School readiness: what it means to be "ready" for kindergarten

Brian D. Kingrey
University of Northern Iowa

Copyright ©2009 Brian D. Kingrey
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Early Childhood Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/1005

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.
School readiness: what it means to be "ready" for kindergarten

Abstract
This review of the literature examined the recent literature on the subject of school readiness. The purpose of this review of the literature was to identify how schools and parents view school readiness, as well as how emergent literacy plays a role in preparing students for public school education. Assessments, skills, early learning standards, literacy practices, and entry age were discussed.

In researching recent literature for the review multiple searches were conducted including the search terms of school readiness and transition. Pianta, Cox, and Snow (2007) discussed the domains of developmental functioning in the early childhood years, which served as a basis for continued research. Summative findings included family involvement, the importance of emergent literacy, and individual student development.
School Readiness:
What it Means to be
Ready for Kindergarten

A Graduate Review
Submitted to the
Division of Literacy Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By
Brian D. Kingrey
May, 2009
This review by: Brian D. Kingrey
Titled: School Readiness: What it Means to be Ready for Kindergarten

has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Rebecca Edmiaston
Date Approved: 6-8-09
Graduate Faculty Reader

Penny L. Beed
Date Approved: 6-9-09
Graduate Faculty Reader

Jill M. Uhlenberg
Date Approved: 6-9-09
Head, Department of Curriculum & Instruction
Abstract

This review of the literature examined the recent literature on the subject of school readiness. The purpose of this review of the literature was to identify how schools and parents view school readiness, as well as how emergent literacy plays a role in preparing students for public school education. Assessments, skills, early learning standards, literacy practices, and entry age were discussed. In researching recent literature for the review multiple searches were conducted including the search terms of school readiness and transition. Pianta, Cox, and Snow (2007) discussed the domains of developmental functioning in the early childhood years, which served as a basis for continued research. Summative findings included family involvement, the importance of emergent literacy, and individual student development.
Acknowledgements

Over the years I've been blessed to have support from my family, friends, and educators. I'd like to thank those closest to me for always offering a supportive word, encouraging me in my studies, and empowering me to be a better person and teacher. From my earliest days growing up, I knew I could count on my family members to be my first teachers. Upon entering school, I was fortunate to have had great educators along the way who taught me to always want more. I credit my success in school to my support network. My network was comprised of my first and second grade teacher who inspired me to become a teacher, my college comp teacher in high school who taught me to write well, and my many professors throughout my college careers who taught me to never accept the status quo; I can make a difference.

I believe that knowledge is power, and in the past several years of my journey in education I've received much knowledge. It is my goal to apply that knowledge to my life, to my teaching, and in turn to my students' lives. I wish to instill in my students the same belief that my teachers instilled in me; you can be whatever you want to be.

I wish to dedicate this work to those who have helped me in my journey. You're appreciated more than you know, and more than words can ever say. Thank you for your unwavering support, guidance, and interest in my educational endeavors.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Choosing Topic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Topic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminology</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods for Locating Sources</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods for Selecting Sources</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures for Analyzing Sources</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of the Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Schools and Readiness</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and Readiness</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Practices and Readiness</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

When parents contemplate the idea of sending their children to kindergarten, many questions race through their minds such as: (a) Is my son/daughter ready to go to school? (b) Have I prepared my son/daughter enough to enter kindergarten? and, (c) What can I do to help my son/daughter? Although parents may have many other questions regarding school readiness, these are among the top concerns of parents of preschool children (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007).

Entering kindergarten is a milestone in a child’s life. From the earliest of days after a child is born, a child’s parents work to provide the best possible life they can for their child. Many parents seek the advice of teachers and professionals who have an advanced understanding of child development, and those who can offer suggestions in teaching a child the most basic of skills. Teachers and professionals generally have similar suggestions in advising parents of preschool children; however, depending on the persons participating in the discussion, teachers or developmental professionals may have varying opinions as to what is best for each individual student versus that of children as a whole.

Children as a whole are often labeled as one large group. Within that group, subgroups of ages and stages exist such as birth to eighteen months, toddlers, threes and fours, preschool and kindergarten aged students. As developmental professionals and teachers work with children of these ages, they often times see great differences across the stages of development. Therefore, it is suggested that within these subgroups of children’s ages, one can accurately assess a child’s developmental factors within four specified domains of development: (a) cognitive, (b) physical, (c) social, and (d) emotional, based on the given norms of children as a whole group. When assessing a child’s development one must take
into consideration an array of norms and statistics to accurately assess the development holistically. All four developmental domains are assessed when discussing school readiness because teachers teach the whole student, that is to say they teach the four areas that make up the whole individual (Pianta, et al., 2007).

Over the years researchers and developmental psychologists have worked to design accurate assessments that gauge an individual’s development throughout the four developmental domains, as well as designate areas of discrepancy in a child’s development. These areas of discrepancy are frequently looked at as areas of concern when considering school readiness. For instance, a child may score high in three of the four developmental domains, but score low in the fourth such as in social skills, making his/her overall score lower. Assessing a child by looking only at an averaged total score may deem him/her *not ready* in terms of school readiness. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers assess each child as an individual and not as a member of a collaborative group (Pianta, et al., 2007). Once individualized assessment has been completed, teachers can then compare students using normative data. This data will indicate readiness skills across all areas of development, and will lead to informed decision-making on individualized bases.

Assessment by teachers and administrators dictates school readiness (Pianta, et al., 2007). The problem that comes to light is the fact that there is not one valid and reliable form of assessment for all preschool-aged students. That is to say, in many schools, the only deciding factor of school readiness is the child’s age, and not that of how the child measures up to developmental norms and indicators of abilities.
Rationale for Choosing Topic

I chose to research this topic because my areas of educational interest lie within the realms of early childhood and literacy. In tying the research from these two topics together, I am better able to assess a child’s readiness for school. Knowledge of this information allows me to differentiate instruction for each student based on individual incoming, pre-assessment data. When a teacher has accurate pre-assessment data stemming from the child’s performance she or he can aid in the transition from preschool to kindergarten.

