Defining School Readiness

National Trends in School Readiness Definitions

A working paper from the Texas Early Learning Council

September 2011
Introduction

What is school readiness? Many early childhood education reforms are designed to improve school readiness for children, but how exactly should school readiness be defined? One of the most important events related to this concept occurred in 1989, when President George Bush met with the nation’s governors at the first National Education Summit. The federal-state partnership that emerged from this Summit, known as the National Education Goals Panel, focused on improving education across the nation through ten goals, the first of which is: “all children will start school ready to learn.”1 Since the initial report of the National Education Goals Panel in 1991, early childhood stakeholders have been working towards improving school readiness; however, a single, authoritative definition of school readiness is lacking nationwide.

The National Center for Children in Poverty states that “in theory, a definition of school readiness should identify the foundational skills, content knowledge, and concepts that children need when they enter school in order to achieve academic success in early elementary school and beyond.”2 Many states use a kindergarten assessment to gauge the progress of children in key areas of development over time, but what exactly is school readiness? To answer this question, twenty-one states have developed school readiness definitions that convey their ideas about children and what they should know and be able to do. Some definitions focus on skills sets and knowledge that children should have upon kindergarten entry. Other definitions add readiness factors for schools, families, and communities to support children in school. A few states utilize a fusion school readiness model that combines both children’s skills and peripheral support. Texas is not the only state exploring this issue; four state advisory councils will develop and implement school readiness definitions for their states: Kentucky, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.

Historically, children have been determined ready to enter kindergarten simply because they reached age 5. In the last ten years, however, states have adopted formal school readiness definitions that incorporate current early childhood research and practices. An analysis of these definitions reveals important national trends to inform considerations of school readiness.

Texas Definition of School Readiness

Under the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, Governor Perry appointed 19 Council members to serve as the Texas Early Learning Council. The Council’s goal is to improve school readiness for children in Texas. This paper is intended to inform the Council on national trends for their discussion and consideration of defining school readiness for Texas, as it relates to their early childhood efforts.

The current Texas definition of school readiness was developed by the Texas School Ready! Certification Task Force in 2003.3 This definition of school readiness directly relates to the Texas
The Texas Definition of School Readiness:

School ready or school readiness—A term that refers to a child being able to function competently in a school environment in the areas of early language and literacy, mathematics, and social skills as objectively measured by state-approved assessment instruments.

Defining School Readiness

There is no single, prevailing school readiness definition for the nation, yet the term is often applied in attempts to improve or set standards for early childhood education. For example, the federal legislation that created the Texas Early Learning Council charged it with improving school readiness, but did not provide an actual definition of school readiness to guide decision-making. In the last decade, in lieu of federal direction, twenty-one states have adopted formal definitions that relate to each state’s particular goals to improve school readiness for young children.

It is generally accepted that school readiness is a measure of a child’s expected success in kindergarten, based on his or her early childhood education, experiences, and development. Every definition of school readiness seeks to answer one or more of these questions: what factors are expected to contribute to a child’s success in kindergarten? What family, school, and community resources enable children to fully benefit from experiences in kindergarten? What skills sets and knowledge areas facilitate success? As research in school readiness advances, so do the elements of school readiness definitions, including developmental domains, community support infrastructure, and knowledge and skills indicators.

School readiness definitions are generally representative of their authors and the intended purpose of the definition. School readiness research by psychologists, health professionals, higher education researchers, and others tend to emphasize specific elements of child development related to their respective fields. However, as definitions have matured over time, domains have broadened and integrated knowledge from multiple fields. The first definitions were simply cut-off dates based on children’s age. The most recent school readiness definitions are complex listings of school readiness indicators that support children’s success in school, sometimes including community support, child development, or both.
In the last decade, several states have developed and adopted definitions of school readiness in conjunction with other early education reforms. For example, many states wrote school readiness definitions that complement and reinforce their kindergarten assessments. Three state advisory councils are currently developing definitions of school readiness as one of their main objectives: New Mexico, Tennessee, and Oklahoma. Kentucky’s state advisory council recently adopted a school readiness definition, and is currently developing a kindergarten assessment with complementary goals.

In 1991, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) published a report on the state of education in the United States, and outlined eight national performance goals to guide education reform efforts. The first education goal, to have been achieved by the year 2000, encouraged the country to make all children ready to learn (and succeed in school) when they enter kindergarten, known as Goal 1: Ready to Learn. The NEGP published a definition of school readiness that included the importance of families, schools, and communities in the overall development and school readiness of a child.

The initial NEGP report, published in 1991, included “as dimensions of school readiness not only the collection of abilities, attitudes and behaviors with which a child enters school, but also the environmental and family support available for the child; the quality and practices within schools and classrooms; and the broader society as a whole.” The NEGP school readiness definition was developed to complement NEGP-proposed early childhood policies. Many states modeled their definitions after the NEGP representation of school readiness, relating children’s success in school to the engagement of schools, families, and communities.

Finally, some states choose to specifically emphasize kindergarten readiness, rather than school readiness, when defining and assessing a child’s expected success in kindergarten and beyond. Several states have adopted “kindergarten readiness” definitions, rather than school readiness definitions, such as Louisiana and West Virginia. Both of these states emphasize skills and knowledge for school success in their kindergarten readiness definitions. Almost all definitions of school readiness imply a child’s entry into kindergarten. However, Maryland includes a child’s kindergarten experiences in its school readiness definition, specifically highlighting first grade entry and success as school readiness.
Trends

Many states have written and adopted school readiness definitions in the past decade. The first state to formally adopt a definition of school readiness was Maryland in 2000. Kentucky, in 2010, and Louisiana, in early 2011, are the latest states to produce definitions. Definitions of school readiness range from short vision statements to extensive lists of child development indicators, and from child-centric statements to broad statements that incorporate the family, school, and community in school readiness efforts. As research into school readiness indicators has developed, newer definitions of school readiness highlight the current research and child development trends.

