

School Readiness in Child Care Settings:
A Developmental Assessment of Children in 22 Accredited Child Care Centers
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Executive Summary

School readiness has become an important issue in every community in our state. Parents and other close family members have the strongest influence on children's success. Communities also play important roles. And for most young children in Minnesota, early childhood care and education settings are a constant and influential factor in their lives. With decades of research that documents the linkages between high quality early childhood care and education and better developmental outcomes for children, many have asked about the role of high quality, community-based child care.

Most of our state's children regularly spend time in early childhood care and education settings, with 41 percent of 3-5 year-olds in center-based child care settings (Chase and Shelton, 2001). The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) piloted *School Readiness in Child Care Settings: A Developmental Assessment of Children in 22 Accredited Child Care Centers* to assess and better understand school readiness in these settings. The initiative focused on two specific questions:

- **How does readiness look for children attending these programs?** The school readiness of 226 children approaching kindergarten age in 22 accredited child care centers was assessed by specially trained teachers who had on-site supports.
- **Can child care program staff effectively use a tool to assess the school readiness of children approaching kindergarten entry?** Child care staff in accredited child care centers were trained in the use of a school readiness assessment tool to understand whether these programs could effectively use the same tool used in the previous Minnesota School Readiness Assessment studies. Of equal importance was investigating staff perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using the tool.

In addition, by using the same assessment tool, the Work Sampling System© (WSS) checklist, employed in previous statewide studies of the school readiness of children entering kindergarten, this study generates intriguing, timely and relevant information related to the readiness results of the children in this study compared with a broader population of young children in Minnesota.

The WSS checklist used in this study includes 32 indicators representing what children should know and be able to do at the end of the year before they enter kindergarten across five developmental domains – personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, the arts and physical development and health. The 226 children in this study were observed by child care center teachers in May and June prior to the start of Kindergarten in the fall and given a rating for each indicator:

Not Yet – indicating that the child cannot perform the indicator.

In Process – the skills, knowledge, behaviors, or accomplishments are intermittent or emergent, but are not demonstrated reliably or consistently.

Proficient – the child can reliably demonstrate the skills, knowledge, behaviors, or accomplishments.

The study found:

- Almost twice as many children in the accredited child care center sample were rated as “Proficient” or school ready as compared to the statewide 2003 Minnesota School Readiness Study. Very few children in the accredited child care center sample were performing in the “Not Yet” range on any indicators within each domain.
- In general, research has found that children from higher income families typically perform better than children from lower income families. In this study of accredited centers, children from lower income families performed the same as their higher income counterparts. Children of color also performed at the same level as White/Caucasian children.
- Children from lower income families in these child care settings had much higher school readiness (proficiency) scores than lower income families in the statewide 2003 Minnesota School Readiness Study.
- In general, research has found that children with more educated parents typically perform better on achievement measures than children with less educated parents. In this study, children in the accredited child care center study did better than children in the statewide 2003 Minnesota School Readiness Study, regardless of the education level of their parents.

Based on the findings of this study, the department recommends that the following be considered:

1. Support child assessment in child care programs to support program improvement and build child care quality. Make training and technical assistance widely available on the use of Minnesota’s Early Childhood Indicators of Progress for what children should know and be able to do and on child assessment and other core competencies for practitioners.
2. Pilot child assessments in other types of child care settings to explore the feasibility of expanded use of WSS and other methods to other types of child care settings.
3. Strengthen the design of future child assessment initiatives in child care settings by randomly sampling child care settings, collecting data on program quality, and strengthening and enriching knowledge of the linkages between quality programming and child readiness outcomes.