Readiness can be viewed from differing vantage points. One such vantage point focuses on academic skills, while another focuses on socialization. Nelson (2004) reported that stakeholders, generally parents and teachers, view readiness differently. Nelson stated that parents view readiness as academic, believing that the acquisition of pre-reading skills, writing, and counting skills are what dictate a successful start to kindergarten. Conversely, teachers believe readiness to be marked by interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate needs and wants effectively, in determining school readiness. In my four years teaching kindergarten I have seen such a disconnect in the perceptions of the parents and teachers. Educators are apt to see both sides in the debate over readiness. Teachers and administrators do embrace the ideals of parents that academics are indicative of school readiness, but at the same time deem social and emotional development just as high in decision-making situations.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this review of the literature was to identify how schools and parents view school readiness, as well as to discuss how emergent literacy plays a role in preparing students for public school education. The practices identified could serve as a guide to
parents and educators as they prepare students for success in the public school. This review of the literature could aid districts in developing early learning standards which define curriculum and instructional practices in early childhood classrooms.

**Importance of Topic**

Early childhood professionals will benefit from the findings of this research as it takes best practices from an array of professional educators and describes them in succinct form in order to allow for increased understanding and awareness in the field of early childhood education and school preparedness. Further, administrators will have knowledge of school readiness and what it means for best practice within their districts.

**Terminology**

Over the past few decades, the term *school readiness* has evolved as well as the notion of what it means to be school ready. School readiness was included as a goal for education by the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) in 1997. Although much debate surrounded the concept of school readiness and use of the term a decade ago, the NEGP discussed that school readiness encompassed those skills and knowledge associated with success in school (Pianta, et al., 2007). The first report by the NEGP outlining school readiness defined readiness parameters to include: (a) physical well-being and motor development, (b) social and emotional development, (c) approaches toward learning, (d) communication and language usage, and (e) cognition and general knowledge (Pianta, et al., 2007). These parameters were made more concrete and specific with the reauthorization of Head Start as the School Readiness Act of 2005 (S1107; H.R.2123), which specified the primary expectations for Head Start children entering kindergarten: (a) language knowledge and skills, (b) pre-mathematics understandings, (c) cognitive abilities related to academic
achievement, (d) social and emotional development, and, (e) in the case of limited-English-proficient children, progress toward acquisition of the English language (Pianta, et al., 2007).

For this review, an integrative view on school readiness was discussed, combining both the NEGP’s parameters, as well as those listed in the School Readiness Act of 2005. One reason for an integrative view of school readiness was to incorporate two viewpoints that address similar, yet different views on what it means to be ready for school. Another reason for an integrative view of school readiness was to identify parameters considered by parents, as well as some early childhood teachers and specialists.

Early childhood teachers and parents consider many aspects in terms of readiness such as birth date, social maturity, and developmental state. In addition, one main focus of parental decision-making in selecting school entry relies primarily on the chronological age of the child; whether the child is five years old by a certain cut-off date as deemed by individual state departments of education. Not only do parents consider chronological age, but they also consider their child’s self-image; whether or not their son or daughter has a positive awareness of himself or herself. One way parents can gauge their children’s self-image is to give them multiple opportunities to succeed in different aspects of life; one such way is to participate in school functions leading up to kindergarten such as pre-enrollment activities.

Pre-enrollment, or transition, activities in which most families participate are kindergarten round-up, informational parent meetings, summer visits with teachers and school personnel, and reading programs sponsored by schools. Kindergarten round-up activities include student visitations to the building that they will attend in the fall. In some cases of kindergarten round-up activities, informational parent meetings are held to inform
parents of pertinent information related to school success and effective transition to school.

Another pre-enrollment activity implemented by schools is summer visitations. *Summer visits* to school include families and teachers, as well as school personnel, and are held once a month during the three summer months leading up to the beginning of school. In addition to the summer visits, some schools implement summer reading programs to involve all families prior to school entry. The *summer reading programs* vary among districts, but the common denominator is family involvement. By participating in such activities, educators are better equipped with the knowledge to teach students once they arrive in the classroom as they had met, talked with, and interacted together positively in the educational sphere. In addition, participation in pre-enrollment activities gives educators an idea of which students needed additional support, or accommodations. Accommodations within the classroom occur frequently and include speech services, physical therapy, as well as academic services.

Although the single best indicator of students' school readiness is self-image (Karnofsky & Weiss, 1993); teachers and developmental professionals can also assess a child's preparedness by looking at their emerging literacy development, such as awareness of print. A child's awareness of print indicates a vast amount of knowledge to teachers and educational observers. Knowing what a book is, how to hold it, turning pages, knowing the top from the bottom, as well as author and illustrator in regard to their jobs, are items teachers look for in deciding school readiness.

*bResearch Questions*

In determining the function of this review, I identified questions I have in gauging school readiness of students that I have had, as well as those students whom I will have in the future. It was my goal to research and identify those skills that deemed students successful in
the four developmental domains, as well as the acquisition of skills deemed most important by teachers and parents. To accomplish this purpose, this review of the literature addressed the following questions:

1. How do public schools determine when a child is *ready* to enter kindergarten?
2. How do parents decide when their child is *ready* to enter kindergarten?
3. What role does emergent literacy play as a primary indicator of children’s readiness for kindergarten?
Methods

The purpose of this review of the literature was to identify how schools and parents view school readiness, as well as to discuss how emergent literacy plays a role in preparing students for public school education. The practices identified could serve as a guide to parents and preschool educators as they prepare students for success in the public school. This review of the literature could aid districts in developing early learning standards for early childhood classrooms. Currently the most frequently used indicator of school readiness is chronological age. This review of the literature discussed the exploration of developmental skills deemed most important by teachers and parents in preparing and transitioning students to formal education settings.

Research Design

In researching sources for this review of literature I first thought about my end result. I decided to examine other master’s level theses and dissertations in order to serve as a reference point for conducting my review. One graduate level review of literature I referenced related closely to my topic of kindergarten readiness. This review, conducted by Smith (2005), focused on using age or skills in assessing readiness. The overall structure and outline of Smith’s thesis served as a model for my review.