An analysis of state school readiness definitions highlights several trends. Because state definitions of school readiness are generally representative of “current” practices, there is a distinct progression of the features of the definitions chronologically from state to state. Only two states have updated their definitions of school readiness; Virginia updated their definition in 2008, and New Mexico is in the process of updating its definition. Both states previously used the “Ready Child Equation” as their school readiness definition, discussed later in this paper. State trends include progressions towards child developmental milestones, individualized needs, expanding focus, adoption of school readiness indicators, and new domains of child development.

Kindergarten Entry

Historically, determining a child’s readiness for school was simple. Children were considered ready to enter kindergarten based on their chronological age at a particular cut-off date, set by each state individually. In Texas, a child is eligible to enter kindergarten if he or she turns 5 on or before September 1 of the school year. Although every state uses an age cut-off to determine eligibility for kindergarten, more recent school readiness indicator research stresses the importance of a child’s skill set in particular areas of development. Wisconsin’s school readiness definition, for example, recognizes a child’s eligibility for kindergarten based on age, while also stressing a set of “conditions” that will allow a child to be successful.

All children are eligible to enter kindergarten if they meet the age requirement, and are not required to have a particular set of skills to enter kindergarten. Most states, however, employ kindergarten assessment tools that measure a child’s skills upon entry into kindergarten, and later to evaluate progress. School readiness definitions continue to emphasize more skills for children as a gauge for kindergarten entry, although not as an impediment to entry. New Mexico’s draft definition of school readiness, currently in development, specifically distinguishes legal kindergarten eligibility from school readiness skills.

School readiness definitions that include developmental milestones and skills sets for children relate to a child’s increased likelihood of success in kindergarten if they possess these skills and development. Louisiana’s definition of kindergarten readiness is actually a listing of skills that
children should possess upon kindergarten entry, such as literacy, numeracy, and approaches to learning.\textsuperscript{26} Louisiana has used their definition to increase public awareness about pre-kindergarten skills for parents and early educators and to better prepare children for kindergarten.\textsuperscript{27} The Louisiana Department of Education published a document in early 2011 that defines school readiness for Louisiana, outlines skills that children should possess in key domains, and provides guidance to parents on improving their child’s kindergarten readiness.\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{Individualization of Learning}

A recent trend in school readiness is a focus on the individual child, and his or her experiences and skill sets, rather than all children collectively. The NEGP acknowledged the multidimensional and complex nature of early learning experiences of children.\textsuperscript{29} A child’s learning is not a linear process. Children have different skill levels when they enter kindergarten in different subjects, based upon their unique early experiences, education, and interactions. Also, some children have better access to learning and resources from their families and communities. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published a position statement on school readiness in 1995 that stresses the importance of individualizing learning for children, supporting differences in children’s skills, and making accommodations in learning.\textsuperscript{30}

Early definitions of school readiness are written for all children, with an implication that all children will enter kindergarten with similar skill sets. For example, Alabama’s definition of school readiness, from 2002, relates school readiness from the perspective of all children entering school with similar skill sets in key areas of development, such as social-emotional development and cognitive development.\textsuperscript{31}

More recent definitions, for instance West Virginia\textsuperscript{32}, from 2008, highlight individualization in early learning and stress each child’s development over broad skill sets evident in all children. More states are emphasizing the individualization of early learning for children, but also articulating the importance of a school to be responsive to each child’s individual needs and areas for improvement. West Virginia’s definition of kindergarten readiness recognizes the individualistic nature of early learning, and it stresses the importance of schools that are able to tailor kindergarten experiences for all children, regardless of a child’s developmental levels.\textsuperscript{33} Maryland also stresses the individual child, not all children, in its school readiness definition.\textsuperscript{34} Newer definitions emphasize individual children, and the importance of individualized learning to help each child meet his or her learning goals.
Ready Children, Families, Schools, and Communities

Nationally, the inclusion of families, schools, and communities, not just the child, for school readiness and later school success is a growing trend. Some school readiness definitions focus primarily on the child, but the majority of states include these other peripheral supports and resources. The child’s full range of early experiences, family interactions, early learning in child care and preschool settings, and community supports and resources, play a vital role in the success of a child in kindergarten. Definitions of school readiness that do not include families, schools, and communities are likely to focus on precise school readiness indicators for children in specific areas of child development.

In the 1990’s, the NEGP recognized the importance of resources from families, schools, and communities in the school readiness of a child. The NEGP focused on a community’s ability to influence school readiness, and current early childhood planning research reinforces the community’s role in student success. For example, many communities across the country are utilizing the Early Development Instrument (EDI) to evaluate their community’s ability to prepare children for school. Data from the EDI, although collected at the student level, is interpreted at the community level to inform large-scale planning projects. NAEYC, in its school readiness position statement from 1995, also emphasized the importance of the whole community and its resources for children’s school readiness.

