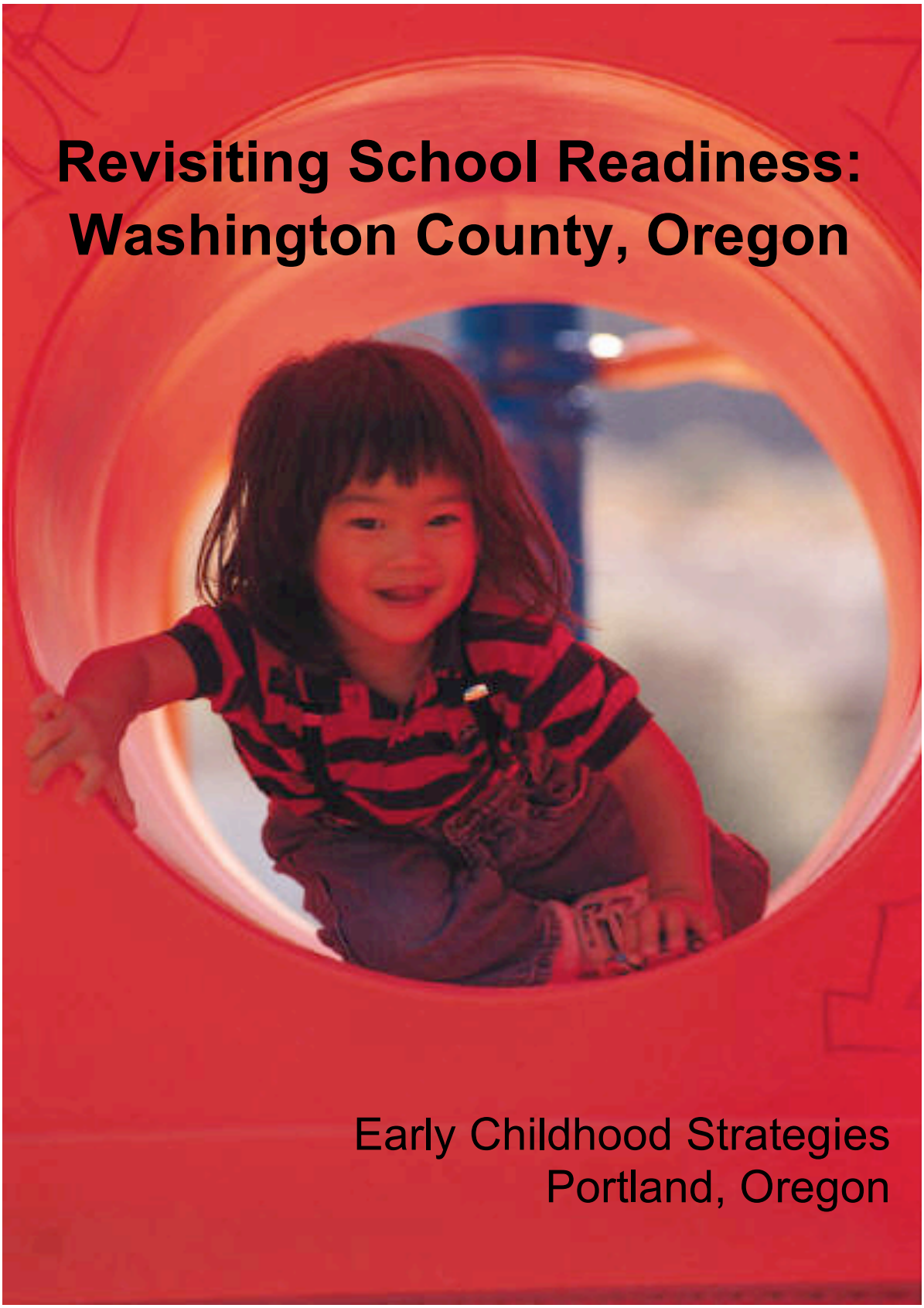
Revisiting School Readiness: Washington County, Oregon



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Executive Summary

Study Goal

Ensuring that children are at optimal developmental readiness to start kindergarten requires a systematic effort by families, schools, and the community. Washington County, Oregon has undertaken continued efforts to build and nurture school readiness over the past decade. This report is the second benchmark study to assess that system of supports. The data for this study was collected in the early fall of 2006 on 537 entering kindergarten children and their families in eight schools across the County. The same model and methods from the first study, which was done in 1997, were used.

Challenges to Past Efforts

The good news is that the system is stronger than it was in 1997. The improvements are particularly positive because in the past decade there have been many challenges to the readiness efforts. Among the challenges, the County population has changed including more young children; an increase in non-English speakers (especially Spanish); and, movement toward a bi-modal economic pattern of more poverty while the median income has increased. In addition to population changes, the state has seen an economic downturn meaning fewer funds for services, schools have become more academic, and there is less quality child care available to meet a growing need.

Highlights of the Results

Results for Child Factors

In 1997, child outcomes were high with the exception of literacy development, which was moderately low. The 2006 child outcomes echo this same pattern suggesting children are generally holding their own, but literacy development continues to be low with 43.7% of the children at levels typical for their age.

Results for Family Factors

In 1997, most of the family factor benchmarks were moderate to high except for a sizable number of families who lacked the resources to meet some of their basic needs. The 2006 data shows a similar pattern with basics needs. The needs fall into one of four clusters:

1) Medical (medical, dental, vision, mental health at 19-27% not met);
2) Social Services (drug and alcohol and domestic violence both at 21% not met);
3) Education (adult and parenting at 18-20% not met); and,
4) Employment (access to child care and job opportunities at 17-18% not met).

An additional family factor of note is that family's intent in being involved in their child's education dropped by 15.5% to 79.1% of the expected level. This is likely a result of the growing diversity in the County where some families may have differing viewpoints and expectations about parent involvement.

Results for School Factors

The greatest improvements in the system of supports happened at the school level with half of the factors improving dramatically. Developmentally appropriate programming increased by 65% to 71.1% of the classrooms passing the expected level. The schools have also improved their cultural and linguistic practices by 59.7% with 82.3% now passing the expected level.

Two factors decreased. One decrease was the internal school communication about transition, which dropped by 19.5%. However many of the individual indicators that contribute to on-the-ground transitions to school for families have improved, suggesting that not all parties appear to be talking the same way about school transition. This means the on-the-ground experience may be better than the factor score implies. The second factor drop measured how much and in what ways families and schools agree on parental involvement, which dropped by14.4% and parallels a similar family drop in intent for parental involvement in schools, and is suggestive of differing cultural understandings and expectations related to parent involvement.

Results for Community Factors

In 1997, there was a mix of low to moderate benchmark scores. The 2006 study shows there are system improvements with two of the three factors improving. Community services are more integrated and better linked with schools, but still are not ideal with 44.4% of the schools offering or linking all of the basic services families need. Parenting education is offered 47% more often at or through the schools for a passing rate of 77.8%. The community factor that has dropped is access to quality child care, which dropped by 6.3% to 57.2% of families who are happy with the access they have.

Recommendations

The Washington County Commission on Children and Families has a long tradition of working with a wide array of groups to channel supports to children and families. The data suggests that this work should continue. As policies are considered, the commission should continue to ask: "*Will this action and partnership improve the overall system"?* Not just, *"Is it something we can do to address one need"?* The following actions are recommended:

1. Continue to assist and support agencies and organizations that focus efforts on system improvements in areas of high need neighborhoods, especially low-income, non-English-speaking neighborhoods. In particular, work on delivery of:
    - Health care cluster services (physical, mental, vision, and dental)
    - Social service cluster services (drug and alcohol concerns and domestic violence)
    - Adult education services (parenting and adult skill development)
    - Employment services (job opportunities and child care)
2. Continue to support school and community communications about transition to school.
3. Continue and expand support for groups working on literacy training and support for parents and child care providers to promote literacy development, birth-to-five.
4. Continue to work with local and state groups to advocate for improved child care options and quality supports.

Introduction

Benchmark Goal: Ensure the Appropriate Cognitive, Physical, and Social and Emotional Readiness of Children Entering Kindergarten

History and Context of Kindergarten Readiness in 2007

National History

In the 1990's, US federal advisory groups and the Governors called upon communities to nurture and strengthen young children and families in order to better ensure that children would be at optimal developmental readiness to start formal schooling at kindergarten entrance. The widespread community and professional consensus of opinion about what constituted school readiness was to take a broad look at the cognitive, language, social, emotional, and physical well-being of typical five year olds (National Education Goals Panel, 1993; Goal 1 Technical Report, 1993).

Since that time multiple efforts have struggled with how to measure school readiness. The bulk of the work at the national level has used proxy measures with parental "impression" reports such as those on the National Household Survey (SR-NHES, 1993, 1990). Limited local efforts have followed some variation of the 1994 model suggested by Love, Aber, and Brooks-Gunn to use a battery of developmental screening tools and interviews. However, these local efforts are difficult to summarize because of the wide variation in the tools used and, very few are published. Yet, the topic readiness, continues to be ever-present at national early childhood professional meetings.