An additional source of literature was one by Ruivo (2006) who focused her thesis on reading aloud. Ruivo’s study was an experimental research study using human participants. This paper offered information on graduate-level writing, as well as information related to emergent literacy, both of which I applied to the writing of this review.
Methods for Locating Sources

Several searches were conducted to effectively identify the multiple variables related to children's school readiness. Locations of materials were through the University of Northern Iowa's Rod Library services, as well as through Central College's Geisler Library services. Articles were accessed using EBSCOhost as well as Eric Educational Research Database. In addition, hand searches were completed within the scholarly journals *Early Education and Development, Phi Delta Kappan, Children and Schools, Early Childhood Education Journal, School Psychology Review,* and *the Journal of Educational Research.*

This literature review included articles that were carefully selected for inclusion. Journal articles that were peer reviewed, scholarly, from notable authors and researchers in the field of early childhood education, from credible institutions of higher learning, were chosen for inclusion. These factors contributed to the authenticity and reliability of the information at hand within the literature review itself. Authenticity, reliability, and validity speak to the very nature of the articles themselves in regard to the authors' views of school readiness.

In researching the topic of school readiness, various search terms were utilized. The subtopics of *kindergarten readiness, school readiness, preschool transition, effective transition methods, early childhood literacy practices, preschoolers and self-image,* and *teacher preparedness for student transition,* were ones chosen for continued research. These subtopics yielded numerous results that required narrowed searches. These continued narrowed searches included search terms such as *specific interventions, preschool children, transition,* and *age versus development.*
Methods for Selecting Sources

In researching the topic of school readiness I looked for skill acquisition of preschool-age students that prepared them successfully for public school kindergarten. Specifically, I looked for perspectives from teachers and parents that led to informed decisions about appropriate entry into kindergarten based on the four developmental domains.

Upon entering my search criteria, I found my searches to be quite cumbersome in results. Entering the search term school readiness yielded results that included transitioning students from high school to college. Therefore, I executed a new search that included the keywords school readiness and kindergarten. Limiting my search to the early childhood field aided in my direction of locating quality sources. An additional topic I narrowed was in regard to entry age of students. I conducted a new search and included both search terms of chronological age of students and developmental age of students. This search provided information pertinent to the controversy of age versus development, a topic highly discussed in the area of school readiness.

Throughout my searching I found ways to limit my results by breaking my research questions into the simplest form. My primary question related to perceptions of school readiness. In searching the literature I found it beneficial to reduce the search terms to simplest form such as teacher perceptions and parent perceptions. I was able to retrieve the most basic information desired by limiting my search terms and combined searches to provide the best results for my topic. I found my searches regarding readiness as an overall umbrella topic to be too cumbersome in yielding results. Therefore, some of the results retrieved in those beginning searches were not appropriate for my topic of kindergarten.
readiness. In addition, searches including one keyword and not two or three key terms yielded fewer results that were unacceptable for use in my review of literature.

**Procedures for Analyzing Sources**

Analyzing current literature allowed me to narrow my focus of acceptable resources viable for use in my review. McEwen's (2006) report related to improving schools was a source that helped me learn to analyze literature to a greater degree. Reading the content within the study allowed me to understand the author’s use of terminology throughout a report. Further, the American Association of School Administrators' (2002) report on improving schools focused my learning on professional writing from a variety of sources and authors. A collection of authors on one main work was interesting to review, due to the variance in opinions, experiences, and contributions made. Reviewing such a piece of work allowed me to take different viewpoints into account when deciphering literature that is of scholarly quality. One last resource proven beneficial for review was Kaplan, Alon, & Boltzer's (2003) literature review on teachers as researchers. This review focused on a master's degree student's experiences fulfilling the roles of both student and teacher, and the idea of teachers becoming researchers in their chosen fields. This particular review was important to my research because it demonstrated how to write a detailed, outlined literature review. Further, reviewing this paper gave me a sense of my role as both a student and teacher as well. It's often difficult to balance work and school, but reading this review allowed me to understand how I can do both effectively, and become an active researcher.
Review of Literature

As part of a national effort to raise student achievement in the United States, the government set forth goals that encompassed every aspect of education from teacher certification to curricula, from early care and preschool programs to graduation rates. These goals were the result of President George H.W. Bush’s 1989 Education Summit with the National Governor’s Association, then headed by Gov. William Clinton (Bracey, 2005). Each goal was specifically targeted and outlined to promote lifelong learners, and as its primary goal, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) targeted early care. Goal 1 of the NEGP is titled *Ready to Learn*. The NEGP had as its goal by the year 2000 all children would start school ready to learn. In order to enter school ready to learn, the NEGP set forth three criteria that were indicative of school readiness. The criteria included: (a) children will receive nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and to maintain the mental alertness necessary to be prepared to learn, and the number of low-birthweight babies will be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal health systems; (b) every parent in the United States will be a child’s first teacher and devote time each day to helping their child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need; and (c) all children will have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school (NEGP, 2009).

Each of the three tenets of Goal 1 from the NEGP is interrelated and works as a sum better than as a part. Early care and prevention are areas of child development that default to parent and caregiver responsibility, as well as the second notion that a parent is a child’s first teacher. Children learn human behavior in a variety of methods such as imitation and
observation, so in essence, every interaction a child has from infancy to school-age provides children with the knowledge of social nuances, body language, and language development that will serve them for a lifetime (Seifert & Hoffnung, 2000). Understanding this, parents and caregivers have a large responsibility in shaping a child’s future from the earliest stages of development, which is what the NEGP communicated to families in Goal 1. Continuing the NEGP’s recommendations for early care and programming, children were to have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs to help prepare children for school. This third tenet of Goal 1 laid the foundation for school success, and acted as a springboard for continued learning in public schools.

School readiness encompasses an array of viewpoints, developmental abilities, and practices and approaches that lead to successful transition from preschool to public kindergarten classrooms. The varied viewpoints associated with school readiness identify sets of skills needed for successful transition to kindergarten, as well as how parents and teachers can develop these skills. The developmental abilities parents and teachers identify as readiness indicators are derivatives from the four developmental domains known as cognitive, physical, social, and emotional (Pianta, et al., 2007). Abilities parents and early childhood teachers consider to be part of the cognitive domain are pre-literacy and pre-mathematics functions. In terms of the physical domain, parents and teachers often look at the overall health and well-being of a student, and how the birth to age five timeline has developed (Pianta, et al., 2007). The social and emotional domains are often times listed as a hyphenated term, meaning experts in the early childhood field acknowledge that the two domains are closely related and somewhat inseparable. When discussing readiness in terms of social-emotional domains, teachers seek to know if students have self-help skills, if they
are able to get along well with others, and if students have a sense of belonging and positive self-image (Ede, 2004). Considering these abilities and characteristics of students, practices by parents and teachers, and viewpoints of parents and early childhood experts produce a gamut of acceptable beliefs about school readiness.