Although not all state school readiness definitions include families, schools, and communities, it is very common. The NEGP produced a report to support the inclusion of families, schools, and communities in school readiness discussions and definitions, developing “10 Keys to Ready Schools” to inform local communities about opportunities to influence schools and ensure that they are “ready” to receive and educate children. These 10 Keys, as well as the NEGP readiness for families, schools, and communities, were later adopted by Congress in 1994 in the Educate America Act: Goals 2000.

The NEGP definition of school readiness, published in 1991, has been very influential for state school readiness definition development. The earliest state definition of school readiness,
from Maryland, does not include the importance of schools, families, and communities for school readiness, although this definition was adopted almost ten years after the NEGP report. Alabama, the second oldest definition, adopted in 2002, does include families, schools, and communities as partners in school readiness. More recent definitions, for the most part, include families, schools, and communities. Virginia’s school readiness definition, a hybrid of the NEGP model and an indicator model, extensively outlines school readiness indicators for each stakeholder group. Wisconsin’s definition of school readiness is another example of a hybrid model.

The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative (NSRII), a coalition of seventeen states to adopt data-driven school readiness indicators, unanimously adopted a revised version of the NEGP school readiness definition, known as the “Ready Child Equation.” Each of the seventeen states that participated in the NSRII used part or all of the Ready Child Equation to determine their respective school readiness indicators. For example, Vermont, a member state of the NSRII, focused on Ready Families and Ready Schools. While some states formally adopted the Ready Child Equation as the official state definition of school readiness, most did not. Two other states, Virginia and New Mexico, used the Ready Child Equation as a base for their more recent definitions of school readiness.

Also, one state defines school readiness from the perspective of a “ready school” that is prepared and equipped to provide quality early education to children. North Carolina’s school readiness definition is actually for “ready” elementary schools that respect children, encourage their success, and prepare them for “life and work in the 21st century.” This definition characterizes the readiness relationship sometimes described as two sides of the same coin: a child’s readiness to be successful in school and a school’s readiness to educate the child. If the schools are not able to educate the children and facilitate high-quality early learning, a child’s experiences and skills acquired before entering kindergarten are not as valuable or meaningful.

**Child Developmental Domains**

Many definitions of school readiness incorporate a set of domains that relate a child’s skills, knowledge, behaviors, and accomplishments in specific areas of child development. The number of developmental domains in school readiness literature and research is growing. While the original five domains used by the NEGP school readiness definition are still important, other domains of readiness, relating to skills in core subjects, are new additions to school readiness conversations. Different developmental domains are important to different stakeholders. For example, there are

**Ready Child Equation**

READY FAMILIES + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SERVICES + READY SCHOOLS = CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL

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particular preference differences between parents and kindergarten teachers. Parents tend to favor cognitive skills, but teachers value social-emotional skills as much as cognitive skills. More recent developmental domains do not generally fall into either category; science, social studies, and creative arts are common new additions to school readiness domains.

The NEGP defined school readiness using five domains of child development:

- physical and motor development
- social and emotional development
- approaches to learning
- language development
- cognitive development

After the publication of the NEGP school readiness domains, other states used these domains, or closely related domains, for their school readiness definitions. Minnesota, Georgia, and West Virginia all cite the NEGP developmental domains in their school readiness definitions. The seventeen states that participated in the NSRII all chose school readiness indicators from the NEGP developmental domains.

The most recent school readiness definitions include additional developmental domains. Minnesota’s definition, adopted in 2005, used the NEGP domains, but added another domain for creativity and the arts. In 2010, in an effort to prioritize Head Start programs for school readiness, the Office of Head Start released new domains of child learning and development, revised from the Head Start Outcomes Framework of 2000. The new Head Start domains were selected to improve outcomes for children in kindergarten, and support the development of the whole child.

A national trendsetter for early childhood education, all Head Start programs must align their practices to the new 10 domains of child development, with an eleventh domain specifically for English-Language Learners:

- physical development and health
- social and emotional development
- approaches to learning
- language development
- literacy knowledge and skills
- mathematics knowledge and skills
- science knowledge and skills
- creative arts expression
- logic and reasoning
- social studies knowledge and skills
- English language development, specifically for English-Language Learners
The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework
Some newer definitions of school readiness incorporate new child development domains that are also included in the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. Creativity, artistic expression, social studies, and science knowledge are included in the Louisiana definition, adopted in early 2011. Virginia’s definition also includes science, history, and social science.

Another element of recent school readiness definitions is the specific inclusion of a child’s good health for success in school. Definitions for Georgia, Colorado, and West Virginia include the physical health of children, especially the opportunity to visit health professionals to determine impediments to learning. Of the many states that utilize the NEGP school readiness model, healthcare resources from the family and community are mentioned in several definitions. Georgia specifically defines school readiness to include the detection and management of physical health, as well as mental and physical disabilities. Alabama also focuses on child health, relating a child’s “optimal health” to the overall outcome of a “strong, healthy society.”

**School Readiness Indicators**

Current school readiness research supports the development of the whole child. Organizations and programs are adapting their child development models to new domains of school readiness, and corresponding indicators of school readiness. Head Start, for example, now has eleven domains of school readiness and over one hundred indicators. Many recent school readiness definitions are lists of school readiness indicators, developmental domains, and skill sets that are intended to produce positive outcomes for children in kindergarten. Older definitions, that do not benefit from recent research and prevailing trends in school readiness, are generally one-dimensional, short statements of broad purpose. Kansas, Maryland, and Texas all have short definitions of school readiness, and all were developed in the early 2000’s. Although these early definitions are more simplistic, they include basic principles that have been elaborated in the newer definitions.

