

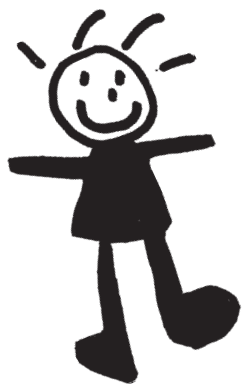


What is Kindergarten Readiness?

Myth vs Reality

• Montgomery Child Care Association •

• The Heart in Child Care Since 1968 •



“We must begin to think of readiness as much more than knowledge of a few skills that are seen in the first few weeks of kindergarten or behavior patterns that are consistent with those of compliant children who have prodigiously long attention spans...”

*--Samuel Meisels,
the foremost authority on
early childhood
assessment*

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MCCA#8447



It's every parent's nightmare: Your elementary school says kids entering kindergarten should be able to:

- count numbers from 1 to 20
- write their names, first and last
- recite --or even write--their addresses and phone numbers
- recognize all the letters of the alphabet
- draw a “left” shoe and a “right” shoe
- play with toys “without breaking them”

The list goes on, and your four-year-old isn't there yet. Who's at fault here? Is your child already a failure?

In our competitive, success-oriented community, reams of school-readiness standards are thrown around, and parents of young children wrestle with the gut-wrenching fear that their children are not “prepared” for school. When panic strikes, we suggest you examine the standard first.

When you see a standard and it doesn't seem right for your child, ask the following questions:

What is the source of the standard?

If the source is a school, was this standard previously an expectation for children at a higher grade level?

Is there good developmental research behind the standard?

How does the achievement of this standard correspond with positive outcomes in later school performance?

How does this standard take into account individual variation?

We expect young children to develop physical, cognitive, social and emotional skills at uneven rates and in different patterns, making a chronological checklist relatively useless.

Does the standard reflect an inappropriate social, economic or cultural bias?

Any readiness standard should take into account the wide diversity of--and potential inequity in--young children's life experiences.

Early childhood experts agree that “readiness” is a troublesome concept when we think of it as *any* specific set of skills a child should demonstrate on demand. Instead, we should be thinking of readiness as a broad picture of a child's abilities and behaviors that are observed over time in a variety of contexts. Any reference to readiness should take into account a child's growth over time as a *continuum* of progress.

MCCA Children's Centers



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In fact, the Maryland Model for School Readiness, www.mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/MMSR/, uses this kind of developmental definition of readiness in outlining a continuum of standards for children in a variety of domains. Bear in mind that the MMSR outcomes and indicators listed here are goals for children *at the end of kindergarten, in preparation for first grade.*

When thinking about school readiness, teachers and parents must resist the pressure to try and force specific skill development on any child. Research clearly and consistently shows that pushing a child in this manner inevitably backfires. A child may indeed develop the skills in the short term, but long term goals of motivation, curiosity, independence and initiative are sacrificed.

All of our existing brain research conclusively shows that learning for young children should be:

- **play-based,**
- **multi-sensory,**
- **engaging, and**
- ***chosen by the child***

in order for the information to “stick” successfully.

Teachers and parents can provide experiences that truly support children’s early learning by adopting these practices:

- Slowing down and recognizing everyday activities as the richest learning opportunities: taking time to talk with and listen to children while playing, eating, and transitioning through daily routines
- Observing and celebrating the daily growth and development of every child, every day
- Giving children daily opportunities to express themselves in many creative ways, including art, music and dance
- Reading to children every day and being a role model for a lifelong love of reading
- Looking for opportunities to point out and share concepts like shapes, colors, numbers and letters in real and meaningful ways as part of everyday life
- Supporting each child’s physical health and development by allowing many daily choices of active large motor play (running, jumping, climbing, dancing)
- Honoring and defending every child’s right to rich, creative, supported, open-ended play, enriched by loving adults.

Ultimately, if we are honestly committed to the goal of school readiness for every child, we must also be ready to advocate with all of our hearts for the factors that are *most* predictive of a child’s later school success:

- Parents who have adequate resources to be confident, responsive, knowledgeable advocates for their children’s learning,
- Economically stable home environments located in safe communities,
- Accessible and affordable health care for every child, and
- Quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs staffed by skilled professionals who are respected and compensated for their value.

These goals will not be easy or inexpensive to achieve, and they will be a true test of our commitment to “Leave No Child Behind.” But we believe we will never reach any longterm goal of “school readiness” without this kind of commitment.