In 2005, the National School Readiness Initiative published *Getting Ready*, a renewed national effort to call attention to the broad nature of school readiness. Like its 1992 predecessor, the initiative looked at multiple factors: Ready Family + Ready Communities + Ready Schools = Children Ready for School. The 2005 initiative identified 10 keys to readiness:

1. Smooth the transition between home and school;
2. Strive for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools;
3. Help children learn and make sense of their complex and exciting world;
4. Commit to the success of every child;
5. Commit to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacts with children during the school day;
6. Introduce or expand approaches that have been shown to raise achievement;
7. Create learning organizations that alter practices and programs if they do not benefit children;
8. Serve children in communities;
9. Take responsibility for results; and,
10. Have strong leadership (*Getting Ready*, 2005).

Oregon's History with School Readiness

In 1994, an Oregon statewide study looked at two aspects of school readiness: physical well-being and language/literacy development in a sample of children from five regions of Oregon (Jewett, Arrasmith. and Manigo). In 1997, Washington County, Oregon conducted a study that looked at multiple details of 17 factors in a sample of over 400 children with a unique model based, in part, on the work of Love, et. al. (Severeide, 1998). (See page 11 of this report for a model description.)

From 1997 through 2006, Oregon's Department of Education has collected teacher survey reports on indicators of school readiness every other fall on all entering kindergarteners using teacher impressions of six areas of child readiness:

1. Physical well-being;
2. Language use;
3. Approaches to learning;
4. Cognition and general knowledge;
5. Motor development; and.
6. Social/emotional development (Oregon Department of Education (2007).

In 2005, Annie E. Casey funded an initiative across six states including Oregon. In Oregon, the initiative formed The Oregon Ready Schools Team, with representatives from 18 groups including school districts; advocacy groups; state and local commissions from a variety of social services, health, justice, and education groups; state and local educational departments; and philanthropic groups. The Oregon Ready Schools Team called for a renewal of school readiness effort in the state. The team embraced the ready child equation, published by the 2005 *Getting Ready* publication. Oregon's team focused their efforts on transition, continuity of care and education from the preschool years to kindergarten, as well as raising achievement for every child (Oregon Department of Education (2006).

In the spring of 2006, a Washington County school readiness summit gathered child care agencies, Head Start, libraries, other early childhood programs, and public schools to discuss transitions to kindergarten, and elementary school expectations for children. An array of strategies were discussed and planned including libraries linking families to school readiness information, Head Start outreach to schools, and using funds from the federal initiative, *Safe Schools,* to pay for community meetings between schools and community groups to promote communication and smoother transitions (Washington County Summit Proceedings and Committee Notes, 2006).

In March of 2007, the Oregon Department of Education spearheaded a statewide kindergarten summit to look at similar issues. The agenda included sessions on full day kindergarten, working with children learning English, transitions, instructional strategies, and working with families. School districts and community education and social agencies attended (Oregon Department of Education, 2007).

Summary of Washington County Readiness Efforts Between 1997 and 2006

During the past decade, more County elementary schools have moved toward full-day programming and academic expectations for the end of kindergarten have risen. In addition, more community groups and agencies, along with schools, have made a bigger push for transition activities, and child care providers have received more training. School and agency efforts are considerably greater than when the 1997-1998 school year study was done (Washington County Summit Proceedings and Committee Notes, 2006).

Although many groups have worked to improve conditions to support and nurture the development of young children, the nature of kindergartens has changed dramatically over the past ten years, ensuring that transition and readiness work is in constant flux. When asked why the changes in kindergartens are taking place, a mix of reasons are given varying widely with the audience being asked. The responses include:

- More pressure on schools to test well and show progress with state report cards and federal *No Child Left Behind* initiatives;
- Changes in populations with more ethnic and language minority children entering schools;
- A pattern of increased poverty among young children;
- More children without health insurance and/or mental health supports;
- Turnover in trained child care providers;
- More outreach by community groups to schools to work on transition issues; and,
- An increased awareness of the value of kindergarten in school success (Washington County Summit Proceedings and Committee Notes, 2006).

Purpose of This Study

Given both the nine-year lapse since the 1997-1998 school year study in Washington County and the changes that have taken place in kindergartens and the County populations, the Washington County Commission on Children and Families commissioned a second baseline study on school readiness. This report presents the findings. The goal of the study is to measure the current status of school readiness in the County and outline policy implications.

This study replicates the 1998 study. The ecological model used in the first study was retained, as was most of the methodology. A few minor differences were necessary due to changes in school structures and requirements, updates in standard instruments, or changes in technology.

A Review of the Model

Experts in the field of early care and education continue to believe that developmental readiness for school extends far beyond simple academic skills such as counting, identifying colors, or naming letters. All contributions to, and levels of children's early learning and development need to be assessed. In addition, national experts argue that early childhood development cannot be assessed "without reference to how children's behavior and development are supported and what children should be ready for" (Love, Aber, and Brooks-Gunn, 1994, p. 3). Indicators of family and community activities that support children's

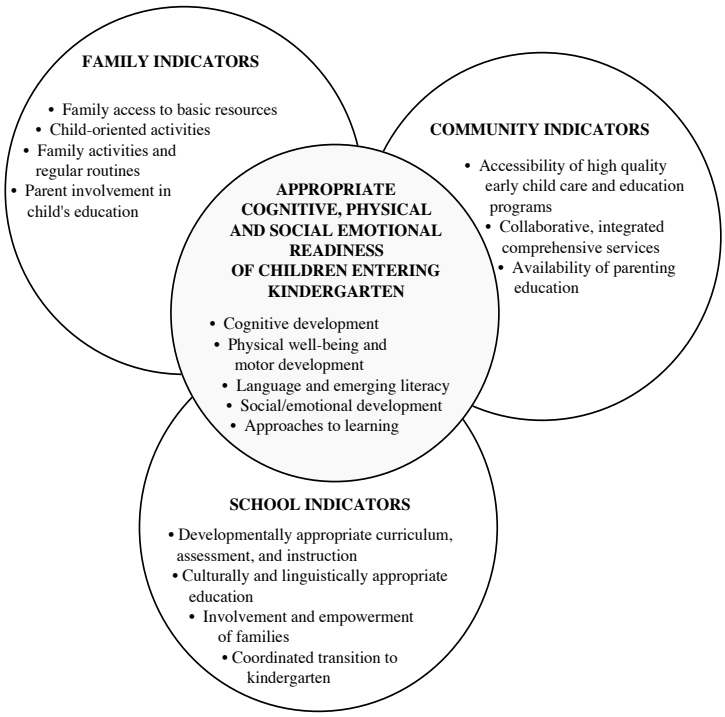
development and aspects of schools that insure early learning success must also be assessed. This view suggests that the human ecosystem is similar to natural ecology, with various forces at differing levels of the environment, interacting to affect and influence development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Garbarino, 1992). These core beliefs are echoed in the ready child equation of Ready Family + Ready Community + Ready Schools = Children Ready for School (*Getting Ready*, 2005).

An ecosystem model of school readiness requires direct measurement of children's early learning, development, and abilities. It also requires measurement of family, school, and community factors supportive of that development. As shown in Figure 1 below, the model uses overlapping spheres to illustrate the reciprocal relationships that exist between children's developmental readiness for school and various family, school, and community activities. Key readiness factors are identified for each sphere.

During the analysis phase of the original Washington County study, the independent nature of the factors was tested using a factor analysis. The analysis showed each readiness factor provided unique information suggesting it is a valid way to guide the setting of benchmarks used to direct social policy. This empirical evidence supports the professional consensus of the need for a broad measure of readiness (Severeide, 1998).

Ecosystem Model of School Readiness:
Factors Contributing to Children's School Success in the Early Years

Figure 1



Study Sample

Washington County Population Summary

Since the last study, the population in Washington County has changed considerably. Table 1 outlines population statistics pertaining to children and their families that are likely to impact the factors under study. Over the past several years, Washington County family income has gone up slightly, but persistent and growing poverty exists, suggesting that income levels are starting to show a bi-level pattern. The percentage of foreign-born people has increased, and more non-English speaking families reside in the County, in particular, Spanish-speaking families. Also germane to this study, over 2000 young children under the age of five have been added, in fact the under age five group has increased at a much faster rate than the adult population. At the same time the number of child care slots has decreased. On the positive side, infant mortality has improved slightly, and 3rd grade reading scores are significantly higher while confirmed cases of child abused have decreased.