Recent definitions of school readiness, particularly Virginia and Louisiana, are very long and include a great deal of information on each component, from indicators and domains to ready schools, families, and communities. Virginia uses the ready children, schools, families, and communities framework, but includes extensive lists of indicators for each constituency. The Virginia definition also incorporates skills indicators for children in certain curriculum domains, such as literacy, math, science, and social-emotional skills. Like Virginia, Wisconsin’s definition of school readiness outlines their school readiness indicators in a framework, organized using the NEGP school readiness model. Louisiana’s definition of kindergarten readiness is also a listing of school readiness indicators and skills for children to possess for kindergarten success. States with indicator-driven definitions use this information to report to stakeholders, especially parents and community leaders, about the benefits of school readiness for children.
Children may not enter a traditional school until kindergarten, but learning begins at birth and children acquire experiences and knowledge throughout their childhood. No state school readiness definition expressly mentions infants and toddlers, but the definitions that rely on school readiness indicators generally focus on a child’s wealth of knowledge, experience, and skills starting early in life. Unlike most other definitions of school readiness, many of the core indicators listed by the NSRII were data-driven and included skill sets and health indicators for infants and toddlers. For example, one of the ready community services indicators under health is the percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds. Another core indicator, under ready children, is the percentage of children with age-appropriate fine motor skills.

Adoption and Implementation

States have developed definitions of school readiness for different reasons and with different goals. Some states use their definition as a goal or aspiration, while others use their definition to inform stakeholders about opportunities to improve school readiness in their communities. While many states utilize a kindergarten assessment tool, not all definitions of school readiness relate to these assessments. The Louisiana and Kentucky assessment tools, currently in development, will benefit from and complement the recently adopted definitions of kindergarten and school readiness, respectively.

The NEGP definition of school readiness has informed the school readiness definitions for many states. When seventeen states came together to define school readiness with the NSRII, they relied heavily upon the work of the NEGP. States chose to formally adopt the school readiness definition from the NSRII individually; some chose to adopt it through their departments of education while others used their state legislatures to formally mandate the definition. Arkansas, Colorado, and Hawaii adopted their definitions of school readiness through state legislation. (Arkansas was a member on the NSRII, but Hawaii and Colorado were not a members and each has a unique school readiness definition.) The state advisory councils for New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Tennessee will develop school readiness definitions for their states, according to their grant applications. The school readiness definitions for Tennessee and Oklahoma are currently in development, but Kentucky’s definition was written in 2010.

Information about each state’s school readiness definition depends upon the state’s outreach and communication of the definition. Some of the more recent definitions, specifically Virginia and West Virginia, have a great deal of material online that relate the state definition to early education in the state. Louisiana, whose definition is very new, has only begun promoting their definition of school readiness, but has produced outreach materials for parents. The state advisory council of Kentucky, in conjunction with the new school readiness definition, has released additional information on the definition, their child development domains, and its relationship to the council’s other work.
Conclusion

In the last decade, many states have written and adopted definitions of school readiness to inform parents, early education providers, and policymakers about child development, school readiness curriculum, and learning assessments. As school readiness policy across the country becomes more inclusive and interconnected, definitions of school readiness are becoming more common and more alike.

Essentially, definitions of school readiness can be divided into three categories: definitions that focus on developmental domains; definitions that focus on family, school, and community supports; and, definitions that feature both developmental domains and peripheral support systems. Each state’s definition of school readiness emphasizes the needs of that population to define and assess school readiness for their children. As research into school readiness indicators, developmental domains, and community resources evolves, so will the official definitions of school readiness developed and adopted by organizations and states.
Questions for Texas:

1. What are the characteristics of a good definition of school readiness?
   
a. Is the definition meaningful? Does it meet our purpose? Will it help us to determine if school readiness is improving in Texas?
   
b. Is the definition valid? Does it capture the essence of school readiness as we currently understand it?
   
c. Is the definition understandable? Will users and stakeholders easily grasp the meaning?
   
d. Is the definition measureable? Will it be realistically measureable in a timely and affordable manner?
   
e. Will the definition be accepted by the agencies and stakeholders who will use it?
   
f. Is the definition reasonable? Does it meet the “good enough” test?

2. How should a school readiness definition be used? To inform parents and communities? To inform the development of early childhood reform efforts?

3. Which current school readiness definition is the most reflective of YOUR definition of school readiness? Why? (See the appendix on page 27 for a table of all current definitions of school readiness adopted by states.)

4. Do the projects of the Texas Early Learning Council, all aimed to improve school readiness, support the current Texas definition of school readiness?
Profiles: State Definitions of School Readiness

Twenty-four states have adopted, or will soon adopt, definitions of school readiness. These definitions range from broad vision statements to extensive lists of school readiness indicators for children, families, schools, and communities. Generally, definitions of school readiness fall into one of three categories: definitions that focus on developmental domains; definitions that focus on support systems and services; and, definitions that feature both developmental domains and peripheral support.

Many states feature their definition on the state’s department of education website. Some of the definitions were written in conjunction with kindergarten assessments, so state’s developed websites that link their definition to the goal of the kindergarten assessment. States have chosen to promote their school readiness definitions in different ways. The most recent states to adopt school readiness definitions have also developed outreach materials for parents to assist families with the decision to enroll children in kindergarten, depending upon the specific child’s current development in key areas. In some cases, this outreach information is the only promotion of the state’s definition for school readiness. At least four states, Kentucky, Tennessee, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, will develop a definition of school readiness with its state advisory council.