*Readiness* may be defined as a quality that renders the child able to participate successfully in a regular public school curriculum (Ede, 2004). Ability to participate successfully is dependent on many factors such as: (a) individual child, (b) teacher, (c) home life, and (d) classroom environment. Often times teachers and parents note disconnects in what they deem as readiness skills (Pianta, et al., 2007).

**Public Schools and Readiness**

The concept of school readiness has evolved during the past few decades from its introduction in the NEGP to recent efforts to define it (Pianta, et al., 2007). The NEGP set the general parameters of school readiness and included physical wellbeing and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, communication and language usage, and cognition and general knowledge. These parameters were made more concrete and specific with the reauthorization of Head Start as the School Readiness Act of 2005 (S1107; H.R. 2123), which specified the primary expectations for Head Start children on entering kindergarten: language knowledge and skills, including oral language and listening comprehension; prereading knowledge and skills, including phonological awareness, print awareness, print skills, and alphabetic knowledge; pre-mathematics knowledge and skills, including aspects of classification, seriation, number, spatial relations and time; cognitive abilities related to academic achievement; social and emotional development related to early learning, school success, and sustained academic
gains; and, in the case of limited-English-proficient children, progress toward acquisition of the English language while making meaningful progress toward the knowledge, skills, and abilities expected for English-speaking children (Pianta, et al., 2007). These parameters, set forth by the School Readiness Act of 2005, are ones that teachers and early childhood professionals use when screening students for school readiness.

Early childhood educators, primarily kindergarten teachers, within public school settings have long held the practice of the kindergarten round-up, the process of locating and screening incoming kindergarten students. During these round-up activities, students’ abilities in the four developmental domains are assessed using an array of developmental screenings. These screenings, developed to assess the whole child, include: (a) the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn, 1965/2007), (b) the Brigance (Brigance, 1997/2005), (c) the Gesell School Readiness Test (Ilg & Ames, 1972), (d) the Kindergarten Diagnostic Instrument (Robinson & Miller, 1990), (e) the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (Mardell-Czudnowski & Goldenberg, 1983/1998), and (f) the Lollipop (Chew, 1989), and (k) other developmental areas that range from pre-literacy to motor control, and from social interaction to self-concept (Pianta, et al., 2007).

Teachers use these screenings and observation techniques to gauge a child’s readiness. Early childhood educators, when asked to identify important skills for children to have as they enter kindergarten, tend to focus on social and emotional aspects of school readiness indicators (Pianta, et al., 2007). Many teachers believe that if students have a positive self-image, self-concept, and are able to self-regulate their behaviors and feelings, learning then becomes second-nature and can be scaffolded according to each individual student’s zone of proximal development (ZPD), the term defined by Vygotsky that refers to
the range of tasks that a child cannot yet accomplish without assistance from parents and others with greater knowledge (Seifert & Hoffnung, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

Teaching to a child's ZPD is a strategy that effective teachers utilize to scaffold student learning. When students enter kindergarten, however, they come with a varying list of developmental skills and abilities. Early childhood educators often note the discrepancy between students from mid- to high-income families and their counterparts, children from low-income families, upon entering school. Research has documented the range in abilities and skills from low- to high-income students, and identify that students from at-risk, disadvantaged households sometimes lack pre-literacy, pre-mathematics, and social skills indicative of school readiness as outlined by the NEGP and the School Readiness Act of 2005 (Seifert & Hoffnung, 2000; Pianta, et al., 2007). Disadvantaged students, those who lack readiness skills, may or may not have had access to Head Start services preceding their kindergarten year, creating an achievement gap already in the first formal year of education.

As a means of closing the achievement gap, created by socioeconomic factors, individual states have begun the process of establishing early learning standards, much like the goals and skills set forth by the NEGP and the School Readiness Act of 2005. In 2002, the National Association for the Education of Young Children joined with the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education to provide recommendations for developing early learning standards (Kendall, 2003). Kendall (2003) noted that early learning standards should contain both content and performance standards, however one independent from the other. Content standards specify what students should know and be able to do, while performance standards specify how good is good enough. Just three years later in 2005, 43 states already developed early learning standards, up from 16
development are strongly interconnected, with positive outcomes in one area relying on
development in other domains. Therefore, early learning standards must address a wide range
of domains – including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and language development,
motivation and approaches to learning, as well as the arts, literacy, mathematics, science, and
social studies. By developing early learning standards using these aforementioned
parameters, districts may begin to see successful readiness skills exhibited in all of their
youngest learners, and in turn decrease the achievement gap.

Another way states have attempted to close the achievement gap is to secure state aid
to districts through universal preschool funding, making access to preschool available for all
four year olds. In order to ensure best practices are implemented in programs such as these,
states and individual districts develop early childhood learning standards, similar to K-12
standards and benchmarks, yet developed to fit the needs of preschool programs (Kendall,
2003). The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted a study
systematically identifying and describing standards and benchmarks within 14 content areas
including mathematics, science, literacy, social studies, social/emotional health, physical
education and health, and thinking and reasoning (Marzano & Kendall, 1995). McREL’s
conclusion within this study was that states needed to thoughtfully develop standards for
prekindergartners, and therefore clarify the content and skills that were developmentally
appropriate for kindergarten and first grade students, integrate social and emotional learning
skills, and make adjustments for students’ developmental differences (Kendall, 2003).

Much can be said about states’ decision-making processes in regard to early
childhood learning standards. As part of compliance to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
regulations (PL 107-110) (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), states have adopted learning standards to guide the content taught throughout public schools nationwide (Logue, 2007). Further, in developing early learning standards, coupled with K-12 learning standards, districts are reducing the risk of discontinuity between programs offered. Logue (2007) stated that often times K-12 learning standards envelop that which is academic, and therefore cannot be applied to the youngest of learners within the district. The district, therefore, needs to develop early learning standards that speak to the nature of preschool including the social and emotional contexts as well as of academia (Logue, 2007). Early learning standards can help schools expand standard teaching practices and ensure that every child has the social and academic background to be successful in kindergarten (Logue, 2007).

