School Readiness Research Synthesis

March 2010

The purpose of this school readiness research synthesis is to provide early childhood professionals, local early childhood coalitions, kindergarten teachers, elementary principals, and school division leaders with a synopsis of school readiness research that is easily assessable via the Internet.

Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI): Current Implementation and Potential Changes

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia. (2007). *Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI): Current Implementation and Potential Changes*. Commonwealth of Virginia.

Abstract:

The Virginia General Assembly directed that the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia (JLARC) conduct a study of Virginia's preschool program for at-risk four-year-olds, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). Multiple methods were used to assess VPI. This report describes that study and the findings of the study.

Selected Key Findings:

- Test results indicate that VPI students gain in literacy skills during the pre-K year and outperform other kindergarteners. Longer term student-level data are needed to assess VPI's impact on test scores in later grades. A survey of kindergarten teachers and principals indicates that most at-risk pre-K graduates are well prepared for kindergarten and later elementary grades.

> "Virginia is one of 38 states supporting a preschool program which is focused on early learning to promote school readiness. Many states have implemented such a program because research indicates that a quality preschool program can improve the school readiness and future educational and even life outcomes of at-risk children."

- Research indicates that a quality preschool experience for "at-risk" four-year-olds helps prepare them for school and can have long-lasting benefits.
- Some localities choose to not participate in the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), and others do not fill all at-risk slots due to funding or space considerations, raising questions about equitable access for at-risk children.
- Local VPI programs largely comply with program requirements. VPI classrooms typically provide a positive learning environment, and student engagement with classroom activities is usually high.
- Regarding "universal" preschool, research suggests quality pre-K can be beneficial for children not at-risk, but gains experienced by these children may be more limited. Virginia's focus on at-risk students appears appropriate.

Web site: JLARC report on VPI:
http://jlarc.state.va.us/Meetings/November07/prek.pdf

Transitioning to Kindergarten

Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. (2002). *Early Childhood Research and Policy Briefs; Transition to Kindergarten.* University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: National Center for Early Development & Learning.

Abstract:

This brief by the National Center for Early Development and Learning provides a synthesis of current issues affecting best practices in transitioning children to kindergarten. The critical issues are discussed in the context of what constitutes school readiness in young children. This is based on the premise that clear developmental differences exist between preschool-age children and school-age children, and that these differences need to be addressed through effective transition practices. Common transition practices are discussed as well as barriers to effective transition and the policy changes that are needed to penetrate those barriers.

Selected Key Findings:
- School readiness is not defined as a trait of a child but rather as a product of interactions in terms of the settings in which the child participates.
- Partnerships between families and schools are encouraged to be established even before school starts.
- Transition policies and practices should not focus solely on children's skills but should be attentive to the assessment of readiness.
- Policy changes are needed to strengthen bonds between preschools and elementary schools as well as between families and schools, provide high quality classroom experiences for kindergarten children, and have transition planning teams in each locality.

> "The transition period involves not only how children adjust to kindergarten but also how families and schools interact and cooperate. It is not just the child who makes a transition."

Web site: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/Tranbrief.pdf

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Getting Parents "Ready" for Kindergarten: The Role of Early Childhood Education

Kreider, H. (2002). *Getting Parents "Ready" for Kindergarten: The Role of Early Childhood Education.* Harvard Family Research Project.

Abstract:

The research brief begins with the hypothesis that the parents' positive experiences with early childhood education programs could help prepare them and keep them engaged in connecting with their children's elementary schools. Findings confirm this hypothesis as preliminary evidence is provided regarding family involvement as a contributing factor to a smooth transition to elementary school for children. Best practices for supporting parents' involvement in their children's learning are also discussed.

Selected Key Findings:

Research findings suggest the following processes by which parents become involved in their children's kindergarten experience.

- *Information and guidance* – provide parents with knowledge in how to assist their child.
- *Leadership opportunities* – build confidence in parents as they become involved in early childhood settings.
- *Patterns of practice* – provide frequent opportunities for parents to volunteer regularly.
- *Trusting relationships* – build meaningful relationships that assist parents in developing communication skills with educators and educational systems.

"Early childhood programs may help set the stage for strong partnerships across families and between families and schools."

Web site: http://www.serve.org/TT/GettingParents.pdf

Readiness: School, Family, and Community

Abstract:

This brief addresses readiness in the context of families, schools, and communities. Three research questions serve as the basis of the information studies. The first looks at what factors upon kindergarten entry account for the differences in children's skills and performance. The second explores the family and community components associated with preschool interventions and finally the third question relates to transition practices and the patterns of family-school interactions.

> "Young children enter kindergarten with a range of cognitive and social skills that appear to make a difference in their achievement during the kindergarten year. This seems to be of long-term importance; children who get off to a good start in kindergarten tend to maintain that advantage as they progress through school."

