
- throw and catch a large ball

C. Number Concept Development

Making sure your child feels confident with number tasks early on, will help them in future mathematical tasks during school. Number concepts include; classifying, ordering, counting, and time and space relationships.

Can your child . . .

- arrange items in groups according to size, shape or color
- recognize groups of up to 5 objects
- count to 10 orally
- correctly count 4 – 10 objects
- determine bigger vs. smaller

D. Language

Language development, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, will help children in school as well as the rest of their lives.

Can your child . . .

- talk in complete sentences of 5 – 6 words
- follow through when you give her/him one or two directions
- start to follow rules
- sing and/or recite nursery rhymes

E. Reading

Reading books to your young child is the best way to get them interested in reading. Reading should be done daily with your child.

Can your child . . .

- recognize his/her first name in print
- look at books or pictures on his/her own
- identify some alphabet letters
- desires to be read to frequently for short periods of time
- try to read along with you on favorite parts of the story or sentences that are repeated over and over again

F. Writing

Children go through stages of writing to include: scribbling; drawing; and pretend writing. Encouraging writing will enable your child to become a lifelong, skilled writer.

Can your child . . .

- try to write, scribble or draw
- attempt to invent his/her own spelling while writing (scribbling sentences)
- ask to write words or sentences

G. Social Emotional

Children need to interact with other children to learn social emotional skills. These include, taking turns, making compromises, approach other children, obey authority, and be nice to others.

Can your child . . .

- comply with rules, limits and routines
- interact appropriately with adults
- separate from parents without being upset
- attempts new tasks knowing its okay to make mistakes
- have success in taking turns and sharing
- ask for help when necessary
- respects the rights, property and feelings of others
- explain how they feel (angry, happy, sad, etc.)

Kindergarten Readiness Part 2: What is next?

If your child is able to complete at least 85% of these skills, and will be five years old by August 31st, she/he is probably ready for kindergarten.

However, if your child has not yet mastered at least 70% of the above skills, you should consider keeping your child home for another year of pre-kindergarten. This will ensure that they experience a positive start to school, and which will give them a lifelong love of learning.

If you feel your child is on the edge of knowing the requested skills, between 70% and 84%, the following are some suggestions to help you prepare your child for kindergarten.

A. Concept Development

- Provide age appropriate toys which require thinking. This includes puzzles, blocks, or sorting toys.
- Count objects around the house, such as plates and forks for the table, crackers for snack.
- Play Simon Says. For example: "Simon says, 'put your hands under your feet.'" "Simon Says, 'Put your hands over your head.'"

B. Physical Development

- Allow your child time to dress him/herself
- Provide experiences with scissors such as cutting pictures from magazines
- Provide opportunities to use crayons, markers, pencils, and pens
- Provide opportunities for your child to experiment with balls, tricycles and jump ropes.

C. Number Concept Development

- Let your child set the table ("How many forks do we need?" "How many chairs?" etc.).
- Provide opportunities to compare objects.
- Provide objects or toys for play.

D. Language

- Talk with your child about what interests him or her.
- Use questions that have more than one answer such as: "What do you think?" "How would you feel?"
- Play rhyming games
- Let your child know what she/he says is important. You do this by *listening* to your child.
- Get down at eye level and show your interest.

E. Reading

- Provide a wide variety of books for your child, including nursery rhymes and fairy tales.
- Give your child books as presents.
- Make reading a part of your daily life.
- Provide a wide variety of reading materials (magazines, newspapers, recipes, etc.).

Suggested Reading:

The Doorbell Rang by, *Pat Hutchins*

Corduroy by Don Freeman

It Looked Like Spilt Milk by Charles G Shaw

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom by Bill Martin Jr and John Archambault

The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister

Other authors to read are Dr. Seuss, Eric Carle, and Don and Audrey Wood

F. Writing

- Provide your child with materials (e.g., crayons, pencils, paper) and a space for writing.
- Have a place to display your child's efforts.
- Accept your child's trial and error (e.g., scribbles, pictures, alphabet soup).
- Make signs to label objects in your child's room or other rooms in the house.
- Encourage your child to read his/her own writing to you.
- Provide magnetic letters for your child to practice forming her/his name and words she/he wants to know.

G. Social and Emotional Development

- Remember that discipline is teaching your child how to behave rather than punishing her/him for misbehavior.
- Remember to always love your child and let her/him know it's the behavior you do not like, not them.