Additionally, an effort directed toward school readiness listed among districts today for students who opt out of kindergarten or for those who need an extra year of practice, is a junior first grade. This additional year is where students who are not yet ready to move on to first grade receive an additional year to stimulate further learning and to support their development of positive self-esteem, which is indicative of successful first grade students (Harris, 2003). Harris claimed that the step between kindergarten and first grade is a giant one, and for those who are not developmentally ready, it can lead to frustration and failure. Teachers interviewed by Harris listed the following specific readiness measures to determine readiness, both from preschool to kindergarten as well as from kindergarten to first grade:

(a) using handwriting samples for assessment, (b) testing letter/sound recognition, (c) using checklists for mastery of skills in reading and math, (d) evaluating journal writing, (e) observing the student and peer group, (f) judging the student's ability to work in groups versus independently, (g) evaluating how well students listen to and
follow directions, (h) assessing work habits and organizational skills, (i) using one-on-one testing, and (j) using standardized testing (p. 625).

Although not all inclusive, and not pertaining completely to one grade level’s transition more than another, the findings of this study provided a list of measurements that students need to have acquired by the time transition time is near. Lacking in any one of these areas, in addition to a lack in maturity, most commonly explained a teacher’s reasons for suggesting an additional year, whether it be in pre-kindergarten classrooms or in junior first grades. According to Harris

Educators need to remember that each child has his or her own timeline for learning, and that even though schools use chronological age to determine a child’s legal readiness for school, age is not always a reliable indicator of readiness for learning. (p. 627)

Measuring readiness of students entering kindergarten is a multifaceted task. In a research study conducted in 1991 by the National School Readiness Task Force, the following four tenets of readiness were identified as: (a) readiness did not just involve knowledge of the academic content but also involved social and emotional readiness and physical health; (b) readiness was not within the child but also was a function of the support of the environment, including families; (c) readiness was also a function of the quality of instruction, class size, culturally appropriate practices, and access to technology; and (d) readiness was also the responsibility of the larger society (Vernon-Feagans & Blair, 2006). Vernon-Feagans and Blair stressed that students need not be ready for schools; rather schools need be ready for students. Therefore, schools need to implement appropriate transition
methods in order to ensure positive experiences are practiced to achieve success for all children and families they serve in the sphere of formal education settings.

Researchers (Pianta, et al., 2007; Protheroe, 2006) noted how transition practices need to include not only students, parents, and early childhood teachers, but the communities in which they live as well. Protheroe (2006) stated that schools today needed to carry out two distinctive practices in order to transition students from preschool settings to formal educational placements with little or no interruption in learning. The first of the two practices included developing a community-wide understanding of the skills and knowledge important to children as they enter kindergarten. The second of the two practices included providing information and education to other childcare providers – including families and private pre-kindergartens – so that they were better able to help children develop these skills and knowledge. This two-pronged, didactic, approach to transition students to school successfully was embraced by many districts as a beneficial, effective method of transition. Protheroe and Nelson (2004) agreed that teachers and parents had differing views of school readiness, and therefore these different perspectives contributed to the misunderstanding of what schools deem ready. Protheroe suggested that, as a result of this misunderstanding between stakeholders, districts had the responsibility to decide what is critical for school entry, and to disseminate district-wide expectations in terms of school readiness to the various stakeholders, parents and teachers. To address this responsibility, Protheroe suggested that districts initiate meetings with various stakeholders such as preschool teachers, preschool directors, as well as district personnel to develop a list of skills that are indicative of school success, along with preschool experiences that could support these skills. The areas of skills
would need to include social-emotional, communication, self-help, fine and gross motor, and language-readiness skills.

Assessing a child’s skills prior to kindergarten entry has become more commonplace in several preschool programs. Informal assessment has long been a part of preschool experiences. A new wave of accountability, however, has changed the mindset of preschool programs across the nation, as individual states offer universal funding for preschool programs. Preschool programs now assess student learning in a variety of methods as part of their accountability requirements for state aid or accreditation from state and national associations.

Parents and Readiness

Participation in a preschool setting or early care initiative such as Head Start is one aspect of school readiness. Parents often times enroll their children in these settings to prepare them for formal education settings. Enrollment of students in preschool and Head Start offers developmentally appropriate practices that extend from the four domains of development.

Parents have differing views of school readiness than do teachers and early childhood professionals (Pianta, et al., 2007; Protheroe, 2006; Nelson, 2004). Parents tend to focus on preacademic skills, such as knowing letters and numbers. While teachers don’t disagree with the notion of the importance of pre-literacy and premathematic skills, many place greater emphasis on development within the social and emotional domains than in the cognitive domain (Pianta, et al., 2007). According to Pianta, Cox, and Snow (2007) those parents who focus much attention on the cognitive domain are most prevalent in low-income households with less education; they feel pressure to raise their child’s abilities compared to their own.
Authors Barnett and Hustedt (2003) suggested preschool was the most important grade of the school experience. In a study conducted by the same authors, they concluded that attending preschool produced persistent gains on achievement test scores, along with fewer occurrences of grade retention, and placement in special education programs. Parents of preschool-age children note the same benefits (Duncan, et al. 2007). Parents of preschool-age children also address the issue of low-performing students in kindergarten and the likelihood of retention practices. When asked why parents focus on academic skills more so than social-emotional skills in preparation for kindergarten, more parents report the fear of ill-preparing their children for the rigors of the new kindergarten curriculum, leading to retention in the first formal year of education (Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes, & Karoly, 2007). Therefore parents, along with early childhood educators, see the need to address school readiness skills and transition models for kindergarten entry.

Traditionally, kindergarten was viewed as a time to learn social skills, and included environments where children were able to interact with one another in a play setting in order to develop such social-emotional skills. As Logue (2007) suggested, however, the push-down effect of standardized testing implemented by No Child Left Behind has led teachers of children ages kindergarten through second grade to implement more rigid curricula in which outcomes are tested, versus that of overall growth within the four developmental domains. This type of teaching is not appropriate for the youngest of learners. Logue stated that reciprocal relationships exist between social and academic mastery. An assumption held by various early childhood professionals is that “children do better when they have the social skills and behavior that enable them to develop meaningful relationships with adults and peers” (Logue, 2007 p. 38). Logue mentioned that schools often times, as a result of NCLB,
retain students at younger ages due to the fact that they have not performed to the level in which they need in order to be promoted to the next higher level. Logue urged schools, however, to work with partners in education from local area education agencies to reduce the likelihood of retention, and to work toward supporting students with interventions, such as social learning rather than that of just academics, as well as to work with families to develop readiness practices.