Washington County Population Statistics *
Table 1

Statistic	2000 number	2000 %	2005 number	2005 %	Change in number or %
Total population	445,342	-	495,597	-	+9.9 %
Children under the age of 5 years	35,111	7.9%	37,115	7.5%	+25%
Hispanic or Latino of any race	49,735	11.2%	69,219	14%	+2.8%
White persons, not Hispanic	366,007	82.2%	395,158	79.7%	+2.5%
Language other than English spoken at home	76,346	18.6%	102,037	22.3%	+3.7%
Other ethnic/racial groups	29,600	6.6%	31220	6.3%	-0.3%
Foreign born (estimate)	63,438	14.2%	83,562	16.9%	+2.7%
High School Graduates among people over 25 years of age	253,848	88.9% Estimate	-	89% Estimate	No change in estimate **
College degree or higher among people over 25 years of age	98,549	34.5% Estimate	-	37.1% Estimate	+2.6%
Families below the poverty level (estimate)	5,637	4.9%	Not available	7.9% Estimate	+4%
Median household income in 1999 adjusted dollars	$52,122	-	$53,431	-	+$1,309
Child care supply among registered providers per 100 children under the age of 13 (2001) ***	22.2	-	18.6	-	-3.6
Infant mortality (2001) per 1000 live births *** (1997-2001)	4.9	-	4.3	-	-0.6
Third grade reading proficiency *** (1998-2002)	-	83%	-	85%	+2%
Confirmed child abuse rates for children under age 18 *** (1997-2001)	3.6	-	2.4	-	-1.2

* All taken from the 2000 or 2005 US Census unless noted
** Estimates within the Latino community are lower than population as a whole
*** Latest data available from The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids of Count database showing a 5-year spread in approximately same time frame, years vary slightly

Description of Participating Schools and Families

Given the changes in the demographics of the County, the school sample for the current study has changed accordingly. In this study, there are fewer rural schools, a higher number of children and families who speak Spanish as their first or only language, more parents are foreign-born, and more children qualify for free and reduced lunch. However, the participating schools and families represent the current demographic spectrum for County schools and children of kindergarten age. Table 2 presents a demographic summary of the participating schools. Table 3 displays demographics for the families in the study.

School Demographics of Sample
Table 2

Public Private	Community Size	Number of Children in Study	Student Size	% of Minority in School	% of ESL in School	State Report Card Rating	Free and Reduced Lunch %/ SES level
Public	Suburban	90	686	70%	50%	Satisfactory	73% (low income)
Public	Suburban	79	514	45%	23%	Strong	46% (low income
Public	Suburban	74	610	48%	38%	Strong	55% (low income)
Public	Small Town	28	355	55%	32%	Satisfactory	62% (low income)
Public	Small Town	102	450	20%	12%	Strong	31% (middle income)
Public	Rural	34	196	26%	9%	Exceptional	37% (middle income)
Public	Suburban	81	612	20%	10%	Strong	25% (upper middle income)
Private	Suburban	47	413	22%	10%	Not Rated	0% (upper middle income)
7 Public 1 Private	1 Rural 2 Small Town 5 Suburban	Total: 537 Range: 28-102	1 small 3 med. 4 large	20%-67%	10%-50%	1 Exceptional. 4 Strong 2 Satisfactory 1 Not Rated	2 @ upper middle SES 2 @ middle SES 4 @ low SES

Family Demographics of Sample
Table 3

Category	2006 %	1997-98 %
Racial/Ethnic Background of Child		
▪ White	57%	78%
▪ Hispanic	28%	11%
▪ Asian/Pacific Islander	8%	3%
▪ African American	0.1%	0.1%
▪ Reported as Mixed	5%	7%
Highest Education Level of Mother		
▪ Less than high school	17%	
▪ High school	28%	43%*
▪ Some college	44%	
▪ Graduate school	9%	
Two or More Adults in Home	91%	80%
Home Language		
▪ English	69%	87%
▪ Spanish	17.5%	8%
▪ Bilingual	6.5%	-
▪ Other languages**	6%	-

* In the 1997-1998 school year study, high school and less than high school were collapsed. There is only a 1% change in this sample.
**16 other languages were reported, four or fewer families spoke each one at home

Gathering the Information

School Participation and Data Collection Configurations

Public school districts in the County were invited to participate in the study at individual meetings in the central office of each of the districts. They were asked to identify one title one school and one non-title one school for consideration in order to have a representative sample. Four of the County districts elected to take part. The participating schools represent the full geographic and economic spread of the County. Several private schools were invited to participate and one accepted.

Benefits of participation included free instruments in English and Spanish, training for all school personnel doing the assessments, a summary of the individual school data for the school, free technical support during the assessments, plus, three university credits were offered to participating teachers at reduced rates. The requirements for each participating school were to assess all entering kindergarten children and parents and have each kindergarten teacher and the school principal complete a questionnaire.

In the first benchmark study, schools were asked to set aside the first week of school for individual appointments with each child and family as part of a week of transition to school and as part of the regular day for teaching staff. The climate in schools has changed toward stronger academic programs and schools expressed concerns about employing any scenario reducing attendance or instructional time. They were apprehensive about any possible negative impacts on academic outcomes. In this changed climate, all child assessments took place before school started or within the first month of school, and all family interviews took place prior to school or within the first 6 weeks of school. Individual school timeframes were created to work around site-specific staffing and scheduling concerns. Since the assessment required time outside of the regular contract day, school personnel were paid at their contract specifications for special project pay for all child and family assessments. Each school arranged for a mix of teachers and assistants to conduct the child and family assessments and each school provided needed bilingual staff.

Instruments

Three child assessments were used: a developmental inventory, a concepts about print measure, and an alphabet knowledge measure. The developmental inventory was the same instrument used in the first study. The concepts about print measure used was an updated version of the one used in the first study and is the one currently in use in most of the participating schools. The alphabet measure is new to the study, reflecting the changes in academic expectations of kindergarten. The participating schools already gather alphabet knowledge, but the measures used vary widely. Since the content is the same and the end measure is directly comparable, it was agreed that schools could submit their existing data for this one measure.

The family interview was the same as the one in the first study. The teacher and principal questionnaires had a few minor changes (largely descriptive) to capture the changes in schools since the first study. A summary of the instruments is in the appendix.

Data Entry and Analysis Process

After school personnel collected the data, it was personally delivered to the investigator at each of the schools. It was cross checked and cleaned. County personnel entered the data on a secure database. American Psychological Association standards of confidentiality and data management were used.

The ecological model was the guide for breaking down the questions in the instrument package into the benchmark readiness factors. Based on the content, questions were assigned to a readiness factor. Factor scores were transformed to a zero-to-one scale to facilitate comparisons. The distribution of questions to factors was almost identical to the first study and varied only with a few questions added to reflect changes in school structures on the principal's interview and teacher survey.

Once the factor compositions were designed, an acceptable level was determined for each one by applying a national norm or using the professional literature. In all cases acceptable levels on instruments remained the same as the first study or what ever was a current national norm.

The multiple steps taken to compose the readiness factors mean that each factor's acceptable level is calculated from a group of scores with many perspectives, not just one item or one viewpoint. This reduces the possibility of errors in saying the children, families, schools, or community services are ready or unready based on one test score.

A separate Empirical Cumulative Distribution Function (ECDF) showing the acceptable score and the unique distribution of the scores on each factor was generated. ECDFs are an especially good way to show the shape of the distribution, the range of the scores, and the percent of the sample at each value. The ECDF was then used to determine if and when ad hoc analyses were warranted. Analyses were performed using SAS programming. SPSS was used in the first study, but changes in technology now render SAS a better program for this type of analysis.

Benchmarks were set by calculating the percentage of the population at or above the acceptable level on each readiness factor. Although setting the benchmark was a primary goal of the study, the ECDFs were used to ensure the unique story behind each number could be told. These stories are critical to using the benchmarks to set sound social policy.

Results

Each one of the factors has a table presenting a numeric and written description of the data with a comparison to the 1997 benchmark. In addition, a figural display of the data distribution is presented in an ECDF curve. When the ECDF curve or the numeric data suggested that additional analyses were warranted, the additional data is also presented with the results.

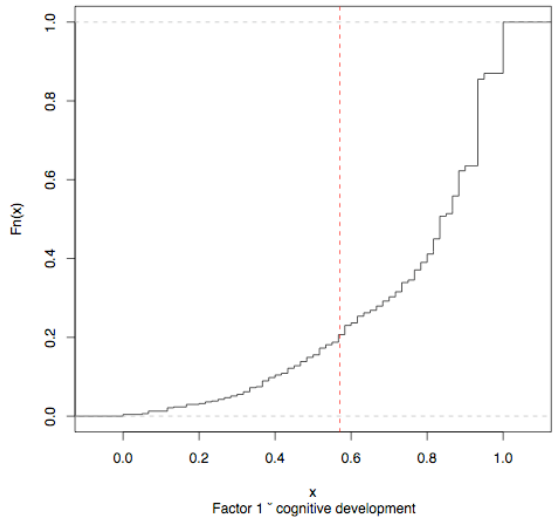
Factor 1: Child Cognitive Development

Since 1997, there has been a slight drop in the number of children who are well developed cognitively. It may be that some children in the County have fewer of the stimulating experiences that build normal cognitive growth. In other words, the haves and have-nots are present in the community. Schools confirm this is starting to happen. It particularly shows up in lower income schools.