This section includes profiles of the definitions of school readiness for several states: Texas, Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, Louisiana, and Wisconsin. Also, definitions written by the National Education Goals Panel and by a 17-state coalition, the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, are included. Each state profile outlines the definition, its purpose and usage, information about the definition’s development, and its relationship to the state’s kindergarten assessment tools.
National Education Goals Panel

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush met with the governors of all states at the first National Education Summit to discuss education reforms for the entire nation. The federal-state partnership that emerged from this Summit, known as the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP), focused on improving education across the nation and organized their efforts into eight goals, the first of which is: “all children will start school ready to learn.” To have been achieved by the year 2000, the first goal asked the country to ensure that all children would start kindergarten ready to learn and ready to succeed in school. NEGP wrote a formal definition of school readiness to complement the Panel’s work in early education to achieve Goal 1.

This definition of school readiness also relates to the NEGP’s developmental domains of school readiness for children:

- Physical and motor development
- Social and emotional development
- Approaches to learning
- Language development
- Cognitive development

The NEGP definition of school readiness and developmental domains are very influential in the development of subsequent state definitions. Almost all states utilize part or all of the school readiness model (including children, families, schools, and communities) and the developmental domains. Although newer definitions of school readiness include additional developmental domains, such as math, science, social studies, and creative arts, the core domains of child development, listed above, are mainstays in both child development literature and school readiness definitions.

For more information:

http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/
National School Readiness Indicators Initiative

The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative: Making Progress for Young Children (NSRII) was a coalition of teams from seventeen states to choose school readiness indicators, and use data collected from the chosen indicators to inform parents, providers, and policymakers about improvements in school readiness for the children in each state. The final report of the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, titled Getting Ready, was published in 2005.

California, Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine participated in the NSRII. While not all states formally adopted the Ready Child Equation as their state’s official definition of school readiness, they did use this definition to determine their school readiness indicators for the project. Additionally, some states have expanded upon the original NSRII school readiness definition and adopted new definitions that feature the Ready Child Equation elements.

Each state participating in the NSRII used the following developmental domains to select school readiness indicators:

- Physical well-being and motor development
- Social and emotional development
- Approaches to learning
- Language development
- Cognition and general knowledge

From each domain, states chose specific school readiness indicators that should predict school readiness. All core indicators were based on available data, for example the percentage of children with age-appropriate motor skills, or the percentage of children aged 19-35 months who are fully immunized.

For more information:

http://www.gettingready.org/matriarch/

The following summarizes the core set of common indicators agreed upon by the 17 states involved in the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative. This core set of common indicators is based on the national research and informed by the state experiences in selecting measurable indicators relating to and defining school readiness.

### Ready Children

- **Physical Well-Being and Motor Development**
  - % of children with age-appropriate fine motor skills

- **Social and Emotional Development**
  - % of children who often or very often exhibit positive social behaviors when interacting with their peers

- **Approaches to Learning**
  - % of kindergarten students with moderate to serious difficulty following directions

- **Language Development**
  - % of children almost always recognizing the relationships between letters and sounds at kindergarten entry

- **Cognition and General Knowledge**
  - % of children recognizing basic shapes at kindergarten entry

### Ready Families

- **Mother’s Education Level**
  - % of births to mothers with less than a 12th grade education

- **Births to Teens**
  - # of births to teens ages 15-17 per 1,000 girls

- **Child Abuse and Neglect**
  - Rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect among children birth to age 6

- **Children in Foster Care**
  - % of children birth to age 6 in out-of-home placement (foster care) who have no more than two placements in a 24-month period

### Ready Communities

- **Young Children in Poverty**
  - % of children under age 6 living in families with income below the federal poverty threshold

- **Supports for Families with Infants and Toddlers**
  - % of infants and toddlers in poverty who are enrolled in Early Head Start

- **Lead Poisoning**
  - % of children under age 6 with blood lead levels at or above 10 micrograms per deciliter

### Ready Services – Health

- **Health Insurance**
  - % of children under age 6 without health insurance

- **Low Birthweight Infants**
  - % of infants born weighing under 2,500 grams (5.5 pounds)

- **Access to Prenatal Care**
  - % of births to women who receive late or no prenatal care

- **Immunizations**
  - % of children ages 19-35 months who have been fully immunized

- **Ready Services - Early Care and Education**
  - Children Enrolled in an Early Education Program

- **% of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in a center-based early childhood care and education program (including childcare centers, nursery schools, preschool programs, Head Start programs, and pre-kindergarten programs)**

- **Early Education Teacher Credentials**
  - % of early childhood teachers with a bachelor’s degree and specialized training in early childhood

- **Accredited Child Care Centers**
  - % of child care centers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

- **Accredited Family Child Care Homes**
  - % of family child care homes accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)

- **Access to Child Care Subsidies**
  - % of eligible children under age 0 receiving child care subsidies

### Ready Schools

- **Class Size**
  - Average teacher/child ratio in K-1 classrooms

- **Fourth Grade Reading Scores**
  - % of children with reading proficiency in fourth grade as measured by the state’s proficiency tests

Source: National School Readiness Indicators Initiative (Feb 2005), “Getting Ready.”
Kentucky

The Kentucky Early Childhood Advisory Council, the Kentucky State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care under the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, developed a definition of school readiness for Kentucky children in 2010. Defining school readiness for Kentucky was one of the Kentucky ECAC’s primary objectives according to their grant application.

