

Vermont's Statewide Report on Kindergarten Readiness 2012-2013

Introduction

Since 2000, Vermont has gathered information on the readiness of children entering kindergarten by surveying kindergarten teachers about their students' knowledge and skills within the first six to ten weeks of school. The effort to measure school readiness is a collaborative project of the Vermont Agency of Education, the Department for Children and Families, and the Department of Health.

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 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 has not been conducted for several years.

Methodology

In the 2012-2013 academic year, kindergarten teachers from around the state were asked to complete 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 a secure online survey using Survey Monkey. Kindergarten teachers completed one survey for each child in his or her class. The Kindergartners Readiness Survey consists of 27 items across 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.

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 5,325 kindergartners. There are 6,507 children enrolled in kindergarten in 2012-2013; hence, the surveys received represent 81.8% of all kindergarteners.

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 5,325 surveys received, teachers identified 2,707 or 50.8% as boys and 2,618 or 49.2% as girls. A total of 1,228 (or 23.1%) of the children surveyed were eligible for specialized services.² Based on teachers' responses, 585 (11.0%) qualified for special education, 298 (5.6%) qualified for EST services, 51 (1.0%) qualified

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.

² Note that some children were eligible for more than one type of specialized service.

for 504 support services, and 243 (4.6%) were eligible for Title I services. A total of 128 (2.4%) were English Language Learners.

The Ready Kindergartners Survey also asked teachers to indicate whether the child attended an early childhood program. Based on teachers' reports, a large majority of children surveyed (4,316 or 81.1%) attended some type of early childhood program before coming to kindergarten. Teachers reported that only 488 (or 9.2%) had not attended any type of early childhood program prior to kindergarten. Some teachers either didn't know if children attended a program (511 or 9.6%), or entered an ambiguous response (10 or 0.2%).

Amongst the children who did attend an early childhood program prior to kindergarten, teachers reported that 1,704 (32.0%) attended a school-based publicly funded prekindergarten program, 421 (7.9%) attended a community-based publicly funded prekindergarten program, 972 (18.3%) attended a private preschool program, 255 (4.8%) attended a family-based child care program, 509 (9.6%) attended a center-based child care program, and 390 (7.3%) attended Head Start. Some children were reported to have attended more than one type of prekindergarten program. The accuracy of these reports is questionable since these data were not independently verified. Additionally, these reported numbers are not consistent with information from other sources regarding Head Start participation and the number of children in child care programs across the state.

Findings for 2012-2013

The tables that follow summarize the findings from the 2012-2013 Ready Kindergartners Survey. **Table 1** includes the number and percentage of children rated for each ability level by survey item. **Table 2** presents the number and percentages of children by domain level.

At the item level, the operational definition of "ready" is when a child is rated at a "practicing" or "performing independently" level for that item. Ratings of "Beginning" are considered "not ready". In the case of the last set of items relating to illness, fatigue and hunger, "No" and "Seldom" were considered conducive to readiness and rated positively, whereas "Sometimes" and "Often" were considered to negatively affect readiness and rated as such.

At the domain level, the operational definition of "ready" is that a child is rated as "practicing" or "performing independently" on **all** of the items within that domain. If the child is rated as "Beginning" on any of the items within the domain, the child was considered "not ready" in that particular domain.

It is important to note that in previous years' analyses of the Ready Kindergartners Survey data, "don't know" responses were considered to indicate "not ready" and were included in the denominator. In the analysis of the 2012-2013 survey data, the "don't know" responses were treated as missing data and excluded from the denominator when calculating percent "ready". Therefore, 2012-2013 results are a less conservative estimate of the percent of children who are "Ready" than the alternative approach used in previous years when the "Don't know" responses were **included** in the denominator. This change means that the survey results for 2012-2013 are not directly comparable to previous years.

TABLE 1: Item Level Responses (continued)

| Social-Emotional Development | Beginning % (N) | Practicing % (N) | Performing independently % (N) | Don't Know (N) |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Plays cooperatively with different children | 9.0% (478) | 31.1% (1,653) | 60.0% (3,190) | (4) |
| Separates easily from parent/caregiver | 4.4% (234) | 14.6% (770) | 81.0% (4,272) | (49) |
| Uses problem solving skills in social situations | 14.3% (760) | 40.8% (2,167) | 44.9% (2,389) | (9) |
| Appropriately expresses feelings and needs | 13.9% (741) | 32.8% (1,747) | 53.2% (2,832) | (5) |
| Adapts to transitions within the school day | 7.4% (396) | 22.7% (1,208) | 69.8% (3,715) | (6) |
| Interacts positively with adults in the classroom | 4.8% (253) | 20.7% (1,101) | 74.5% (3,959) | (12) |
| Approaches to Learning | Beginning % (N) | Practicing % (N) | Performing independently % (N) | Don't Know (N) |
| Can persist in a self-directed activity for at least 15 minutes | 10.0% (530) | 23.9% (1,270) | 66.2 (3,520) | (5) |
| Appears enthusiastic and interested in classroom activities | 6.1% (323) | 21.0% (1,117) | 72.9% (3,881) | (4) |
| Uses a variety of learning strategies in the classroom | 11.5% (611) | 31.7% (1,686) | 56.8% (3,014) | (14) |
| Is able to pay attention during teacher-directed group activities for approximately 15 minutes | 13.7% (731) | 29.2% (1,551) | 57.1% (3,037) | (6) |
| Knows when and how to use adults as a resource | 9.5% (506) | 30.0% (1,595) | 60.5% (3,215) | (9) |
| Initiates activities in classroom | 9.4% (501) | 25.1% (1,337) | 65.4% (3,479) | (8) |
| Shows curiosity (asks questions, probes, tries new things, etc.) | 7.8% (414) | 22.1% (1,173) | 70.1% (3,729) | (9) |
| Communication | Beginning % (N) | Practicing % (N) | Performing independently % (N) | Don't Know (N) |
| Follows simple classroom rules and instructions with reminders | 9.8% (524) | 27.1% (1,442) | 63.0 (3,354) | (5) |
| Communicates needs, wants, or thoughts in his/her primary language | 8.0% (423) | 20.0% (1,064) | 72.0% (3,826) | (12) |

