

Vermont's Statewide Report on Kindergarten Readiness 2010-2011

Introduction

Since 2000, Vermont has gathered information on the readiness of children entering kindergarten by surveying kindergarten teachers about the “readiness” of their students within the first six to ten weeks of school. This effort to measure school readiness is a collaborative project of the Vermont Department of Education and the Agency of Human Services.

There are many interpretations of what constitutes “readiness”. Vermont’s concept of children’s readiness is multidimensional; it includes social and emotional development, communication, physical health, as well as cognitive development, knowledge, and approaches to learning (e.g., enthusiasm for learning, persistence, curiosity).

Vermont’s concept of readiness also reflects the belief that “school readiness” is interactional: children need to be ready for schools, and schools need to be ready to accommodate the diverse needs of children. Since 2000, surveys for assessing schools’ readiness have been conducted several times. The Ready Schools’ survey asks principals and teachers to report on the school’s transition practices, connection to families of young children and the community, and other related issues. Despite the importance of this information, the “Ready Schools” survey was not implemented in 2010-2011.

Methodology

During the 2010-2011 academic year, kindergarten teachers from around the state completed a Ready Kindergartners Survey for each of their students. This survey is not a direct assessment of children; rather it relies on the accumulated observational knowledge the teacher has developed about the child during the first few weeks of kindergarten.

The kindergarten readiness data were collected through an online survey using Survey Monkey. Kindergarten teachers completed one survey for each child in his or her class. The Kindergarten Readiness survey consisted of 28 items encompassed within the domains of “social and emotional development,” “approaches to learning,” “communication,” “cognitive development and general knowledge,” and “physical health and development.” These items are aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards. In order to adhere to FERPA requirements for protecting child-level data, the online survey only asked teachers to identify the Agency of Human Services (AHS) District in which their school is located rather than name their school or school district.

Characteristics of the sample

The Ready Kindergartners Survey is intended to include all children entering kindergarten in all of Vermont’s public schools. This goal was not achieved. Child-level data were submitted online for 2,346 kindergartners. There were 6,625 children enrolled in kindergarten in 2010-2011; hence, the surveys received represent only 35.4% of all kindergarteners. Furthermore, not all respondents answered every item on the surveys, so the number of valid responses varies somewhat by item.

Teachers were asked to indicate on each Ready Kindergartners Survey the child's gender and if the child was eligible for specialized services such as special education or 504¹ services. They were also asked to identify if the child was an English Language Learner. Of the total 2,346 surveys received 1,217 or 52.5% were boys and 1,100 or 47.5% were girls. A total of 450 children surveyed were eligible for specialized services. Based on teachers' responses, 291 (12.4%) qualified for special education, 40 (1.7%) qualified for 504 support services, 41 (1.7%) were English Language Learners, and 95 (4.0%) were eligible for Title I.

The Ready Kindergartners Survey also asks teachers whether the child attended an early childhood program. Based on teachers' reports, the majority of children surveyed (1,798 or 76.6%) attended some type of early childhood program before coming to kindergarten. Teachers reported that 318 (or 13.6%) had not attended any type of early childhood program prior to kindergarten. Teachers either didn't know if children attended a program (167 or 7.1%), or left this item blank (102 or 4.3%) in the remaining surveys.

Of the children who did attend an early childhood program prior to kindergarten, teachers reported that 705 (39.2%) attended a publicly funded prekindergarten program, 261 (14.5%) attended an Essential Early Education (EEE) program, 392 (21.8%) attended a private preschool, 161 (9%) attended a child care center, 104 (5.8%) attended a family-based child care program, and 175 (9.7%) attended Head Start. The accuracy of these reports is questionable since these data were not independently verified; they also do not appear consistent with information from other sources regarding Head Start participation and the number of children in child care programs across the state.

Findings for 2010-2011

The tables that follow summarize the findings from the 2010-2011 Ready Kindergartners Survey. Table 1 includes the number of responses per item and the percentage of children rated for each ability level.

Items that were left blank or reported as "don't know" were treated as non-responses. Since the operational definition of "ready" is when a child is rated as being at a "practicing" or "performing independently" level, children rated on any items as "beginning", "don't know" or if the item was left blank, were considered to be "not ready" for that particular item. In the case of the last set of items, "No" and "Seldom" were considered to indicate conditions conducive to readiness and rated positively, whereas "Sometimes" and "Often" were considered to negatively affect readiness and rated as such.

Table 2 presents the percentages of children rated as "Practicing" or "Performing Independently" by domain. A comparison with last year's results is included.

¹ Children who are determined to have a significant disability but who are not eligible for special education services, receive 504 supports in order to access learning. The disability may be of a medical nature, or it may be another type of disability.