Factor 1: Child Cognitive Development
Table 4

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Issues the Data Suggests
85%	79.3%	20.7%	.68	The data suggests that some children are well developed for their age while more than typical are below the norm. Together, this suggests a bi-modal pattern is starting to develop in the population with lower income children having lower scores.

Factor 1: Child Cognitive Development
Figure 2



Factor 2: Child Physical Well-Being and Motor Development

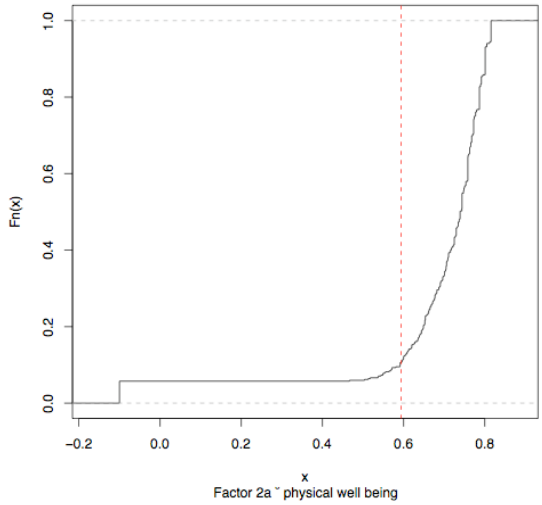
This factor has two components and each is reported separately. Factor 2a is physical well-being (general health) and Factor 2b is motor development. Although both of the components have normal distributions, a drop in the percentage of children passing the acceptable level in one of them while the other had a sharp increase warranted a second look.

For 2a, general health, parents reported that they have more concerns about general hygiene and nutrition than in 1997, but other wise, the factor is similar in level and distribution to 1997.

Factor 2a Child Well-Being
Table 5

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Issues the Data Suggests
91.7%	89.4%	10.6%	.61	The distribution is normal with no unexpected special characteristics.

Factor 2a Child Physical Well-Being
Figure 3

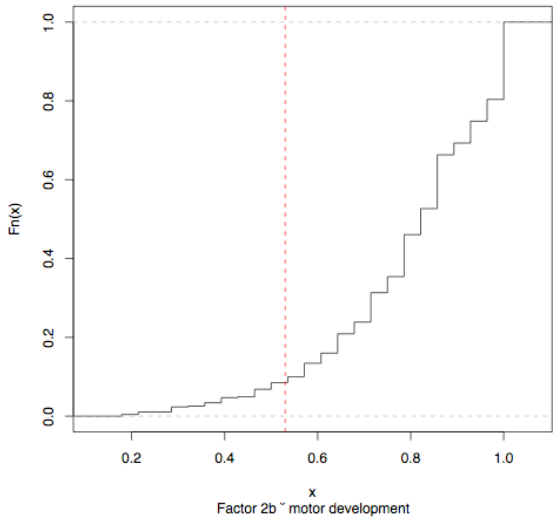


For factor 2b, motor development, there is a 16% increase from the 1997 study. Neither the distribution nor the detailed data suggest reasons for the increase.

Factor 2b: Child Motor Development
Table 6

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
75.4%	91.5%	8.5%	.72	The distribution is normal with no unexpected special characteristics.

Factor 2b: Child Motor Development
Figure 4



Factor 3: Emerging Literacy Development

In the first benchmark study, an instrument looked at concepts about print (how books and print work) as a measure of early literacy. Since then, professional thinking and school practice now also look at alphabet knowledge as an additional proxy for children's general knowledge of and comfort with early literacy skills. Both of these components are reported below as factor 3a and 3b. The concepts about print level were below expected levels in 1997 and in 2006 it dropped slightly lower. However, knowledge about alphabet is normal.

Theoretically, if children are in a well-rounded, literacy-learning environment at home or in child care, the two literacy scores should be similar. Keep in mind that children are not expected to read upon kindergarten entry. However, when exposed to a rich literacy environment where adults read often, point out elements of print, and offer opportunities to talk and write, children will typically know a great deal about print. Many children may not be in this type of environment since more than half of the time children were confused about key reading concepts such as:

- Where to look for print on the page while an adult is reading;
- Reading occurs from left to right and continuously to the next line; and,
- Words are a special combination of letters in an upright position.

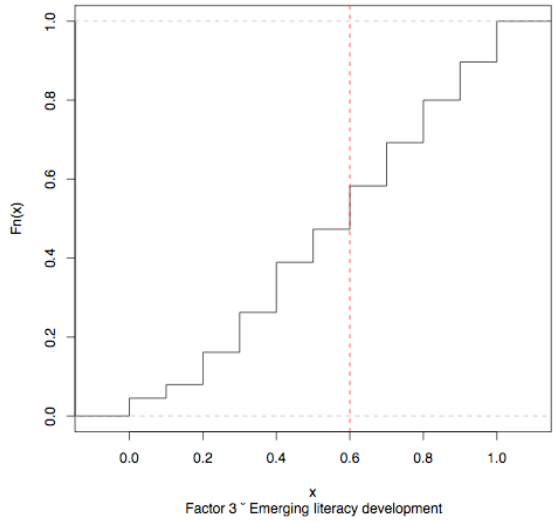
Children had less confusion about other concepts abut print, but still scored low. Children also showed confusion typical for their age about alphabet, but with a curious pattern. Few of the children knew many lower case letters, with the bulk of their knowledge being about upper case. The concern about this result is that books have the majority of print in lower case with capitals only used as punctuation. The scores vary widely by school with the lower income and language diverse schools scoring considerably lower than middle and upper

middle class schools. In the lower income schools, children tended to have higher alphabet knowledge than concepts about print while in the middle and upper income schools the difference in the two scores was not as great. Details for concepts about print are displayed in Table 9 while Table10 displays the percentages of children at or above both literacy benchmark levels by the social economic (SES) level of the school.

Factor 3a: Concepts About Print
Table 7

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
49.9%	43.7%	56.7%	.6	The distribution is normal, but lower than expected.

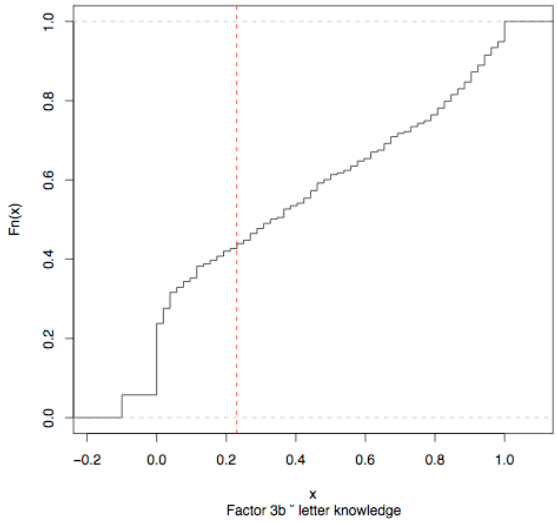
Factor 3a: Concepts About Print
Figure 5



Factor 3b: Alphabet Knowledge
Table 8

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
Not measured	57.3%	42.7%	.25	The distribution is normal and closer to expectations than concepts about print.

Factor 3a: Alphabet Letter Knowledge
Figure 6



Percentage of Children Passing Specific Concepts About Print
Table 9

Concept	% of Children Passing
Front of the book	82%
Back of the book	78%
Note inverted picture	69%
Print contains the message	62%
Where to start reading	50%
Which way you read (left to right)	55%
Return sweep at end of line	49%
Concept of Word	43%
Note inverted print	43%
Word to word match	22%

Literacy Scores By School SES Level
Table 10

SES School Level	% of Children At or Above Benchmark for Concepts About Print	% of Children Who Know 12 or More Letter Names
low	25%	36.5%
	39.4%	78.5%
	48.5%	40.8%
	16.7%	44.4%
middle	55.6%	58.8%
	80%	81.2%
upper middle	70.8%	80.9%
	92.7%	71.4%

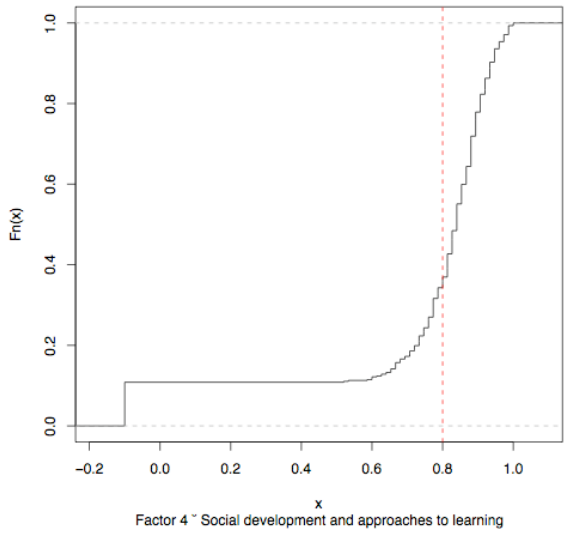
Factor 4: Child Social Development

The social emotional development of children in the sample is within the normal range and close to the 1997 level. However, given the long drawn-out tail, children with issues are likely to have serious issues. This tail is longer and more drawn out than in the first study.

