

Vermont's Statewide Report on Kindergarten Readiness 2009-2010

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 2009-2010.

Methodology

During the 2009-2010 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.

Two methods for collecting information were used: (1) an online version using Survey Monkey, and (2) a paper version of survey. The online survey was used by the majority of teachers who responded. It consisted of 28 items encompassed within domains of “social and emotional development,” “approaches to learning,” “communication,” “cognitive development and general knowledge,” and “physical health and development.” These items were 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 the school or school district.

The paper Ready Kindergartners Survey was an earlier version of the survey that had been used a few years ago. It was conducted by a supervisory union that wanted to have access to their own data. It consisted of 24 items across the same domains cited above for the online survey. In fact, many of the items in the paper version of the survey were identical to those in the online survey. In the data analysis, the findings from the online and paper version of the surveys were combined when the items were the same. In other analyses, only the data collected from the online survey are reported.

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 3,025 kindergartners; data for another 198 were submitted by teachers using the paper

version of the survey. The total number of surveys received represents 52% of the 6,192 children enrolled in kindergarten for 2009-2010. Not all respondents answered every item on the surveys, so the number of valid responses varies somewhat by item.

More than half of the children teachers submitted data for online were identified as boys. According to these responses, 52.5% or 1,559 of the surveys were completed on boys, while only 47.5% or 1,408 were identified as girls.

Teachers using the online and paper versions of the surveys were asked to indicate if any of the children were eligible for specialized services such as special education or 504¹. They were also asked to identify if the child was an English Language Learner. Of the total 3,223 surveys received (online and paper), 335 children (11%) were identified as eligible for special education services; 62 (1.9%) were reported as eligible for 504 services; and 81 (2.5%) were identified as English Language Learners.

Both versions of the Ready Kindergartners Survey also ask teachers whether the child had attended an early childhood program. Based on these self-report data, the majority of children surveyed (74.5%) attended some type of early childhood program before coming to kindergarten. Teachers reported that only 11.4% had not attended any type of early childhood program prior to kindergarten. Teachers either didn't know if children attended a program, or left this item blank in the remaining 13.5% of the surveys.

Findings for 2009-2010

The charts that follow summarize the findings from the 2009-2010 Ready Kindergartners Survey. They include the number of responses per item and the percentage of children rated for each ability level. The items here are from the online version. In the cases where the items in the online and paper versions of the survey are the same, the responses have been combined.

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.

Social-Emotional Development	Beginning % (N)	Practicing % (N)	Performing independently % (N)
Plays cooperatively with different children	9.0% (271)	30.5% (923)	59.3% (1,795)
Separates easily from parent/caregiver	3.4% (109)	15.0% (484)	77.8% (2,480)
Uses problem solving skills in social situations	14.9% (481)	40.7% (1,312)	42.7% (1,376)
Appropriately expresses feelings and needs	12.7% (408)	34.7% (1,117)	51.3% (1,652)
Adapts to transitions within the school day	7.4% (237)	22.0% (709)	68.3% (2,232)
Interacts positively with adults in the classroom	4.7% (150)	20.8% (671)	73.0% (2,354)

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.

