

Iowa DE/AEA Early Childhood Network

Fact Sheet

on

School Readiness



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School Readiness

Definition:

“Readiness” has typically meant “readiness to learn to read”. Evidence of readiness was measured according to the child’s knowledge of some or all of the alphabet letters, numerals, and shapes; and the ability to write his/her name. This traditional definition of readiness unduly placed the burden of proof on the child. (Katz,1991) This resulted in programs that excluded children.

This traditional definition of readiness is changing with the recent national interest in early childhood education. Readiness is recognized as a combination of factors that relate to school success. These include:

- health and physical well-being
- social and emotional development
- language skills
- an ability to solve problems and think creatively
- general knowledge of the world.

The discrete knowledge of naming letters, numerals, and the ability to write his/her name is not reflected in the second definition, because those things can be taught once the other five areas have been addressed. School success is also dependent upon the “match” between the child’s knowledge/skills and the school’s expectations. More children succeed when these expectations reflect knowledge of child development and early learning. The current definition is more inclusive and asks programs to be more flexible in meeting the diverse needs of young children and their families.

The current definition reflects the nation’s interest in striving to meet the first of eight educational goals outlined by the National Education Goals Panel, “By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.” Two areas of concern are reflected in Goal 1.

- “Increasing numbers of young children live in poverty, live in single-parent households, have limited proficiency in English, are affected by the drug abuse of their parents, have poor nutrition, and receive inadequate health care.”(Katz,1991)
- “High rates of retention in kindergarten and the primary grades, delayed school entry in some districts, segregated transition classes, and the increasing use of standardized tests to determine children’s readiness to enter school.” (Katz,1991)

Recent medical research on brain development provides additional understanding about this critical time period of early childhood. Issues related to early childhood impact public policy reforms in the public health, social, economic, and educational arenas.

To reach this school readiness goal will require a twofold strategy:

- focus “on supporting families in their efforts to help their children get ready for school”
- help “schools be responsive to the wide range of developmental levels, backgrounds, experiences, and needs children bring to school with them.” (Katz, 1991)

Getting Children Ready for School

Children's social development and intellectual backgrounds need to be taken into account when considering ways to help children prepare for school. Young children think and learn in a qualitatively different way than older children, adolescents, and adults.

Children who have had positive group experiences are more likely to enter school successfully. Opportunities to positively interact with peers and learn such social skills as taking turns, making compromises, and approaching unfamiliar children are outcomes of group experiences. The child's ability to accept authority from adults outside of their family helps in the adjustment of entering school. Parents and preschool teachers can contribute to social readiness by offering children positive experiences in group settings outside of the home, and by helping children strengthen their social skills and understanding. (Katz, 1991)

Children are more likely to feel competent, if they can understand and use the language of the peers and the adults that they are with at school. Parents and preschool teachers can strengthen intellectual readiness by providing children opportunities for conversation, discussion, and cooperative work and play with peers. Children who come to school with a wide variety of experiences—being read to frequently, going to the store with their own grocery list, dictating or writing letters/notes to parents or grandparents, taking trips to the park or zoo—have a rich background of experiences upon which later learning can be based. (NAEYC, 1995)

Getting Schools Ready for Children

Another important strategy for addressing the school readiness goal is to prepare the school to be responsive to a wide range of experiences, backgrounds, and needs of children who are starting school.

Curriculum based on a developmentally appropriate philosophy is recommended in the primary grades. *Developmentally appropriate curriculum* is characterized by

- an emphasis on informal work and play
- a wide range of activities related to the children's direct (firsthand) experience
- ample opportunities to apply skills being learned in meaningful contexts
- a wide variety of teaching methods in which there is a balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated learning. (Katz, 1991)

High expectations challenging each child to reach his/her potential and multiple methods of assessing learning progress are essential in programs for young children. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997)