Kentucky also chose five developmental domains to complement their school readiness definition:

- Approaches to learning
- Health and physical well-being
- Language and communication development
- Social and emotional development
- Cognitive and general knowledge

In developing this definition, Kentucky “focused on the whole child, while still providing guidance on appropriate student expectation in primary school.” Kentucky does not currently have a kindergarten assessment tool. The definition of school readiness will guide the development of the Kentucky kindergarten assessment tool. The five domains and corresponding indicators will be used to inform the state’s new kindergarten assessment tool.

For more information:

Louisiana developed and adopted its definition of school readiness in early 2011. The state conducted a constituent survey on the school readiness definition in 2010, while it was still under development, and 93% of the population agreed with the state’s chosen definition of school readiness. The Louisiana definition of school readiness is the most recent definition to have been adopted among the states.

Louisiana’s definition of school readiness includes relatively new developmental domains of science, social studies, and the arts in school readiness definitions. The definition will be used to inform the development of the new Louisiana kindergarten assessment tool. Louisiana does not currently have a universal kindergarten assessment tool; the state legislature approved the development of an assessment in early 2011 by legislative mandate. The new tool will be used for all children in Louisiana.

Currently, Louisiana school districts may use Brigance K-1, Chicago EARLY Assessment, Developing Skills Checklist (DSC), Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning-Third Edition (DIAL-3), DIAL-Revised, Early Screening Inventory-Revised, or Screening Test for Education Prerequisite Skills (STEPS). Not all school districts assess their kindergarten students, and the assessments vary based on the instrument. Data is disaggregated by district level, and reported to parents.

For more information:


Louisiana Definition of School Readiness:

At the beginning of kindergarten, it is expected that children will demonstrate:

- **Cognitive abilities**, which include knowledge and skills in:
  - *early literacy*, such as phonological awareness, print concepts, alphabetic understanding vocabulary, listening comprehension, and emergent writing
  - *basic numeracy concepts*, such as rote counting and number awareness, sorting, classifying, comparing, patterning, and spatial relationships
- **Basic science concepts**, such as making observations, exploring the world using their senses, and using appropriate scientific vocabulary related to topics
- **Basic social studies concepts**, such as self-awareness and their relationship to family and community, and an awareness of money and time
- **Response to and participation in music, movement, visual and dramatic arts experiences and activities**
- **Abilities, either assisted or unassisted, that show an awareness of health, hygiene, and environmental hazards, in addition to gross and fine motor skills**
- **Social and emotional competencies**, including self-regulation, self-identity, self-reliance, respect for others, and interpersonal skills
- **Approaches to learning**, such as reasoning and problem-solving, engagement, persistence, and eagerness to learn
Maryland

Maryland adopted its definition of school readiness in 2000. Maryland was the first state to adopt a school readiness definition after the NEGP released its definition of school readiness. However, the Maryland definition of school readiness does not incorporate the NEGP model that includes families, schools, and communities. Also, Maryland’s definition is unique in that it incorporates a child’s experiences in kindergarten into the definition of school readiness, defining school readiness at entry into first grade, not kindergarten.

This definition of school readiness is one element of the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR), the state’s assessment and instruction system that focuses on skill development in children. Teachers administer the Work Sampling System (WSS), a kindergarten assessment, to assess and evaluate skills, knowledge, behavior, and academic accomplishment. All children in Maryland are assessed 2-3 times during their kindergarten school year.

The WSS measures:

- Social and personal development
- Language and literacy
- Mathematical thinking
- Scientific thinking
- Social studies
- The arts
- Physical development and health

WSS data is collected by teachers and aggregated by classroom, school, district, and state levels. The assessment data is used to inform parents and teachers about a child’s specific needs, and areas for improvement.

For more information:

http://mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/mmsr/
Texas

The Texas definition of school readiness was developed by the Texas School Ready! Certification System Task Force in 2003. This definition of school readiness directly relates to the Texas School Ready! Certification System and the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI), both developed by the Children’s Learning Institute. The Texas School Ready! Certification System awards high-quality prekindergarten programs that have proven records of student success on kindergarten assessments, including the TPRI assessment. This definition was codified into the Texas Administrative Code in 2009, Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 102, Subchapter AA, Rule §102.1002.

Texas currently defines school readiness as children’s satisfactory scores on kindergarten assessments, primarily the TPRI. School districts assess children’s early literacy skills in kindergarten, first, and second grades. This data is reported to the state for individual children, to gauge their progress over time, and by the district.

The Texas definition of school readiness relates three developmental domains, early literacy, early math, and social skills, to student success. However, the Texas Legislature only requires school districts to administer a reading assessment. The TPRI is the most commonly used kindergarten assessment in Texas, but many school districts chose to use a TEA-approved alternative assessment. In accordance with recent school readiness research, the Children’s Learning Institute is currently developing a supplemental assessment for early math skills.

For more information:

http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=5921
Virginia

Virginia’s definition of school readiness was developed in 2008 by the Virginia School Readiness Task Force. The comprehensive school readiness definition includes many indicators for children, families, schools, and communities to influence and determine school readiness. Virginia was a participant in the NSRII, but further developed their definition of school readiness several years later. The Virginia definition of school readiness uses the NEGP model of ready children, families, schools, and communities.

Virginia Definition of School Readiness:

“School readiness” describes the capabilities of children, their families, schools, and communities that will best promote student success in kindergarten and beyond. Each component – children, families, schools and communities – plays an essential role in the development of school readiness. No one component can stand on its own.