Factor 4: Child Social Development
Table 11

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
68.9%	65.3%	34.7%	.80	The curve has a long and drawn out lower tail suggesting that about 10% of children have serious social-emotional problems.

Factor 4: Child Social Development
Figure 7



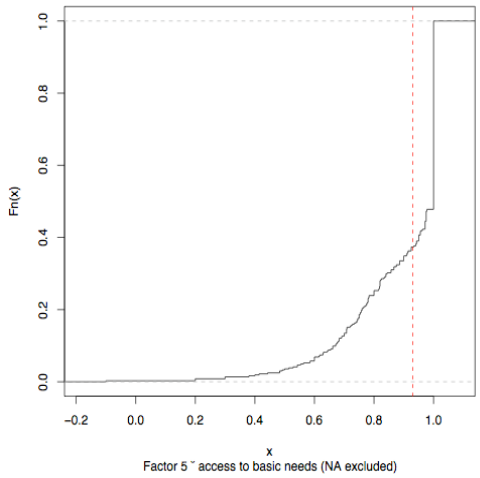
Factor 5: Family Access to Basic Resources

The number of families who need help filling their basic needs is similar to 1997, with a sizable group who need help. Day-to-day living such as housing, food, and clothing were not large issues for most of those in need. However, there are four clusters where a sizable number of the families reported a lacked of resources to meet needs. The details of the level of needs are in Tables 13 and in Table 14 by the SES level of the school. Generally, the pattern is: the lower the SES of the school, the greater the level of unmeet family needs.

Factor 5: Family Access to Basic Resources
Table 12

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
67.8%	62.9%	37.1%	.94	The long tail at the lower end of the curve suggests there is a group who has very limited resources while approximately 60% have sufficient resources for all needs.

Factor 5: Family Access to Basic Resources
Figure 8



Percentage of Families With Unmet Needs By Need Cluster
Table 13

Health Care Cluster	
Regular Vision Care	27%
Mental Health Services	22%
Regular Dental Care	20%
Regular Medical Care	19%
Social Service Cluster	
Drug and Alcohol	21%
Domestic Violence	21%
Education Cluster	
Adult Education	20%
Parenting Education	18%
Employment Cluster	
Child Care	18%
Employment Opportunities	17%
Dependable Transportation	7%
Daily Living	
Three Meals/Day	11%
Clothing and Shoes	8%
Adequate Housing	7%

Percentage of Families With Most Frequent Unmet Needs by School SES Level
Table 14

School SES Level	Health Care Cluster				Employment Cluster		Social Service Cluster		Education Cluster	
	Regular Vision Care	Regular Medical Care	Regular Dental Care	Mental Health Services	Child Care	Job Opport-unities	Drug and Alcohol	Domestic Violence	Adult Ed.	Parent Ed.
low	51%	37%	35%	38%	15%	37%	32%	32%	35%	36%
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	31%	27%	18%	29%	10%	11%	29%	31%	18%	11%
	30%	21%	17%	39%	34%	30%	39%	44%	30%	38%
middle	16%	7%	9%	11%	6%	6%	15%	16%	5%	5%
	21%	15%	32%	32%	10%	10%	32%	32%	32%	32%
upper middle	6%	4%	9%	14%	5%	2%	12%	13%	9%	10%
	23%	0%	0%	2%	5%	2%	0%	0%	0%	5%

* not reported by school

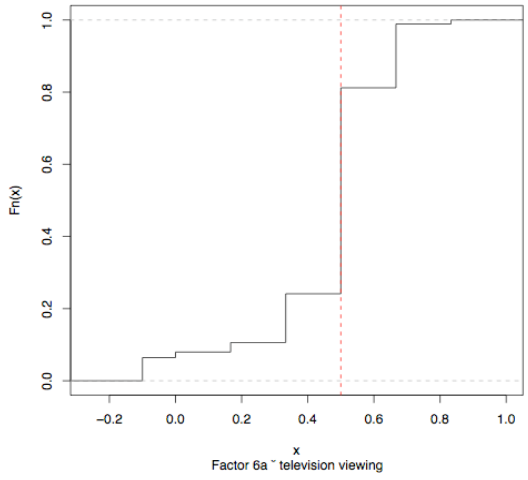
Factor 6: Child Center Activities

Factor 6 is broken down into two components: TV viewing habits (6a) and reading habits (6b). They are presented separately, In the case of 6a, TV viewing, almost 76% of families report that they curtail TV to less than 2-3 hours day, which is similar to 1997. However, this also means about 24% of families allow their children to watch 3 hours or more of TV a day.

Factor 6a: Children's TV Viewing Habits at Home
Table 15

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
78.3%	75.9%	24.1%	.30	A natural break in the data occurs at the benchmark level suggesting large numbers of families work to limit TV viewing.

Children's TV Viewing Habits at Home
Figure 9

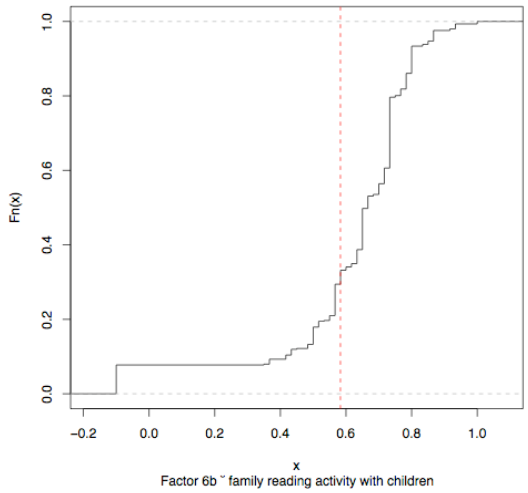


For factor 6b, reading with children, almost 70% report reading with their children at least 3 times a week. This is a 6.4% increase from 1997.

Factor 6b: Family Reading Habits With Children
Table 16

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
64.2%	70.6%	29.4%	.65	The long tail suggests about 30% of families do not read regularly with their children. The size and shape of the lower tail suggests that families who are not reading may have other issues.

Factor 6b: Family Reading Habits With Children
Figure 10



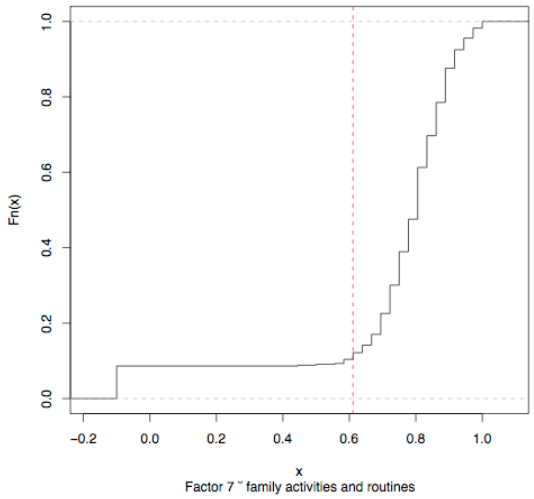
Factor 7: Family Activities and Routines

Nearly 90% of parents reported spending regular time with their children and having family routines. This is a slight drop from 1997. It appears that families try to allot their time in ways that will help enhance child development. However 18% of parents also report lacking sufficient resources for parenting education suggesting that some parents may know that time and routines are important, but may not always know the best way to orchestrate them.

Factor 7: Family Activities and Routines
Table 17

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
95.1%	89.6%	10.4%	.60	The distribution has long flat, but small tail suggesting that a few families have a hard time maintaining a child-supportive set of routines and activities.

Factor 7: Family Activities and Routines
Figure 11



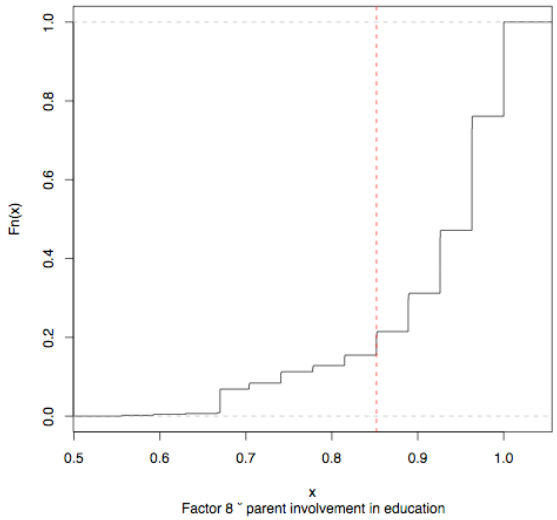
Factor 8: Parental Involvement in Child's Education

On the whole, parents appear to believe it is important to be involved in their child's education. However, there was a 14.6% decrease in parents who expressed this belief compared to 1997. This could be attributed to the growing number of foreign-born parents in the County who may have come from a country or community where the type of parental involvement in education American schools expect is not seen as a parental role. The parents who hold a different belief tend to cluster around 10-20%.