TABLE 1: Item Level Responses

<u>Social-Emotional Development</u>	Beginning % (N)	Practicing % (N)	Performing independently % (N)
Plays cooperatively with different children	9.4% (219)	32.9% (770)	57.5% (1,345)
Separates easily from parent/caregiver	3.6% (85)	14.0% (327)	79.2% (1,850)
Uses problem solving skills in social situations	15.1% (352)	40.2% (938)	44.1% (1,029)
Appropriately expresses feelings and needs	12.8% (408)	35.1% (817)	51.9% (1,208)
Adapts to transitions within the school day	7.3% (171)	22.7% (529)	69.7% (1,625)
Interacts positively with adults in the classroom	4.2% (98)	21.7% (504)	73.9% (1,713)
<u>Approaches to Learning</u>	Beginning % (N)	Practicing % (N)	Performing independently % (N)
Can persist in a self-directed activity for at least 15 minutes	8.9% (207)	22.9% (535)	68.0% (1,588)
Appears enthusiastic and interested in classroom activities	6.7% (157)	21.0% (490)	72.1% (1,681)
Uses a variety of learning strategies in the classroom	12.7% (296)	30.0% (698)	56.9% (1,325)
Is able to pay attention during teacher-directed group activities for approximately 15 minutes	13.6% (317)	28.2% (657)	58.0% (1,352)
Knows when and how to use adults as a resource	8.8% (205)	28.9% (674)	62.0% (1,447)
Initiates activities in classroom	9.8% (228)	27.3% (635)	62.7% (1,460)
Shows curiosity (asks questions, probes, tries new things, etc.)	8.4% (196)	24.0% (557)	67.6% (1,571)
Communication	Beginning % (N)	Practicing % (N)	Performing independently % (N)
Follows simple classroom rules and instructions with reminders	10.2% (237)	29.8% (693)	9.8% (1,392)
Communicates needs, wants, or thoughts in his/her primary language	7.1% (165)	21.9% (510)	70.8% (1,646)
Engages in conversation (e.g. complete sentences, turn-taking, etc.)	8.4% (196)	23.6% (549)	67.7% (1,573)
Understands simple directions, requests and information	6.8% (158)	21.3% (492)	71.7% (1,656)

TABLE 1: Item Level Responses (continued)

Cognitive Development	Beginning % (N)	Practicing % (N)	Performing independently % (N)	
Shows awareness of how books are organized and used	8.3% (193)	21.7% (507)	69.7% (1,629)	
Can recall and explain a sequence of events (e.g. can tell about a recent activity, can retell a story)	11.6% (272)	28.8% (674)	58.7% (1,374)	
Recognizes his/her most commonly used name in print	4.9% (114)	13.1% (305)	81.8% (1,912)	
Engages in imaginative play	6.1% (143)	16.5% (385)	77.0% (1,795)	
Shows ability to discriminate and identify speech sounds	16.4% (382)	26.4% (615)	56.2% (1,310)	
Recognizes 10 or more letters of the alphabet	14.2% (331)	20.2% (473)	64.9% (1,517)	
Uses scribbles, symbols or letters to write or represent words or ideas	15.4% (359)	24.6% (574)	59.3% (1,385)	
Shows the ability to count 5 or more objects using one-to-one correspondence	7.6% (178)	15.8% (370)	75.9% (1,772)	
Can identify several basic geometric shapes (e.g. circle, square, rectangle, triangle)	7.5% (174)	19.5% (452)	71.5% (1,658)	
Physical Health & Development	Beginning	Practicing	Performing independently	
Demonstrates age appropriate self-help skills (e.g. dressing, toileting, wiping nose, washing hands)	3.4% (79)	12.6% (289)	83.8% (1,927)	
This child's ability to learn appears to be inhibited by:				
	No	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
Illness	86.5% (2,007)	7.2% (168)	5.5% (127)	0.7% (17)
Fatigue	80.4% (1,867)	7.2% (167)	10.3% (239)	2.1% (49)
Hunger	89.8% (2,067)	4.5% (103)	5.0% (114)	0.8% (18)

Of the individual items rated by teachers, 85 percent or more of the children were either “practicing” or “performing independently” (i.e., they were considered “ready”) on all but four items. These items are:

- Uses problem solving skills in social situations (combined 84.3%)
- Engages in imaginary play (combined 83.5%)
- Shows ability to discriminate and identify speech sounds (combined 82.6%)

- Uses scribbles, symbols or letters to write or represent words or ideas (combined 83.9%)

Additionally, there was only one item in which fewer than 50% of kindergartners were rated as “performing independently”:

- Uses-problem solving skills in social situations (44.1%)

These data also suggest that some competencies are achieved earlier by most children. There were four items in which only a small percentage of children (5% or less) are at the beginning level. It should be remembered that 12.4% of the children in this sample are eligible for special education services. These items are as follows:

- Separates easily from parent/caregiver (3.6%)
- Interacts positively with adults in the classroom (4.3%)
- Recognizes his/her most commonly used name in print (4.9%)
- Demonstrates age appropriate self-help skills (3.4%)

Results by Domain

Items on the “Ready Kindergartners’ Survey” are clustered into five domains:

- Social-Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Communication
- Cognitive Development
- Physical Health & Development

The percentage of children who were rated as “practicing” or “performing independently” on all of the items within a domain are presented in the chart below. The results of the domain percentages for 2009-2010 are included as a comparison.

Table 2 – Results by Domain

<i>Domain</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>2009-10</i>
Social-Emotional Development	76.0	77.4
Approaches to Learning	78.6	79.3
Communication	83.3	84.2
Cognitive Development	74.6	72.9
Wellness	79.0	79.1

From a comparison of these two years, it appears that more children were rated as “ready” in the Cognitive Development domain in 2010-2011 than in 2009-2010. However, the 2010-2011 results indicated very small decreases in the other domains when compared to the results of the previous year’s sample of kindergartners.

It was also found that slightly more than half (51.8%) of all children in the 2010-2011 sample were rated at the “practicing” or “performing independently” levels for all items in all five domains. Given the relatively high percentages of children rated at the “practicing” and “performing independently” levels on the individual items, this percentage may be difficult to understand. As stated earlier, if a child were rated as “beginning”, “don’t know” or an item was left blank, the child would not be considered “ready” for the entire domain. Only those children that were ranked “practicing” or “performing independently” on all items in all five domains were included in the 51.8% reported here.

The following graph compares domain percentages for the statewide sample from 2001-2 to 2010-2011. Please note, year-to-year comparisons may not be valid since the items in each domain changed, participation rates varied, and different data collection methodologies were used.