Ready Children. A ready child is prepared socially, personally, physically, and intellectually within the developmental domains addressed in Virginia’s six Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: literacy, mathematics, science, history and social science, physical and motor development, and personal and social development. Children develop holistically; growth and development in one area depends upon development in other areas.

Ready Families. A ready family has adults who understand they are the most important people in the child’s life and take responsibility for the child’s school readiness through direct, frequent, and positive involvement and interest in the child. Adults recognize their role as the child’s first and most important teacher, providing steady and supportive relationships, ensuring safe and consistent environments, promoting good health, and fostering curiosity, excitement about learning, determination, and self-control.

Ready Schools. A ready school accepts all children and provides a seamless transition to a high-quality learning environment by engaging the whole community. A ready school welcomes all children with opportunities to enhance and build confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities. Children in ready schools are led by skilled teachers, who recognize, reinforce, and extend children’s strengths and who are sensitive to cultural values and individual differences.

Ready Communities. A ready community plays a crucial part in supporting families in their role as primary stewards of children’s readiness. Ready communities, including businesses, faith based organizations, early childhood service providers, community groups and local governments, work together to support children’s school and long term success by providing families affordable access to information, services, high quality child care, and early learning opportunities.
Virginia, continued.

The Virginia definition of school readiness is the longest school readiness definition from the states. In addition to the text listed above, Virginia also includes specific indicators under each heading: ready children, ready families, ready schools, and ready communities. Virginia uses the school readiness definition to inform community leaders about supporting school readiness for children. The state actively recruits other early childhood organizations that work in Virginia to also adopt the school readiness definition.

Virginia uses the Phonetic Awareness Literacy Screening for Kindergarten (PALS-K) to assess children’s early literacy skills. PALS-K is voluntary, but is used by 99% of Virginia school districts. Children are assessed in the fall and spring of the kindergarten school year. All students are assessed in the spring of first grade (PALS-1) to evaluate progress. Children who do not meet the benchmark in kindergarten or first grade enter into a reading intervention program.

For more information:

http://pals.virginia.edu/tools-k.html
http://www.earlychildhood.virginia.gov/school_readiness.shtml
Wisconsin developed its definition of school readiness in 2003. A member of the NSRII, Wisconsin organizes its school readiness indicators into three categories: responsive families and communities; receptive schools; and, ready children. The state specifically chose a broad statement to define school readiness to allow children flexibility in knowledge and skills at kindergarten entry.

In addition to this definition, Wisconsin publishes a supplemental document that outlines school readiness outcomes, indicators, and relevant data for each element of the definition: children, schools, families, and communities. The Wisconsin definition of school readiness was developed to complement recommendations for a Wisconsin early childhood data system. Wisconsin does not currently use a kindergarten assessment.