Factor 8: Parental Involvement in Child's Education
Table 18

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
94.5%	79.9%	20.1%	.85	The distribution curves shows that those that do not view parental involvement in typical American ways tend to cluster. This suggests there may be a similar set of beliefs among this group.

Factor 8: Parental Involvement in Child's Education
Figure 12



Factor 9: Developmentally Appropriate Practice

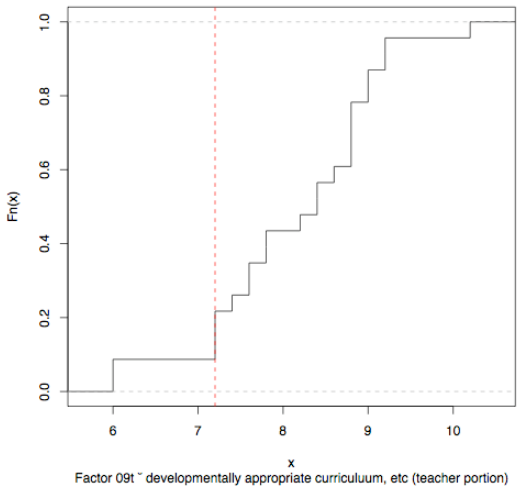
Kindergarten classrooms are more academic than in 1997 with approximately 62% of the schools now defining their program this way. Yet, significantly more schools have programs that demonstrate appropriate practice. Teachers report more activity centers, more focused choice or free play time, and more small group or individual instruction than in 1997. These changes are likely a result of many factors. First, in 1997, programs were generally half-day where as in 2006, 35% of the classrooms surveyed had full day programs.

Teacher background has also changed. Sixty-one percent of the teachers now have a degree or endorsement that includes some early childhood training, where as in 1997 none had pre-service early childhood training. In the 1997, few teachers attended special in-service training geared for kindergarten and now approximately 50% have attended early childhood specific training. However, kindergarten teachers may still be isolated from their preschool community peers since only 22% of this sample is formally affiliated with an early childhood professional organization. Teacher training levels and use of testing are reported in Tables 20 and 21.

Factor 9: Developmentally Appropriate Practice
Table 19

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
5.6%	71%	29%	.74	These scores are calculated at the school level. The curve shows one school below acceptable levels.

Factor 9: Developmentally Appropriate Practice
Figure 13



Teacher Training
Table 20

Type of Training or Support	Yes
ECE Endorsement/Degree	61%
ECE Professional Affiliation	22%
ECE Geared In-service Training	
• Workshops	52%
• Coursework	48%

Percentage of School Using Testing in Kindergarten By Type of Test
Table 21

Type of Standardized Testing	% School Using
For individual instruction	100%
For special ed referral	75%
For full day classroom placement	75%
For regular classroom assignment	50%
For kindergarten retention	50%
For Title 1 eligibility	25%
For social development program placement	25%

Factor 10: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriateness

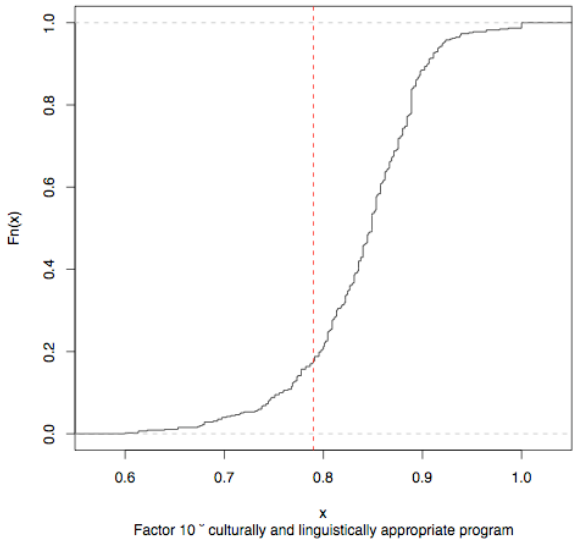
This factor is calculated by looking at how teachers and parents view children in the context of a social group like a classroom. In the original study, only 22.6% of the families and

teachers agreed on how children should behave. This benchmark has changed dramatically with 82.3% of the population who now have matching viewpoints. This likely is the result of improved home-school communication. Over half of the schools now conduct home visits where as in 1997 none did. Most now support more family activities at the school, some type of staff-family collaboration with human services when families need them, and have policies in place to support/adapt to the home culture of the family in addition to having translation services for non-English speaking families. These are large changes in school systems in the past 10 years and reflect a positive response to the increased diversity of the County. Table 23 lists the percentages of school reports on policies or action that create a positive school cultural climate.

Factor 10: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriateness
Table 22

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
22.6%	82.3%	17.7%	.79	The distribution suggests that families and teachers see children in much the same way with only a small number having a mismatch of viewpoint.

Factor 10: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriateness
Figure 14



School Policies Supporting Cultural and Linguistic Appropriateness
Table 23

Policy	% Of School Who Have It
Multiple family-oriented activities at school	100%
Family supports designed to reflect family culture	77.7%
Documents translated to home language of family	77.7%
Home visits by staff	62.6%

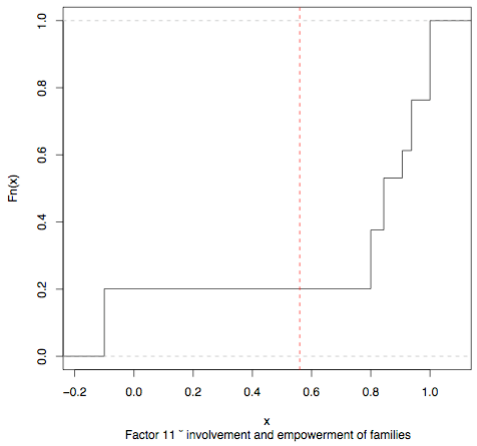
Factor 11: Involvement and Empowerment of Families

The best parent involvement occurs when school staff and parents view parental involvement in the same way. There has been almost a 15% drop in the number of schools and parents who appear to have a match on what parent involvement may entail. Factor 11 and 8 are closely related. Factor 8 is involvement from the family viewpoint only while factor 11 looks at the match between school and family. So, it is no surprise these two factors have had similar drops since 1997. Given the typically strong social skills of school staff and regular contact they have with families, the staff is in a unique position to foster the conversations that promote mutual understandings.

Factor 11: Involvement and Empowerment of Families
Table 24

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
94.4%	80%	20%	.56	The long tail at one end of the curve suggests that many parents and school staff view parental involvement differently.

Factor 11: Involvement and Empowerment of Families
Figure 15



Factor 12: Coordinated Communication About Transition to Kindergarten

There has been a great deal of activity surrounding transition to kindergarten in the community, but the benchmark has gone down. It is likely that the score is the result of the calculation method of the benchmark, which is grounded in a systems approach. High scores are won when most of the school staff knows similar things about transition activities. This assumption is made because any one staff member is the public face of the school when talking with parents or other community members. Principals and teachers do not consistently appear to have similar understandings of what transition activities and arrangements are present in the schools. This miss-match does not mean the configuration of the factor is poor, but rather that there is not a consistent communication system in place within or between schools regarding transition.

A closer look at the data suggests that principals tend to take a big picture view and may not know details while teachers tend to see the day-to-day work but may not know what administrators call it. Also, teachers who are involved in community transitions activities may not have the time to share the information with their colleagues.

Principals report an array of examples that are likely to support a smooth transition even if teachers do not label these as transition-to-school support. They include:

- 66.7% of the schools have formal visit times available for families prior to school entry such as "round up;"
- 66.7% of the schools design activities throughout the year where parents are involved to ease transitions for the child and parent;
- 66.7% of the schools have some system in place to identify children who have low academic skills in order to boost their skills in kindergarten; and,
- 55.6% of the schools have some system in place to identify children who have low social skills in order to boost their skills in kindergarten.

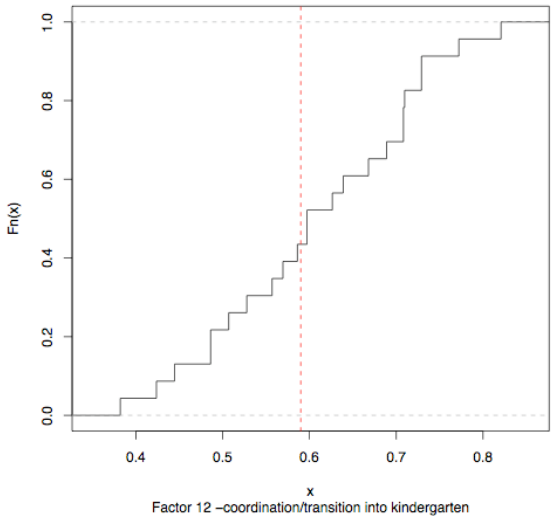
Data from factor 10 also suggest that much has occurred such as more home visits and that schools being more overtly active in becoming more culturally and linguistically aligned with families. All evidence suggests that families and children may experience a smoother transition "on-the-ground" than the factor scores suggests. However, schools still need support to be more consistent in how they communicate and label their efforts: language counts.