TABLE 1: Item Level Responses (continued)

| Communication | Beginning % (N) | Practicing % (N) | Performing independently % (N) | Don't Know (N) |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Engages in conversation (e.g. complete sentences, turn-taking, etc.) | 8.6% (458) | 20.0% (1,064) | 71.4% (3,796) | (7) |
| Understands simple directions, requests and information | 6.9% (367) | 18.6% (988) | 74.5% (3,960) | (10) |
| Cognitive Development | Beginning % (N) | Practicing % (N) | Performing independently % (N) | Don't Know (N) |
| Shows awareness of how books are organized and used | 7.6% (402) | 19.6% (1,041) | 72.9% (3,874) | (8) |
| Can recall and explain a sequence of events (e.g. can tell about a recent activity, can retell a story) | 11.6% (613) | 28.8% (1,529) | 59.6% (3,163) | (20) |
| Recognizes his/her most commonly used name in print | 5.6% (296) | 11.7% (623) | 82.7% (4,400) | (6) |
| Engages in imaginative play | 4.5% (238) | 16.0% (851) | 79.5% (4,221) | (15) |
| Shows ability to discriminate and identify speech sounds | 15.9% (846) | 25.9% (1,376) | 58.2% (3,090) | (13) |
| Recognizes 10 or more letters of the alphabet | 14.5% (773) | 15.5% (824) | 70.0% (3,719) | (9) |
| Uses scribbles, symbols or letters to write or represent words or ideas | 15.0% (799) | 22.0% (1,168) | 63.0% (3,345) | (13) |
| Shows the ability to count 5 or more objects using one-to-one correspondence | 8.1% (428) | 13.7% (729) | 78.2% (4,158) | (10) |
| Can identify several basic geometric shapes (e.g. circle, square, rectangle, triangle) | 8.0% (418) | 18.8% (980) | 73.2% (3,825) | (102) |
| Physical Health & Development | Beginning | Practicing | Performing independently | Don't Know (N) |
| Demonstrates age appropriate self-help skills (e.g. dressing, toileting, wiping nose, washing hands) | 2.7% (146) | 10.8% (575) | 86.4% (4,597) | (7) |

TABLE 1: Item Level Responses (*continued*)

| This child's ability to learn appears to be inhibited by: | | | | | |
|--|---------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Never | Seldom | Sometimes | Often | Don't Know (N) |
| Illness | 90.0% (4,790) | 5.0% (264) | 4.2% (222) | 0.9% (49) | n/a |
| Fatigue | 83.3% (4,436) | 6.4% (339) | 8.4% (447) | 1.9% (103) | n/a |
| Hunger | 91.2% (4,855) | 4.2% (225) | 3.6% (194) | 1.0% (51) | n/a |

N.B. Row totals may not add exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Observations:

- At least 85% or more of all children were rated as either “practicing” or “performing independently” (i.e., they were considered “ready”) on all survey items except for:
Shows ability to discriminate and identify speech sounds (combined total of 84.1%)
- There was only one item in which fewer than 50% of kindergartners were rated as “performing independently”:
• Uses problem solving skills in social situations (44.9%)
- While it should be remembered that 11.0% of the children in this sample are receiving special education services, the data suggest that most children had achieved some competencies by the time they entered kindergarten.
- There were four items in which a large percentage of children (95% or more) were rated at the “ready” level. These items are as follows:
 - Separates easily from parent/caregiver (95.6%)
 - Interacts positively with adults in the classroom (95.2%)
 - Engages in imaginative play (95.5%)
 - Demonstrates age appropriate self-help skills (97.2%)

Results by Domain

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

- Social-Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Communication
- Cognitive Development
- Wellness³

The percentage of children who were rated as “practicing” or “performing independently” (i.e. “Ready”) on all of the items within a domain are presented in the chart below. As with the item level responses, the calculation of percent “Ready” excludes “Don’t know” responses.

³ Wellness includes children who demonstrate age appropriate self-help skills **and** who seldom or never appear to be inhibited by illness, fatigue or hunger.

TABLE 2: Results by Domain – Percent “Practicing” or “Performing independently”

| <i>Domain</i> | <i>Number “Ready”</i> | <i>Valid Responses</i> | <i>Percent “Ready”</i> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Social-Emotional Development | 4,235 | 5,263 | 80.5% |
| Approaches to Learning | 4,236 | 5,304 | 79.9% |
| Communication | 4,516 | 5,306 | 85.1% |
| Cognitive Development | 3,988 | 5,202 | 76.7% |
| Wellness | 4,538 | 5,318 | 85.3% |

Summary

Overall, well over half (62.0%) of the children included in the 2012-2013 survey were rated as “ready for kindergarten” in all five domains of the survey. Readiness is defined here as “practicing” or “performing independently” in all areas and “seldom” or “never” in the illness, fatigue or hunger responses.

Year-to-year comparisons are not valid since over the years, items in domains have changed, participation rates have varied, and different data collection and analysis methodologies were used (e.g., including or excluding “Don’t Know” responses in the denominator). In keeping with this assertion, comparisons of domain percentages of the statewide results from 2001-2002 to the present, as was customarily made, are not provided.