

WHO'S REALLY READY FOR SCHOOL?

Carrie Zelin Johnson, M.Ed carriejohnson@yahoo.com 612-296-5443

Definitions → State definitions, Federal Definitions, District definitions, Teacher definitions

- Most states determine a child's readiness for kindergarten depending upon their age
- Most children are allowed to enter kindergarten if they are five years old or are turning five by a specific date
- Educators stress the importance of recognizing; children develop at different rates. (Clifford, Sauja & Scott-Little, 2003.)
- In Minnesota children must be five years old by September 1st to enter kindergarten; however some districts have policies in place to allow children to enter at age 4.
- MN law states that children do not have to attend school until the age of 7, children with special needs; age 8. (MN Department of Education; <http://www.mndepted.gov>)

Federal Definitions: The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (PL 107-110), passed by Congress in 2001

- Increase academic achievement levels in students considered to be disadvantaged (based upon low family income level, residence in a non-English speaking household, or enrollment in a low-performing public school)
- To better prepare educators for the task of teaching.

4 Key Principles of NCLB:

- accountability for student learning results,
- state flexibility in its use of federal funding,
- school choice for parents and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and
- a focus on using curriculum programs based on scientific research.

Accountability aspects of NCLB

- Requires students to pass assessment tests at specified grade levels to ensure schools qualify for federal funding. (Does it cause teachers to teach to the test?)
- Possible effect of mandated assessment tests in kindergarten and primary grades (1-3.) (Does it mislead parents and policy makers to set unrealistic academic goals for young children?)
- School Readiness can help truly ensure that "no child is left behind" (Blaustein, 2005.)

School readiness should be thought of as having at least the following dimensions:

- Health and Physical development
- Emotional well-being and social competence
- Approaches to learning
- Communicative skills
- Cognition and general knowledge

(As stated by The National Education Goals Panel)

- ✓ *Children's development varies and environmental factors influence their development, which makes it hard to decide on how to measure the dimensions above.*

Realistic Goals and Uses for Assessments

1. Improve Learning and change teaching strategies
2. Identify Children with Delays or other Special Needs
3. Evaluate Programs and outcomes
4. Use for high-stakes accountability; funding and employment contingencies.

Recognize that all assessments have limitations:

- Every assessment gathers unique information that may not be used for multiple purposes; i.e. a specific skill such as stacking blocks or naming pictures.
- For this reason multiple assessment tools must be selected to avoid specific skills like early literacy to define appropriate progress in the developmental domains and vice versa.
- Careful training in assessment administration is a must as is reliability checks.
- Some assessments may promote or results may not take into account racial, cultural ethnicity, gender and first-language bias. (Clifford & Maxwell, 2004.)

Specific School Readiness Skills

Self-help skills

- Independently uses the bathroom and washes hands
- Uses a tissue to wipe runny nose
- Snaps, zips and buttons clothing
- Puts away toys and helps with clean-up activities
- Asks for help and accepts it when needed

Gross motor skills

- Runs smoothly
- Skips
- Jumps with both feet off the ground
- Hops on one foot
- Catches, throws and bounces a ball
- Climbs easily on playground equipment

Language and speech skills

- Can easily make adults understand what he/she wants
- Engages in conversation and understands questions and answers
- Listens to and follows simple direction
- Participates and stays on truthful discussion topics (back and forth at least 5 times)
- Tells a story or retells experiences in proper sequence
- Enjoys listening to stories or rhymes
- 10,000-12,000 word vocabulary is needed to be a successful reader

Fine Motor Skills

- Holds and uses a drawing implement
- Can copy letters such as X, H, V, D, O & name from a sample
- Draws a human figure with arms, legs and features
- Can tie own shoes
- (On average one hour a day is spent by teachers tying children's shoes)
- Cuts on simple lines and around simple shapes

Thinking Skills

- Matches symbols/letters, letter sounds, and simple words (Match/Point/Say)
- Shares ideas and gives reasons for opinion
- Asks questions and tries new things
- Understands and follows the rules of a simple game
- Recognizes pictures/objects and sounds that are the same and different
- Verbally counts to 10

Social/Emotional Skills

- Adjusts to new situations
- Uses words to resolve conflicts
- Can sit for 5-10 minutes to focus on a story or task
- Complete tasks
- Cooperates with others and takes turns
- Uses control when frustrated
- Takes pride in his/her achievements
- Positive association with school, teachers and peers.