Factor 12: Coordinated Transition to Kindergarten

Table 25

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
76.4%	56.9%	43.1%	.59	Further analysis suggests that the distribution of knowledge and descriptions of teachers and principals on this factor varies by school and by role.

Factor 12: Coordinated Transition to Kindergarten
Figure 16



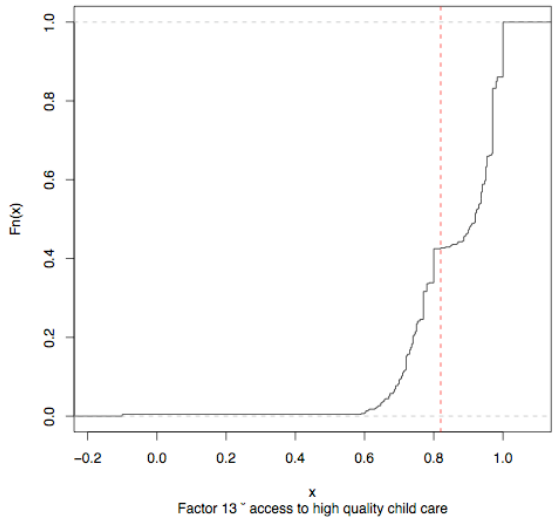
Factor 13: Access to High Quality Child Care

There has been a small decrease in the number of families who report having access to high quality child care. This factor is comprised of a mix of questions about parental satisfaction with child care practice known to reflect child care quality, as well as the number of times they need to change child care providers. In addition, 18% of families reported that they lacked the resources to pay for child care. The small benchmark drop is not surprising given that there are more young children under the age of five in the County and there are fewer child care slots available.

Factor 13: Access to High Quality Child Care
Table 26

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
63.5%	57.2%	42.8%	.82	The distribution curve shows there is a natural breaking point at the benchmark level. This may be reflective of the child care that families use, mostly likely impacted by the dollars they have to spend on child care with more affluent families happier with their arrangement than lower income families.

Factor 13: Access to High Quality Child Care
Figure 17



A picture of what types of child care that parents use for their preschool-age children is displayed in Table 27. The type of experience appears to vary, in part, by income levels typical of the school neighborhood. More of the children in the lower income schools attended family child care as preschoolers, and historically, family child care providers have less training and offer lower quality programs than child care centers, but family child care is less expensive for families to use. This finding may also help explain part of the lower literacy scores among children who enroll in the lower income schools. When reading the data in the table, note that some percentages at a given school may not equal 100% because families use more than one type of child care arrangement to fit their resources and care needs.

Child Care Arrangements For Preschool Age (3-4)
Table 27

School SES Level	At Home With Parent	At Home with Other Caregiver	Family Child Care	Head Start	Formal Preschool or Child Care Center
low	40%	8%	30%	20%	14%
	34%	2%	34%	4%	38%
	34%	12%	20%	5%	34%
	47%	11%	11%	4%	14%
middle	38%	8%	25%	3%	27%
	59%	3%	6%	0%	15%
upper middle	48%	6%	7%	2%	52%
	26%	17%	9%	0%	53%

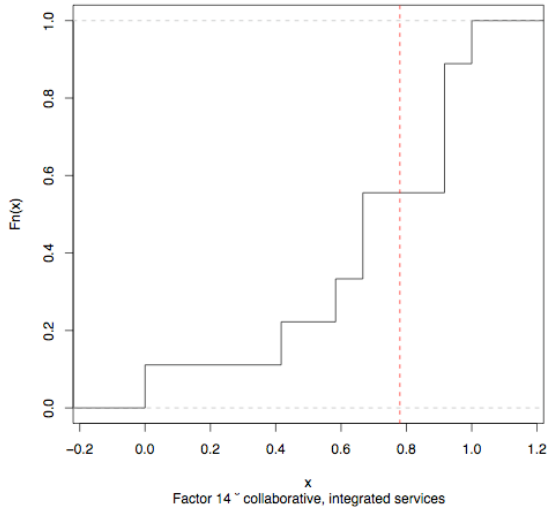
Factor 14: Collabortive and Integrated Services

More schools are now offering information to families about a larger number of community services. However, links to agencies that help adults find employment, emergency financial assistance, child care, and housing are still the least likely to be present in schools. Table 30 details the services not yet routinely offered at or linked through schools.

Factor 14: Collaborative and Integrated Services
Table 28

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
28.5%	44.4%	55.6%	.78	The curve suggests four services are not frequently offered.

Factor 14: Collaborative and Integrated Services
Figure 18



Percentage of Schools With No Links or Offerings of Specific Basic Family Services
Table 29

% of Schools *Not* Offering or Linking Families to Needed Services	Services
75%	Employment
50%	Financial Assistance
50%	Child Care
37%	Housing
25%	Drug and Alcohol Support
25%	Adult Education
25%	Parent Education

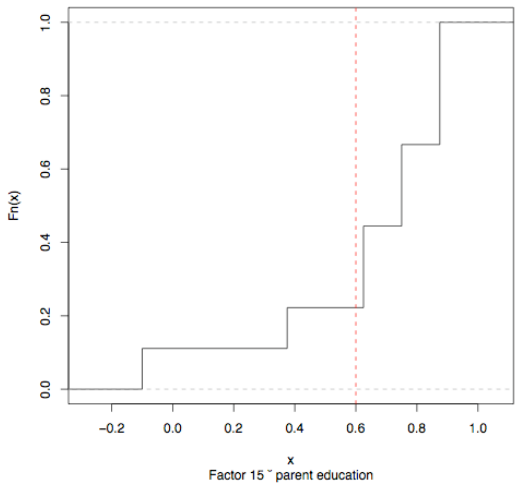
Factor 15: Parenting Education

Although more schools now directly offer or link parents to parenting education than in 1997. The detailed data in factor 5 confirm that 18% of the parents report needing more resources to access parenting education/

Factor 15: Parenting Education
Table 30

1997 Benchmark	% At or Above Benchmark	% Below Benchmark	Acceptable Score	Distribution Issues
31.2%	77.8%	22.2%	.60	The step-like progression of the curve is due to this factor being calculated at the school level. Schools vary in how much parenting education is offered or linked.

Factor 15: Parenting Education
Figure 19



Summary of Results and Comparisons to 1997 Data

Seven of the factors changed less than 5% one-way or the other. Six factors made gains, some considerable, especially school-based factors. Four factors lost ground, and are likely attributed to the increase in poverty or cultural and linguistic diversity. One factor was new to the study. On the whole, the system is stronger with the largest gains at the school level or with factors that link communities and schools.

Comparisons of Benchmarks in 1997 and 2006
Table 31

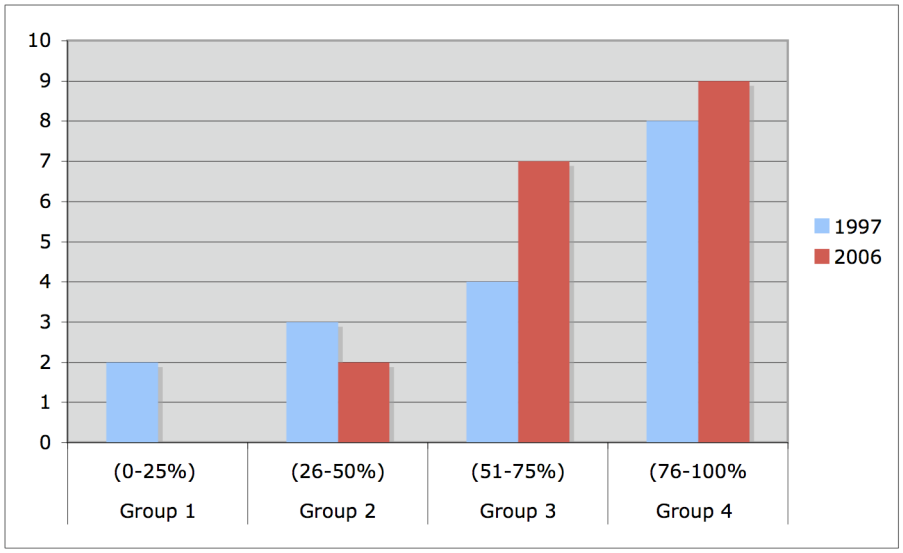
Factor	% At or Above Benchmark in 1997	% At or Above Benchmark in 2006	Notes on Changes
Child Factors			
#1 Child Cognitive Development	83.5%	79.3%	-4.2%
#2a Child Physical Well-being	91.7%	89.4%	-2.3%
#2b Child Motor Development	75.4%	91.5%	+16.4%
#3a Child Emerging Literacy: Concepts About Print	48.8%	43.7%	-5.1%
#3b Child Emerging Literacy: Alphabet Knowledge	-	57.3%	Not measured in 1997
#4 Child Social Development	68.9%	65.3%	-3.6%
Family Factors			
#5 Family Access to Basic needs	67.8%	62.9%	-4.9%
#6a Child Television Viewing Habits in Family	78.3%	75.9%	-2.4%
#6b Family Reading Habits with Child	64.2%	70.6%	+6.4%
#7 Family Activities and Routines	95.1%	89.6%	-5.5%
#8 Family Involvement in Child's Education	94.6%	79.1%	-15.5%
School Factors			
#9 School Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction	5.6%	71%	+65.4%
#10 Culturally and Linguistically Appropriateness of Education	22.6%	82.3%	+59.7%
#11 Home School Match of Involvement and Empowerment of Families	94.4%	80%	-14.4%
#12 Coordinated Communication About Transition to Kindergarten	76.4%	56.9%	-17%
Community Factors			
#13 Access to High Quality Child Care in Community	63.5%	57.2%	-6.3%
#14 Collaborative and Integrated Services in Community Offered Through School	28.5%	44.4%	+15.9%
#15 Parenting Education Offered at or Through School	31.2%	77.8%	+46.6

