

MEMO

TO: IOWA EMPOWERMENT BOARD  
FROM: PENNY MILBURN, CONSULTANT  
DATE: JANUARY 10, 2003  
SUBJECT: CHILDREN READY TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

During the 2002-2003 school year the Iowa Department of Education conducted the third annual Kindergarten Teacher Perception Survey to address the empowerment indicator measuring the result "Children ready to succeed in school". The survey process and design were conducted in the same manner as the previous year.

### **Survey Process**

Surveys were sent to accredited public and nonpublic schools. Community Empowerment Coordinators assisted in the process, helping to increase both the return rate and accuracy of the data. The data was aggregated at the state level and disaggregated by community empowerment areas.

### **Survey Results**

The return rate for accredited public districts was 81% while accredited nonpublic buildings was 67%. This was an improvement of approximately 15% from last year's return rate. The usable (accurate) data represents 66% of all school buildings as compared to 52% last year.

About 64% of Iowa's kindergarten students both public and nonpublic are represented in these data. This compares to 47% of Iowa kindergarten students last year. Surveys with categories and representative behaviors that totaled within a range of 97% to 103% were accepted. State results as well as results for each community empowerment area are posted on the Empowerment web site.

Without predictability evidence of the instrument used, cautious conclusions must be drawn. It may be helpful to consider lower bound estimates or areas that appear to fall in the lower ranges of the total range. For example, it appears that teachers perceive about 35% of kindergarten children consistently exhibit the communication skills a teacher would expect while 50% of the children consistently exhibit the social/emotional skills. Another low area was cognitive skills. Teachers perceive that only 44% of the children exhibit the cognitive skills they would expect.

Another way to consider the results is similar to the manner in which the health care field reports data. Looking across the communication category, about 1 out of 10 children rarely exhibit the representative behaviors, 2 out of 10 sometimes exhibit these behaviors, less than 3 out of 10 frequently exhibit these behaviors and 3 out of 10 consistently exhibit these representative behaviors. These results are similar to those from the 2001-2002 survey.

In general, the percentage of students ranked in the consistently observable category in communication, cognitive, and self management skills are rated lower by teachers than are motor and social emotional skills. Overall, it would appear that about 7 of 10 children exhibit the needed skills to be successful in school as compared to about 8 of 10 last year.

### **State Level Conclusions**

When taken alone, the survey still does not address the validity, reliability or technical adequacy necessary to draw any definite conclusions. However, when coupled with the results of the Midwest Child Care Research Study a clearer picture begins to emerge.

The Midwest Child Care Study indicates activities, language and reasoning were rated only mediocre in preschool child care centers. In addition, learning activities were rated just above poor in Iowa's infant and toddler centers. The cognitive and communication skills of Iowa's kindergartners as measured by the Kindergarten Teacher Perception are low. The areas of weakness in the Midwest study relate to the low scores in communication and cognitive skills on the survey. Iowa's lack of high quality environments as confirmed by this data appears to negatively affect child outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

In order positively affect outcomes for children and to increase their performance, Iowa must increase families' capacity to provide quality early learning environments and increase the quality of child care and early learning environments. The results of the Midwest Child Care Study and the Iowa Kindergarten Teacher Perception Survey support the following state level strategies

- 1) Development of a comprehensive assessment system
- 2) Development of voluntary early learning guidelines
- 3) Continuation of systematic professional development