Graue's (2006) concepts of developing readiness practices recognized that families contributed to the overall transition by providing the essential context for readiness. Graue identified four specific readiness practices that supported positive transition practices; they included: (a) creating opportunities for sharing in a non-threatening, pressure-free environment; (b) structuring play activities by providing materials and social situations that encourage play; (c) encouraging conversation so that children learn about language and self-expression as they engage in verbal exchanges with others, and (d) reading aloud to children regularly, as well as letting children see adults and siblings reading. This mindset provided by Graue, supported Protheroe's (2006) beliefs that skills needed to be in place prior to kindergarten entry; skills that can be assessed on a multifaceted scale.

Family involvement is critical to a smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten. In addition, another area of concern for parents is school enrollment, in terms of students' age, maturity, and gender. Individual states' cutoff dates for school entry typically determine most children's entry into school. Questions regarding age versus development as the best guide for children's school entry exist. The Institute of Education Sciences (2006) conducted a study to examine effects of age versus development involving students who entered kindergarten at the state's specified age versus those who both started according to
chronological age and then repeated kindergarten again, or those who were held at home an additional year before beginning their formal education. The Institute showed that 88% of kindergarten students began formal schooling when they were old enough according to individual state standards. This study also showed results in regard to retention of students and the toll it takes on their development in years to come. While the initial focus of retention is to hold students another year in order for them to develop to a higher degree, studies showed detrimental effects of doing so, including displayed antisocial skills, reduced differentiation in Year 2, creating similar learning environment in Year 1 and thus the same learning acquisition, and long term effects of increased high school dropout rates (IES, 2006). Internationally this question is also under study. According to Dr. Unutkan’s research (2003) of Istanbul, Turkey, children at age five differ greatly from those children ages five and a half and six in regard to developmental readiness. She suggested that students who are five have significantly lower capabilities in scientific thinking and mathematical reasoning than do those students just six to twelve months older. Unutkan found that there was no difference in school performance in regard to the gender of preschool students. In addition, Unutkan noted a significant difference in those students who were on different socioeconomic status levels, as well as those who were in preschool settings versus those who stayed at home without any formal education. Differences found in socioeconomic subgroups of kindergartners who attended preschool, who were from higher socioeconomic families, and who entered kindergarten at age six included higher levels of scientific reasoning and mathematical reasoning in the areas of: (a) induction, (b) deduction, and (c) problem solving (Unutkan, 2003).
Although Dr. Unutkan found no significant difference in regard to academic performance to gender of preschool students, other researchers noted overwhelming discrepancies between boys and girls and their relationships in kindergarten settings. Smith and Niemi (2007) found evidence that boys received biased teachings from early childhood educators due to preconceived notions that boys typically struggle more so than do girls. Smith and Niemi noted that neither teachers nor students live in a sociocultural vacuum, and therefore teachers have preconceived notions of students' size in relation to his or her academic capabilities. Teachers often times see small size as an indicator of immaturity, and subconsciously attach the label of inadequate to the student as early as the first few weeks of kindergarten. Doing so, teachers also communicate the idea of the self-fulfilling prophecy to that student, and the feeling of inadequacy might inevitably remain with that child throughout his or her educational career (Smith & Niemi, 2007). Smith and Niemi also found in a longitudinal study of 400 American 5-year-old children, that boys were four times more likely to be identified as having reading problems than girls, based on the notion that teachers pay closer attention to boys' behavior more so than they do to girls' behavior. Smith and Niemi noted that although boys and girls, at age five, typically exhibit similar behaviors in group settings, it was the male gender that received slighted perceptions rather than the female gender.

In addition to the debate over gender and teacher perceptions about entry age of kindergarten students, the debate over nature-nurture, the psychological theory that a person's development is influenced by either nature, inborn characteristics, or by nurture, experiences in life, is played out in early childhood classrooms today (Seifert & Hoffnung, 2000). This theory takes into account both sides of the debate of school entry as either
chronological age or individual development. Educators have discussed for years the idea of nature versus nurture of children and its direct relation to academic success. Morrison, Griffith, and Alberts (1997) continued the debate over nature versus nurture with his study of entrance age, school readiness, and learning in children. The researchers noted that although entry into school was determined by chronological age; it was not the only factor that should be considered in promoting students to higher grade levels. Rather, Morrison et al. suggested that even though students entering school at a younger age may exhibit immature behavior in kindergarten, they should not be retained for that reason alone. They stated that students discrepant in areas significant to those of their peers upon completing kindergarten, and in moving on to first grade, showed growth throughout first grade and narrowed the achievement gap of that of their peers to a difference of six percentile ranking points. In turn, this caused teachers to evaluate their methods and reasoning for retaining students (Morrison et al., 1997). Further investigation by these authors into social promotion revealed that differences in entry age of students were not as significant as socioeconomic and racial factors. These two factors were thirteen times more likely to contribute to retention as chronological age. These findings reinforced the view that achievement differences between younger and older children are small in absolute magnitude and in educational relevance compared with other factors. Morrison et al. went on to state that overall, without gathering systematic information on younger versus older entrants, one cannot be certain to what degree and in what direction potential group differences in background characteristics might be produced nor can their subsequent impact on academic achievement be predicted beforehand.
The third item Morrison et al. discussed was the correlation between age and academic achievement. They noted that we cannot dismiss the premise that younger students are learning; they suggested that young children should not be retained due to lack of skills, but rather should be praised for growth and potential, in all academic areas, no matter how slight the growth.

**Literacy Practices and Readiness**

Irvine (2003) studied families who volunteered to participate in a family reading project the summer prior the kindergarten year. The project designers asked families with no regulated child care to participate in shared-reading events throughout the summer preceding school entry. Participants were administered pretests and posttests. Data indicated that by participating in the summer reading program, as a family, age equivalent scores of students who participated increased anywhere from eight months to fifteen months above grade level when compared to those students of average age equivalency who did not participate in the summer reading project (Irvine, 2003). Therefore, the authors concluded that reading with students prior to kindergarten increased a child's ability to read, as well as provided a list of other pre-reading strategies and skills acquisition such as concepts about print, phonics, phonemic awareness, and alliteration. The Vermont Department of Education (2003) listed strategic concepts and effective interventions for supporting transitions to help aid in the preparation of school readiness. The Department discussed the importance of family involvement in every step of the transition process; Irvine's study validated these suppositions.