Discussion and Policy Implications

Describing the Overall System Supporting School Readiness

Graphic and numerical displays in the section above tell a story about the system of supports to build school readiness in children upon kindergarten entry. One way to do long term tracking and to prioritize policy decisions about improving the benchmarks is to group the benchmarks by attainment levels in quadrant groupings to see how the system works as a whole. The comparison of the 1997 and 2006 groups are displayed graphically in Figure 20. The system is stronger in 2006 with no factors now in the lowest quadrant, one less factor in the second quadrant, three more factors in the third quadrants and one more factor in the upper quadrant. This is true even though the population needs have increased with growing poverty and more non-English speaking immigrants.

Comparison of 1997 and 2006 Benchmark Groupings
Figure 20



Community Strengths To Build Upon

By looking at the graphic displays and benchmark movement, it is clear that the system to support school readiness has many strong features. Among them:

- Families continue to have a strong motivation to spend time with children, are aware of services that they need, and appear to be hearing the community messages about reading more.
- Schools are stronger as suggested by rising third grade test scores, there are more age appropriate practices occurring in kindergarten, classrooms are more individualized, schools are more culturally and linguistically aligned with families, and schools are linking to more community services to support families in need.

- Libraries appear to be making inroads with getting books into the hands of families.
- Community agencies doing outreach to both schools and families and are collaborating more.
- The growing diversity has the potential for continuing to encourage schools and community agencies to communicate with and learn from families, as well as each other.

Weaker Areas of the System

Even though community agencies have put a great deal of effort put into many areas, low scores in some areas coupled with the demographic changes suggest their efforts have not always kept up with needs. Areas that continue to need work include:

- Literacy development among children is still low, even with many training efforts. Training efforts may not have kept pace with the needs. Training needs to continue with more mentoring of child care providers and more inclusion of literacy in parent education, especially among low income, second-language families.
- Access to affordable quality child care. Dealing with child care is not an issue the County can deal with on its own. It is a national problem. Turn over is high, quality it low, many unregistered and untrained providers continue to exist. And, child care takes a large bite out of a family income - more than most low income families can pay.
- A group of families continues to need basic services in clusters of medical, employment, social services, and education. Progress has been made in some neighborhoods, but some families still do without these services. This is likely an especially difficult issue if the families are not legal immigrants.
- Many public and private efforts to build a coordinated system of transition to school have been made, but the efforts do not necessarily show at the systems level yet. This may be due in part to the limited time and opportunities schools have to share efforts among all staff involved, and to have all school staff and community members use consistent ways to describe their efforts and share and coordinate strategies across systems.
- The growing diversity of the County is a two-edged sword: It brings richness but also requires more work, a need for differing types of approaches, and flexibility by agencies, schools, and the community especially around the values and beliefs families from different cultures may hold about their roles in family life and the interface with public and private organizations, especially in how families can be involved to support their children's education.

A Profile of a Neighborhood in Need

The family resource data does a particularly good job of painting the picture of a high-need neighborhood. The more a family or school neighborhood fits the following description, the more likely the entire family and school suffers, but especially the development of young children who have a short time window for peak development. This cluster of issues include:

- Monolingual Spanish-speaking families;
- Low income families who are under employed;

- Poor quality and/or limited child care options that are beyond family budgets;
- Limited access to health care (medical, dental, mental health, and vision);
- Limited support for families with alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence issues; and,
- Limited educational opportunities for adults, both adult education and parent education.

Recommendations

Look Toward a System in Areas of Need

The Washington County Commission on Children and Families has a long tradition of working with a wide array of groups to channel supports to children and families. The data suggests that this work should continue. As policies are considered, the commission should continue to ask: "*Will this action and partnership improve the overall system"?* Not just, *"Is it something we can do to address one need"?* The following actions are recommended:

1. Continue to assist and support agencies and organizations that focus efforts on system improvements in areas of high need neighborhoods, especially low-income, non-English-speaking neighborhoods. In particular, enhance work on delivery of:
   - Health care cluster services (physical, mental, vision, and dental)
   - Social service cluster services (drug and alcohol concerns and domestic violence)
   - Adult education services (parenting and adult skill development)
   - Employment services (job opportunities and child care)
2. Continue to support school and community communications about transition to school.
3. Continue and expand support for groups working on literacy training and support for parents and child care providers to promote literacy development, birth-to-five.
4. Continue to work with local and state groups to advocate for improved child care options and quality supports.

Final Words of Caution in Applying Information

There are many types of caution that need to be applied when using the information in this study. First, as the results of this study are compared to the first benchmark study caution should be taken about making direct study-to-study comparisons of progress on the benchmarks since the population in the County has changed. Change will continue and it is critical to continue to look at the changes in the population and its needs as the system of supports evolves.

Second, although the results represent the range of the kindergarten-age demographics in the County and this sample may differ somewhat from the entire population of children. Kindergarten-aged samples are often different than older school-age populations by development and in population characteristics. First, five-year-olds are at a unique time in their lives where they are still very young children, but are on the verge of great change at the same time, and second, families with younger children tend to be younger and less affluent that families on the whole.

Third, a low factor score in an area does not mean that efforts to address an issue have been ineffective. It very likely with the population changes and poor economic climate of the past 10 years some efforts may have been to small enough in scale to not show up in system-based assessment yet.

The final caution is that the framework for this study uses a systems approach. In a system, if one factor changes other factors change in response. For example, lack of access to quality and affordable child care is likely to impact cognitive development, literacy scores, parts of family resources, and school transition. Like-wise, since families report liking to spend time with their children, offering family-oriented activities in the schools or in the community are likely to more positively impact adult and parent education level than adult-only classes. Again, one effort can make a bigger systems impact, if carefully considered. When making final decisions about policy, look to not only what is possible, but also what may impact the most parts of the system.

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Appendix

Summary of Instruments

Child Instruments	
Early Screening Inventory	The *Early Screening Inventory* is a short, easy-to-administer, standardized inventory well suited for benchmark data and comparisons to national norms. It measures cognition, motor skills, and language development. It has high technical qualities and is available in Spanish and English. This instrument also gives schools excellent screening data for special needs children or children who may benefit from special services. Approximate administration time was 15 minutes.
Early Literacy Battery	Two subtests of emergent literacy used for this study – the first 10 questions from Marie Clay's *Concepts About Print* and *Alphabet Knowledge Test*. Both have national norms and are excellent proxies of early literacy development. Since these match common assessments kindergarten teachers use within the first month of school, a few schools used their own instruments when the data was transferable. For example, *Dibels* has alphabet knowledge was used in a few schools. English and Spanish versions of both of these instruments were used. Approximate administration time was 8 minutes.
Family Instrument	
Family Questionnaire	In addition to basic demographic data and questions about a child's health and social qualities, each family was asked questions about family activities and routines, access to and satisfaction with child care, access to resources in the community, and involvement with the school. These items are standard questions used in multiple national studies. Approximate administration time was 30 minutes in either Spanish or English.
School Instruments	
Principal Survey	Principals were responsible for providing information on school demographics and community context, kindergarten teacher hiring and in-service practices, family support activities at or through the school, influences on school programming, and details about any school entry plan. Approximate administration time was 30 minutes.
Teacher Survey	Each participating teacher completed a survey that described their program, school transition activities, their personal view of school readiness, influences on school programming, and personal demographic data. Approximate administration time was 30 minutes.