

SYSTEMS ACCOUNTABILITY & POLICY DEVELOPMENT

"We provide the right information to the right people at the right time."

What is Ready to Learn?

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The focus of this brief is on the value of using the construct of "Ready to Learn" as an Oregon benchmark and as an agency key performance measure.

Oregon takes a high-level look at its young children every two years using the Kindergarten Readiness Survey¹. Kindergarten teachers use this survey to "assess" the children in their classrooms. Six Developmental Dimensions² are the indicators of school readiness. The demographic variables of interest are: gender, ethnicity, English as a second language and preschool history. Teachers use a variety of measures to collect information to rate their children's development.

Table 1³ shows the percent of children who met the six Developmental Dimensions as rated by teachers from 0 to 5 from one survey administration to another. Over half of the children for 2000 and 2002 met all six of the Developmental Dimensions.

Is Oregon making progress? Is there a difference between school readinesses from one

point in time to another? Is school readiness improving? At first glance it looks like progress - school readiness is improving over time. However, one limitation in the data stands out. There were two different groups of children, different in size and probably in group characteristics. Comparable groups of children are needed to make a claim about the percent increase in children meeting all Developmental Dimensions over time.

Regardless, "Ready to Learn" can and should be a state benchmark. The survey results can give a point-in-time picture of young children who are attending Kindergarten. Cautious commentary should be used when making statements about progress from one survey administration to another.

Can the same benchmark measure be used as an agency key performance measure? The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) has targeted school readiness for children in Head Start/Oregon Pre-Kindergarten as an agency benchmark ("Every child is ready for entrance into school").

Table 1
Kindergarten Children Meeting Developmental Dimensions

| | 2000 | | 2002 | |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Total Number of Children Rated on Survey | 18,427 | | 23,796 | |
| Meets Six Developmental Dimensions | % | N | % | N |
| | 66.5 | 12,262 | 76.1 | 18,136 |

As an agency key performance measure the Kindergarten Readiness Survey is more limited than it is for a state high-level benchmark. The connection between agency performance and ratings on Developmental Dimensions is weak. Although the ODE assumes a role in early childhood education through advocacy, policy, practice recommendations and program accountability, the agency does not have direct control over kindergarten teaching and learning. In this case, "Ready to Learn" is not a valuable measure for agency performance.

¹A description of the Kindergarten Readiness Survey and the survey administration method is in the *2002 Kindergarten Survey Report—Readiness to Learn*, Oregon Department of Education.

² Developmental Dimensions: Physical Well-Being, Language Use, Approach to Learning, Cognition and General Knowledge, Motor Development and Social/emotional Development.

³The data in Table 1 are from the *2002 Kindergarten Survey Report*. A wealth of analysis information is available in the report.