Reading with children is proven to be one of the single-best methods of preparing a child for school. Irvine (2003) stated that experiencing read-alouds at an early age increased
a child’s awareness of print, text, and letter/sound correlation, not to mention concepts of print such as how to hold a book and when to turn pages. Jackson and Roller (1993) supported Irvine’s findings that reading to children at an early age sets the stage for continued success later in school. Jackson and Roller found that students related to story reading differently according to their ages and stages. Researchers once thought of the preschool years as the time where young children began to learn about reading. As Jackson and Roller found, however, the preschool years have now become the time where young children begin their first experiences in literacy, which inevitably lead to richer preschool experiences, as well as heightened awareness of reading in kindergarten. In their study, Jackson and Roller identified the following seven key conclusions about reading with young children and its correlation to school readiness and success. Children acquire important literacy knowledge and behaviors such as understanding that print has meaning, writing takes particular forms, and how words can be divided into sequences of sounds. In addition, effective story reading is interactive and responsive to the child, and in early writing as in early reading, preschool children initially use unconventional forms that gradually develop into the conventional forms as used by adult readers and writers. A child’s early reading and writing skills may develop in somewhat parallel sequences, but evidence supports the theory that development may be more rapid in one area than in the other. Irvine’s, Jackson’s, and Roller’s, findings allow parents and teachers to contemplate the definitive nature of reading with a child at a young age, as well as its connectedness to furthered success in school.

In 1998 the International Reading Panel, in conjunction with the National Association for the Education of Young Children, joined together to place a renewed emphasis on the need for preschool literacy (Lee & Ginsburg, 2007). The Panel and Association believe that
preschool literacy builds solid cognitive and affective foundations for children's later learning and school success. Lee and Ginsburg stated that inadequate attention to literacy in the preschool years may cause serious problems for children, especially those children from impoverished homes. With preschool literacy as the focus of early childhood educators' formal teacher preparation as well as continued professional development courses, researchers Lee and Ginsburg wished to gain insight into current preschool teachers' beliefs concerning the teaching and learning of literacy. They created a series of vignettes for early childhood educators to study and respond to, based on individual beliefs of early childhood literacy practices. The ten written vignettes focused on the following topics: (a) the purpose of preschool education; (b) preschoolers' readiness for academics; (c) emergent and planned curriculum; (d) integrated and separate subject matter curriculum; (e) promotion of knowledge and skills and dispositions and feelings; (f) teacher-directed, formal and child-initiated, informal activities; (g) children's individual differences in interest; (h) children's individual differences in competence; (i) use of concrete materials and computers; and (j) parents and the home environment. Lee and Ginsburg found that the perspectives of early childhood educators were polar opposites. They found that teachers with no formal early childhood certification were academic-oriented in their beliefs, and those teachers who were certified in early childhood were child-oriented in their beliefs. Lee and Ginsburg found that the participating preschool teachers expressed somewhat different pedagogical beliefs concerning literacy in the early childhood classroom, further confirming the need for proper teacher preparation in the field of early childhood educators.

Lonigan's (2006) research of pre-literacy skills of children ages three to five helped educators and parents understand the tie between literacy development and age of students.
Lonigan (2006) conducted research on emergent literacy skills evident in children ages three to five and their relationship to furthered success in school. Lonigan proposed that emergent and conventional literacy consisted of two interdependent sets of skills and processes, outside-in and inside-out. Outside-in skills represented children’s understanding of the context in which the target text occurs. Inside-out skills represented children’s knowledge of the rules for translating the particular writing they read into meaningful sounds. This interdependence is directly related to age and maturation of each individual child (Lonigan, 2006). Lonigan suggested that inside-out skills are linked with reading, and outside-in skills are linked with comprehension; both skills must be present in school-aged children in order for learning to take place. Lonigan noted that students who enter school at a younger age may not have the developmental abilities and skills to succeed in kindergarten and subsequent years of formal education, further supporting Morrison’s (1997) beliefs about early entry age, as well as parents’ hesitancy in enrolling students in public school educational settings at age five.
Summary

School entry is a milestone in a child’s life. Multiple factors contribute to the success children experience as they enter school such as knowledge of pre-literacy, pre-mathematics, and social-emotional skills. These skills vary in terms of socioeconomic status, preschool attendance, and family involvement. Although schools and families differ in views of school readiness, researchers noted a strong connection between emerging literacy skills and school preparedness (Irvine, 2003; Jackson & Roller, 1993). Students who come to school with emerging literacy skills are advantaged.

Advantaged students aren’t necessarily those students who come from mid- to high-socioeconomic backgrounds. Rather, advantaged means students who had access to early childhood care and preschool programs. As a measure to secure these positive early childhood experiences, states have begun to offer universal preschool for all students who are age four by the state’s cutoff date. In maintaining best practice in these new preschool initiatives, some states have implemented early learning standards and assessment practices for program and teacher accountability. In so doing, preschool-aged children received developmentally appropriate practices that led to school preparedness.

Conclusion

In summary, teachers and parents view school readiness from different perspectives. What it means to be school ready is complex, as it encompasses the four developmental domains of development. Teachers view readiness in terms of social-emotional competence, while parents view readiness in terms of cognitive function. In acknowledging that this divide exists among parents and teachers, stakeholders have begun the process of redesigning school readiness practices. An attempt at universal school readiness organized by some
The purpose of this review of the literature was to identify how schools and parents view school readiness, as well as to discuss how emergent literacy plays a role in preparing students for public school education. The practices identified could serve as a guide to parents and educators as they prepare students for success in the public school. This review of the literature could aid districts in developing early learning standards which define curriculum and instructional practices in early childhood classrooms. To accomplish this purpose, this paper addressed the following questions:

1. How do public schools determine when a child is ready to enter kindergarten?
2. How do parents decide when their child is ready to enter kindergarten?
3. What role does emergent literacy play as a primary indicator of children’s readiness for kindergarten?

In reviewing this literature, one can deem the necessity of school preparedness as a high priority for all. The various stakeholders, students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members, benefit from sound practices related to school readiness. Many researchers have studied the diverse practices, approaches, and methods associated with school readiness and have listed criterion that best support a child’s development in terms of
being ready. Researchers and child advocates believe that judging a child’s readiness requires a multifaceted screening, one that includes the four domains of cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. Readiness involves many different components, and one way to insure all students receive the basic foundation of learning, which then prepares them for public school, is by implementing statewide or nationwide early learning standards.