For more information:
http://www.wccf.org/pdf/WSRII.pdf
# Appendix: State Definitions of School Readiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Definition of School Readiness</th>
<th>Year of Adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>“School Readiness” is a condition whereby children enter school with: (a) an enthusiasm for learning; (b) an ability to function in a social setting; (c) age-appropriate communication and problem solving skills; (d) age-appropriate physical and emotional skills; and, (e) optimal health. School readiness is fostered through opportunities that promote child exploration, sociability, curiosity, creativity, decision-making, independence, and responsibility, in combination with partnerships among families, teachers, local and state communities. A child who is ready to learn when entering school will be able to obtain optimal benefits from learning experiences offered by the school and will encounter fewer obstacles to learning. Supporting children to be “ready for school” is essential in the attainment of: (a) educational achievement and success; (b) reduction of retention and remediation resulting in functional benefits; (c) a higher individual economic status; and, (d) a positive sense of social responsibility, thus creating a strong, healthy society.</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>“Ready Child Equation”: READY FAMILIES + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SERVICES + READY SCHOOLS = CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL.</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>“Ready Child Equation”: READY FAMILIES + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SERVICES + READY SCHOOLS = CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL.</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>School readiness is children’s readiness for school, school’s readiness for children, and family and community supports and services that contribute to children’s readiness for school success. (National Education Goals Panel definition.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>School readiness describes both the preparedness of a child to engage in and benefit from learning experiences, and the ability of a school to meet the needs of all students in preschool and kindergarten. School readiness is enhanced when schools work collaboratively with families and community service providers to ensure that every child is ready for higher levels of learning in academic content. Colorado School Readiness includes: (child preparedness) social and emotional development, communication and language development, approaches to learning, content knowledge, and physical wellbeing and motor development; (school capacity) professional proficiency, strategic thinking in leadership, community services and family engagement, and structures and resources.</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>“Ready Child Equation”: READY FAMILIES + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SERVICES + READY SCHOOLS = CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL.</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>A child’s readiness for school is when: possible health barriers that block learning have been detected; suspected physical or mental disabilities have been addressed; enthusiasm, curiosity, and persistence toward learning is demonstrated; feelings of both self and others are recognized; social and interpersonal skills are emerging; communication with others is effective; early literacy skills are evident; and, a general knowledge about the world, things, place, events, and people has been acquired.</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>“School readiness” means that young children are ready to have successful learning experiences in school when there is a positive interaction among the child’s developmental characteristics, school practices, and family and community support.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>School readiness occurs when families, schools and communities support and serve children effectively so that all children have the ability to succeed in various learning environments. There are four domains, each with measurable indicators: Family, Community, School, and Child.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky SAC (Early Childhood Advisory Council)</td>
<td>School readiness means that each child enters school ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the child’s success - ready to grow, ready to learn, ready to succeed.</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>At the beginning of kindergarten, it is expected that children will demonstrate: -Cognitive abilities, which include knowledge and skills in: ---early literacy, such as phonological awareness, print concepts, alphabetic understanding vocabulary, listening comprehension, and emergent writing ---basic numeracy concepts, such as rote counting and number awareness, sorting, classifying, comparing, patterning, and spatial relationships -Basic science concepts, such as making observations, exploring the world using their senses, and using appropriate scientific vocabulary related to topics -Basic social studies concepts, such as self-awareness and their relationship to family and community, and an awareness of money and time -Response to and participation in music, movement, visual and dramatic arts experiences and activities -Abilities, either assisted or unassisted, that show an awareness of health, hygiene, and environmental hazards, in addition to gross and fine motor skills -Social and emotional competencies, including self-regulation, self-identity, self-reliance, respect for others, and interpersonal skills -Approaches to learning, such as reasoning and problem-solving, engagement, persistence, and eagerness to learn</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>School readiness is the state of early development that enables an individual child to engage in and benefit from first grade learning experiences.</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>School readiness is defined as skills, knowledge, behaviors and accomplishments that children know and can do as they enter kindergarten in the following areas of child development: social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language and literacy development; creativity and the arts; cognition and general knowledge; and physical wellbeing and motor development.</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Education Goals Panel</td>
<td>School readiness is children's readiness for school, school's readiness for children, and family and community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness for school success.</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National School Readiness Indicators Initiative</td>
<td>&quot;Ready Child Equation&quot;: READY FAMILIES + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SERVICES + READY SCHOOLS = CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL.</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Mexico SAC (Early Learning Advisory Council)</td>
<td>In development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>A ready elementary school provides an inviting atmosphere, values and respects all children and their families, and is a place where children succeed. It is committed to high quality in all domains of learning and teaching and has deep connections with parents and its community. It prepares children for success in work and life in the 21st century.</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>&quot;Ready Child Equation&quot;: READY FAMILIES + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SERVICES + READY SCHOOLS = CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL.</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma SAC (Partnership for School Readiness)</td>
<td>In development.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>&quot;Ready Child Equation&quot;: READY FAMILIES + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SERVICES + READY SCHOOLS = CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL.</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee SAC (Early Childhood Advisory Council)</td>
<td>In development.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>School ready or school readiness--A term that refers to a child being able to function competently in a school environment in the areas of early language and literacy, mathematics, and social skills as objectively measured by state-approved assessment instruments.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Virginia**

"School readiness" describes the capabilities of children, their families, schools, and communities that will best promote student success in kindergarten and beyond. Each component – children, families, schools and communities – plays an essential role in the development of school readiness. No one component can stand on its own.

- **Ready Children.** A ready child is prepared socially, personally, physically, and intellectually within the developmental domains addressed in Virginia’s six Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: literacy, mathematics, science, history and social science, physical and motor development, and personal and social development. Children develop holistically; growth and development in one area depends upon development in other areas.
  - Ready Families. A ready family has adults who understand they are the most important people in the child's life and take responsibility for the child's school readiness through direct, frequent, and positive involvement and interest in the child. Adults recognize their role as the child’s first and most important teacher, providing steady and supportive relationships, ensuring safe and consistent environments, promoting good health, and fostering curiosity, excitement about learning, determination, and self-control.
  - Ready Schools. A ready school accepts all children and provides a seamless transition to a high-quality learning environment by engaging the whole community. A ready school welcomes all children with opportunities to enhance and build confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities. Children in ready schools are led by skilled teachers, who recognize, reinforce, and extend children's strengths and who are sensitive to cultural values and individual differences.
  - Ready Communities. A ready community plays a crucial part in supporting families in their role as primary stewards of children’s readiness. Ready communities, including businesses, faith based organizations, early childhood service providers, community groups and local governments, work together to support children’s school and long term success by providing families affordable access to information, services, high quality child care, and early learning opportunities.  

**Year of Adoption:** 2008

**Vermont**

"Ready Child Equation": READY FAMILIES + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SERVICES + READY SCHOOLS = CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL.

**Year of Adoption:** 2005
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<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>West Virginia defines kindergarten readiness as a stage of transition that encompasses the child’s various learning experiences and general knowledge, physical well-being, social and emotional development, and familiarity and ease with expressing themselves and understanding language. Children develop holistically and at an individual rate. As a result, children enter school with varied levels of skill and learning experiences. These variances are further impacted by the resources children have access to prior to entering school including home, family and community supports. Since each child’s degree of readiness differs and is highly individualized, kindergarten readiness also entails the capacity of schools to be prepared to serve all children effectively regardless of a child’s individual developmental level in each of the five developmental domains of school readiness. The five developmental domains of school readiness are: 1. Health and physical development, 2. Social and emotional development, 3. Language development and communication, 4. Cognition and general knowledge, and 5. A child's individual approaches to learning.</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>While all children are ready for school by virtue of having attained the chronological age for school entry established by the state, school readiness refers to the conditions that promote their readiness to succeed in school.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


References

4 Ibid.
19 Ibid.


27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.


33 Ibid.


High/Scope ReSource 2005(Fall/Winter).


62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.


78 Ibid.


82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.


34


98 Ibid.