Approaches to Learning	Beginning % (N)	Practicing % (N)	Performing independently % (N)
Can persist in a self-directed activity for at least 15 minutes	8.7% (264)	23.5% (710)	66.6 (2,015)
Appears enthusiastic and interested in classroom activities	5.3% (170)	23.0% (740)	70.5% (2,271)
Uses a variety of learning strategies in the classroom	12.2% (392)	31.5% (1,015)	52.0% (1,670)
Is able to pay attention during teacher-directed group activities for approximately 15 minutes	12.2% (407)	28.9% (930)	57.2% (1,842)
Knows when and how to use adults as a resource	9.3% (301)	28.1% (905)	61.4% (1,978)
Initiates activities in classroom	9.0% (291)	26.0% (837)	63.4% (2,042)
Shows curiosity (asks questions, probes, tries new things, etc.)	8.1% (262)	23.5% (758)	66.8% (2,154)
Communication	Beginning % (N)	Practicing % (N)	Performing independently % (N)
Follows simple classroom rules and instructions with reminders	9.5% (305)	28.9% (930)	60.1% (1,936)
Communicates needs, wants, or thoughts in his/her primary language	7.3% (234)	21.5% (694)	69.4% (2,237)
Engages in conversation (e.g. complete sentences, turn-taking, etc.)	7.4% (238)	20.5% (659)	70.3% (2,266)
Understands simple directions, requests and information	7.1% (214)	19.5% (590)	71.2% (2,154)
Cognitive Development	Beginning % (N)	Practicing % (N)	Performing independently % (N)
Shows awareness of how books are organized and used	7.4% (238)	23.4% (753)	67.8% (2,184)
Can recall and explain a sequence of events (e.g. can tell about a recent activity, can retell a story)	11.9% (383)	27.0% (870)	59.6% (1,920)
Recognizes his/her most commonly used name in print	4.5% (144)	12.7% (409)	81.6% (2,629)
Engages in imaginative play	5.0% (150)	15.7% (475)	77.3% (2,337)
Shows ability to discriminate and identify speech sounds	15.1% (458)	25.6% (775)	57.8% (1,747)
Recognizes 10 or more letters of the alphabet	13.5% (409)	16.0% (485)	69.1% (2,090)
Uses scribbles, symbols or letters to write or represent words or ideas	13.7% (415)	21.7% (657)	62.2% (1,880)
Shows the ability to count 5 or more objects using one-to-one correspondence	7.0% (211)	13.2% (399)	78.4% (2,371)

Can identify several basic geometric shapes (e.g. circle, square, rectangle, triangle)	6.8% (207)	16.2% (490)	73.1% (2,210)
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Physical Health & Development	Beginning	Practicing	Performing independently
Demonstrates age appropriate self-help skills (e.g. dressing, toileting, wiping nose, washing hands)	2.1% (64)	11.1% (335)	84.7% (2,563)

This child's ability to learn appears to be inhibited by:

	No	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
Illness	83.5%	9.0%	6.3%	1.2%
Fatigue	78.5%	8.8%	10.4%	2.3%
Hunger	89.5%	4.9%	4.8%	0.7%

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

- Uses a variety of learning strategies in the classroom (combined 83.5%)
- Shows ability to discriminate and identify speech sounds (combined 83.4%)
- Uses scribbles, symbols or letters to write or represent words or ideas (combined 83.9%)

Additionally, there are only seven items where fewer than 60 percent of kindergartners were rated as “performing independently”:

- Plays cooperatively with different children (59.3%)
- Uses problem solving skills in social situations (42.7%)
- Appropriately expresses feelings and needs (51.3%)
- Uses a variety of learning strategies in the classroom (52%)
- Is able to pay attention during teacher directed activities for approximately 15 minutes (57.2%)
- Can recall and explain sequences of events (59.6%)
- Shows ability to discriminate and identify speech sounds (57.8%)

These data also suggest that some competencies are achieved earlier by most children. There were six items in which only a small percentage of children (5% or less) are at the beginning level. It should be remembered that 11% of the children in this sample are eligible for special education services. These items are as follows:

- Separates easily from parent/caregiver (3.4%)
- Interacts positively with adults in the classroom (4.7%)
- Appears enthusiastic and interested in classroom activities (5.3%)
- Recognizes his/her most commonly used name in print (4.5%)
- Engages in imaginative play (5%)
- Demonstrates age appropriate self-help skills (2.1%)

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. (Please note, only the online survey responses were tabulated since the items included in the paper version domains differed from the online version.) The results of the domain percentages for the 2008-9 are included as a comparison.

<i>Domain</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>2008-9</i>
Social-Emotional Development	77.4	66.9
Approaches to Learning	79.3	66.2
Communication	84.2	81.3
Cognitive Development	72.9	61.2
Wellness	79.1	Not Available

From a comparison of these two years, it appears that more children were “ready” in all of the domains in the 2009-2010 sample of kindergarteners than in the previous year’s sample.

It was also found that slightly more than half (51.1%) of all children in the 2009-10 online 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 51.1% reported here.

The following chart compares domain percentages for the statewide sample from 2001-2 to 2009-2010. 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.