In recent years, an increase in accountability related to school readiness has been evident in many statehouses nationwide. Individual states have begun the process of creating early childhood learning standards that either work as a standalone document, or align closely with individual districts’ scope and sequence of learning in grades K-12. Acknowledging the need for early learning standards by departments of education across the nation has been a milestone in the early childhood arena. Early learning standards will guide best practices in preschool and early care settings, which in turn will lead to a stronger core of knowledge and social-emotional preparedness among all learners. All learners, regardless of socioeconomic bracket, need quality early childhood practices. Implementing early learning standards will raise the bar on what quality means and what the outcomes will be.

The outcome of quality early childhood practices is a child who is confident, language-rich, varied in experiences, and one who is socially and emotionally nourished. Identifying these common characteristics among students who are ready for school is something on which all practitioners and parents should agree. These characteristics should be considered first before looking at entry age. Many states have a cutoff date for school entry, but it is simply that – a cutoff date. Across the nation, individual states have varying dates of entry for kindergarten-age students, creating a national discontinuity in terms of what age is appropriate for school entry. Researchers noted that a five year old is
significantly different in scientific reasoning more so than a five-and-a-half year old, and even greater significance from a six year old. Therefore, it is imperative that states have a common cutoff date for school entry. Setting a national cutoff date for school entry will create an atmosphere of learning that applies to all students within the classroom. Currently, an early childhood classroom, such as kindergarten, can have, at times, four, five, and six year olds; seven year olds are rare, but in cases of retention, they are present. As a result, a kindergarten classroom can have up to four different ages and stages within one setting. In light of Dr. Unutkan’s findings (2003) that students even six months separated in age differ greatly, one may assume that a classroom of varied ages and stages would be immeasurably dissimilar to one that, based on commonality of entry age, may have a more homogenous group with similar developmental levels and preparedness of students.

Entry age alone cannot guarantee success of all students. Early experiences are a key indicator of student success. Children with families who read together have a higher percentage of success upon entry into public school. Engagement in literacy practices among family members increased students’ awareness of print, and ultimately fostered the beginning stages of the reading process. As researchers noted, preschool was once thought to be the time where students learned about reading. Currently, however, students in preschool are beginning to identify letters, match letters with sounds, and some may begin to read sight words, and rhyme quite easily. This progression has led parents and teachers to acknowledge that early experiences in literacy-rich environments promote growth and learning that is the foundation for years to come.

Literacy-rich environments build solid cognitive and affective foundations for learning and school success. Identifying this as a prerequisite to later learning, educators and
center directors can then begin to implement literacy activities in the preschool classroom that will lead to an advanced understanding of how language works. Teachers and parents need to provide students opportunities to interact with language. Students need to manipulate sounds, use associative vocabulary, and interact with language across the curricular areas and preschool centers such as the block area, housekeeping, and paint areas. Allowing students the opportunity to talk about their works of art increases students' confidence and language experience, and fosters growth throughout the four developmental domains. Although literacy-rich experiences do not fill all of the four developmental domains, the feeling students have when interacting with and manipulating language is indicative of best practice in teaching because it encompasses the whole child and helps to develop the remaining three domains of development.

Limitations

A limitation of this review was access to primary sources. At times, some sources were not available for review, and therefore limited an extensive review of some tenets related to school readiness and emergent literacy practices. In addition, when some sources were found, access to them was denied, again limiting an extensive review of some aspects related to school readiness and emergent literacy practices. Yet another limitation experienced throughout this review of the literature was the lack of journals in which to do hand searches and in-depth reviews.

Recommendations

This review of the literature, an investigation of successful early childhood practices in preparing a student for kindergarten, leads to the conclusion that early childhood professionals, parents, and communities need to (a) continue to support states’ efforts in
designing and implementing early childhood learning standards, (b) increase family
involvement in preschool and kindergarten programs, and (c) develop and disseminate
goals/skills necessary for kindergarten entry/promotion. Continued action in the areas of
learning standards, family involvement, and entry age will lead to quality experiences for the
nation's youngest learners. Strong emphasis should be paid to quality, not quantity in terms
of early childhood education and its practices.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children encourages all
stakeholders to champion developmentally appropriate practices within child care and
preschool settings nationwide. At NAEYC's website (www.naeyc.org), various stakeholders
can access pages related to their specific field, administrators, teachers, parents, advocates.
NAEYC teams with state chapters to implement developmentally appropriate practices to
ensure all children receive quality early childhood experiences. Stakeholders in early
childhood experiences see the need to continue advocacy efforts; one such way is to advocate
for early learning standards.

Early childhood advocates acknowledge the role family plays in child development.
Family involvement is an area that needs strengthened in the early childhood field. When
children see family members take interest in their lives, growth is fostered in all
developmental areas. Continuing to advocate for higher standards of family involvement,
much like Head Start programs where home visits are implemented, will perpetuate the ideals
that family-centered learning is the beginning of a strong education for all children.

Education for all children is guaranteed in the United States. What isn't guaranteed,
however, is that all students come to school prepared to learn or at the developmental age
ready to learn. Entry age of students in kindergarten varies from state to state. What is
needed, consequently, is a national entry date for kindergarten, rather than allowing individual states to set cutoff dates for school entry. Allowing individual state departments of education to set dates for school entry age, as has been customary for decades, creates national norms that are not indicative of school ready children. Rather, it creates the notion that kindergarten is for school children ages four, five, six, and seven in some cases. This type of mixed-age classroom houses multiple ages and stages that are not developmentally appropriate. Therefore, it is imperative that early childhood advocates work with legislators to set national school entry dates.

Along with national school entry dates, advocates need to work to develop and disseminate skills and knowledge appropriate for entry and promotion in to and out of public school kindergarten programs. Currently, no list of skills or knowledge dictate readiness, which has led to a situation in which readiness is considered to be whatever various stakeholders believe it to be. What the field of early childhood needs, is a succinct list of skills and knowledge which match those of successful preschool, kindergarten, and first grade students. A list of this magnitude would clearly identify where students fall on the developmental spectrum, allowing teachers to chart progress vertically and horizontally within the kindergarten year.

School readiness is multifarious. Teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, each have differing views on what it means to be school ready. This review of the literature sought to provide recent literature that explains the diverse views of being ready.
References