Appropriate staffing in which class sizes are small or a second full time, trained assistant is present helps the staff meet the individual needs of the students. Teachers have the opportunity to get to know the child individually, to challenge each child appropriately, and to differentiate instruction as needed. Qualified teachers in the primary grades, who have early childhood teaching endorsements, have taken specialized classes in child development and early education. This enables them to be better prepared to effectively teach young children and work in partnership with families. (Katz, 1991)

Chronological age consideration for school entry is the "only legally and ethically defensible criterion." "Because of the nature of child development and how children learn, it is difficult to develop reliable and valid measures of young children's abilities. Preschool children, by nature, are not good test takers. When tests are used to make decisions that have significant impact on children's lives, such as denial of entry or assignment to a special class, the tests must offer the highest assurance of reliability and validity. No existing readiness tool meets these criteria." (NAEYC, 1995)



The Goal 1 Ready Schools Resource Group's findings reflect a shared conviction that schools alone cannot produce students who meet world-class standards. Parents and communities share responsibility for this as well. Communities need to make decisions as they work in preparing schools to be "ready" for their children. Ten key principles were agreed upon by the Goal 1 Ready Schools Resource Group, that suggest policies and strategies for creating appropriate learning climates designed for young children from pre-school to grade 3.

1. Ready Schools smooth the transition between home and school.
2. Ready Schools strive for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools.
3. Ready Schools help children learn and make sense of their complex and exciting world.
4. Ready Schools are committed to the success of every child.
5. Ready Schools are committed to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacts with children during the school day.
6. Ready Schools introduce or expand approaches that have been shown to raise achievement.
7. Ready Schools are learning organizations that alter practices and programs if they do not benefit children.
8. Ready Schools serve children in communities.
9. Ready Schools take responsibility for results.
10. Ready Schools have strong leadership.

"Working together, all who shape education policy or work in classrooms need to serve every child who comes to school." The success of our children and our schools is our collective responsibility. (Shore, 1998)

adapted from Katz, L. (1991). Readiness: Children and Schools. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

Resources and References:

Boyer, E. (1991). *Ready to learn: A mandate for the nation*. New Jersey: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Bredenkamp, S. & Copple, Carol (editors). (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs (revised edition)*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Graue, M.E.. (1998). What's Wrong with Edward the Unready? Our Responsibility for Readiness. *Young Children*, 53(2), 12-13.

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Iowa Department of Education, (1996). Taking the Next Steps Together: Transition for Children Birth Through Age Eight in Iowa.

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National Association for the Education of Young Children (Revised, 1995, 1990). NAEYC Position Statement on school readiness. *Young Children*, 46(1).

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), *Readiness Resource Packet for Parents & Readiness Resource Packet for Schools*. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), 1900 Spring Road, Suite 300, Oak Brook, IL 60521. 800-356-2735. These two resource packets are put together by NCREL and ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.



Shepard, L.; Kagen, S.L.; and Wurtz, E.; Eds., (1998). *Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Goals Panel.

Shore, R, (1998). *Ready Schools*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Goals Panel.

Southern Early Childhood Association. (1993). Children are born learning: Schools must make ready to celebrate and nurture what children do- A SECA public policy institute report. *Dimensions*, 22 (1) 5-8.

Washington, V., Johnson, V., & McCracken, J. (1995) *Grassroots success: Preparing schools and families for each other*. Washington, DC: NAEYC

Internet Web Sites:

ERIC- What Does It Mean To Be Ready for School? <http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/readyweb/c4s/doepubs/getready/whatdoes.html>

Iowa Department of Education & Area Education Agency Early Childhood Network
<http://www.state.ia.us/educate/prek12/>

NAEYC- Parent Information- Early Years are Learning Years- “Ready or Not...Preparing Young Children for the Classroom”
<http://www.naeyc.org/eyly/eyly9803.htm>

The National Education Goals Panel-
<http://www.negp.gov/webpg720.htm#child>

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory- “What does research say early childhood education?” (1992)
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/stw_esys/5erly_ch.htm

Ready Web Home Page- ERIC
<http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/readyweb/readyweb.html>

The Future of Children (Summer/Fall 1995) “School Readiness”
<http://www.futureofchildren.org/cr/09cri.htm>