Selected Key Findings:

- The cognitive and social skills with which young children enter kindergarten make a difference in their achievement in kindergarten.
- Young children's family background experiences and family interactions are strongly correlated with their relative skills and abilities upon entry to kindergarten.
- Children from both middle and low income families produce gains in emergent literacy and numeracy skills when parents are given specific strategies to help support their children.
- The frequency of family-school contact tends to change as children enter kindergarten, with families of all backgrounds becoming less involved.

Web site: http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/readiness-synthesis.pdf

School Readiness: Helping Communities Get Children Ready for School and Schools Ready for Children

School Readiness: Helping Communities Get Children Ready for School and Schools Ready for Children, (October 2001, Trends Research Brief) National Education Goals Panel

Abstract:

The brief begins by summarizing recommendations from the National Education Goals Panel regarding defining and assessing school readiness. A framework for community investments based on an "ecological" view of child development is discussed. The emphasis is not only on factors related to the child, but also to the child's family, early childhood care and education, schools, community, and the larger society. The five dimensions of young children's school readiness are discussed in this context. The ten characteristics of ready schools as they are prepared to support the learning and development of young children are also discussed in this brief.

Selected Key Findings:
- The National Education Goal Panel (NEGP) identifies the three components of school readiness as a) readiness of the child; b) schools' readiness for children; and c) family and community services and supports that contribute to children's readiness.
- Research consistently documents the importance of the family environment in shaping children's early development.
- Emergent literacy skills at kindergarten entry are a good predictor of children's reading abilities throughout their school years.

Web site: http://www.childtrends.org/Files/schoolreadiness.pdf

America's Kindergarteners

U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *America's Kindergarteners,* NCES 2000-070, by Kristin Denton, Elvira Germino-Hausken. Project Officer, Jerry West, Washington, DC: 2000.

Abstract:

This report - *The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten (ECLS-K); Class of 1998-99, Fall 1998* - presents the first findings from a national study of kindergarteners, their schools, classrooms, teachers and families. The study was begun following a nationally representative sample of some 22,000 kindergarteners in the fall of 1998. The sample included children from both public and private kindergartens that offered full-day and part-day programs; and included children from different racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

This publication focuses on the child, and information is presented according to several factors that may influence child development. While first-time kindergarteners are similar in many ways, this report demonstrates that differences exist in children's skills and knowledge in relation to their characteristics, background and experiences. This report has two purposes: (1) it provides the first national picture of entering kindergarteners in the United States and (2) it introduces the rich data set associated with *The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten* (*ECLS-K).* This report is highly descriptive in nature, presenting a broad array of information on children's status as they begin their journey to school.

Selected Key Findings:
- The foundation of cognitive skills and knowledge that children build in kindergarten will influence children's experience in school and their cognitive growth in later school years.
- Children's performance in reading, mathematics and general knowledge increases with the level of their mothers' education.
- The incidence of problem behavior is relatively infrequent in first-time kindergarteners, but children who exhibit aggressive or antisocial behaviors have a more difficult time adjusting to school.
- More girls than boys score in the higher portion of the distribution for both fine and gross motor skills.

"Information about the entry status of the nation's kindergarteners can inform educational policy and practice, and especially those policies and practices that are targeted to meeting the needs of a diverse population of children entering kindergarten for the first time."

Web site: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000070.pdf

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Parents' Reports of the School Readiness of Young Children from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007

O'Donnell, K. (2008). *Parents' Reports of the School Readiness of Young Children from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007* (NCES 2008-051). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

Abstract:

This report presents data on the school readiness of children in the United States as reported by their parents. It also incorporates basic demographic information about the children, parent/guardian characteristics, and household characteristics. The purpose of this First Look report is to introduce new *National Household Education Surveys* survey data through the presentation of selected descriptive information. It is important to note that many of the variables examined in this report may be related to one another (e.g., children's age and attending preschool/daycare, mother's employment status or specific reading activities).

Selected Key Findings:
- Overall, 58 percent of children ages 3 to 6 and not yet in kindergarten were reported to be attending preschool or a daycare center in 2007. Eighty-nine percent of children had parents who planned to enroll them in kindergarten on-time, given school division guidelines for admission based on birth date. Seven percent had parents who planned to delay their entrance into kindergarten, 3 percent had parents who did not plan to enroll them or who had not yet made a decision about enrollment, and 1 percent had parents who planned to enroll them early.
- A higher percentage of boys than girls (9 percent vs. 4 percent) had parents who planned to delay their entry into kindergarten.
- Regarding children's school readiness skills, as reported by parents, 93 percent had speech that was understandable to a stranger, 87 percent could hold a pencil with their fingers, 63 percent could count to 20 or higher, 60 percent could write their first name, 32 percent could recognize all letters of the alphabet, and 8 percent could read written words in books.

Web site: Parents Report of School Readiness and Young Children:
http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008051.pdf