

School Readiness

About the Title V Block Grant

The federal Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant helps states ensure the health of all mother and children. As part of Minnesota's Title V Block Grant activity requirements, the MDH conducts a statewide needs assessment every five years. The needs assessment provides guidance to Title V activities for the next five years by identifying priority issues. This fact sheet describes one of Minnesota's priority issues.

Seriousness of the Issue

School readiness is a multidimensional issue and involves more than just the child. In the broadest sense, it is about children, families, early environments, schools, and communities. Children are not innately ready or not ready for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through interactions with other people and environments from birth to age five.

Currently, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) tracks school readiness by assessing kindergartners in a random sample of schools. Students performance is rated on a series of indicators that compose five domains: personal and social development; language and literacy; mathematical thinking; the arts; and physical development and health. In 2008 the sample was representative of approximately 63,000 kindergartners. Findings indicate that:

- 39 percent were not considered proficient in physical development
- 52 percent were not considered proficient in personal and social development
- 54 percent were not proficient in language and literacy
- 55 percent were not proficient in mathematical thinking
- 52 percent were not proficient in the arts¹

Since the study began in 2002, there has been a steady rise in the number of children considered not fully ready for kindergarten across all domains²

The failure to insure that children start school ready to learn has substantial consequences and costs to the state as a whole. When essential needs are not met in the early years, children are prone to a wide array of future problems that relate both to school success and to success in life generally. Research shows that the lack of quality prenatal and postnatal care has a negative effect on the developing child. As a result they become a higher risk for admission to neonatal intensive care units, chronic and severe medical conditions, mental retardation, developmental disability, neurological/mental health issues as well as teen pregnancy, school drop-out, child abuse/neglect, foster care, juvenile delinquency welfare dependency, etc.³

Kindergartners from lower income families are more likely to not be ready for kindergarten. Other factors that have shown to negatively influence school readiness are: low parent education levels and primary home language other than English.⁴ Factors that help and hinder Hmong children's school readiness include: social-emotional development, valuation of children's education, parental education, perceived shyness, dual-language deficiency, and lack of parental involvement.⁵

Economic Loss

An analysis of the Chicago Longitudinal Study (an evaluation of children who participated in the Chicago School District's Child-Parent Center Program) showed that seven dollars are returned for every dollar spent on the program. The largest benefit was program participants' increased earnings capacity projected from higher educational attainment. Other benefits are lower criminal justice system costs, savings for crime victims, and savings on school remedial services budget.⁶

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project also concluded that for every dollar invested in a high quality early childhood program for children, the direct and indirect economic benefits to the public total approximately \$7.16.⁷

In 2009, Wilder Research released a study for the Bush Foundation finding that that the estimated cost burden to Minnesota's K-12 system due to children



Maternal and Child Health Section
P.O. Box 64882
St. Paul, MN 55164-0882
(651) 201-3760
www.health.state.mn.us

entering kindergarten unprepared for school success is about \$113 million dollars annually.⁸

Evidence-Based Strategies

In order to have Minnesota's children ready for school we need to provide a system that looks at the whole child in the context of their culture and community. Strategies need in order to support the early learning, the family, health/mental health, and early intervention and special needs for each child.

Early environments matter and nurturing relationships are essential for early brain development. What happens during the first months and years of life is critical because it sets either a sturdy or fragile foundation for what follows. Emotional development and academic learning are far more closely intertwined in the very early years than has been previously understood. Elements of infant, toddler, and preschool programs that enhance social and emotional development are just as important as the components that enhance linguistic and cognitive competence.⁹

Secure early attachments provide the base for all learning, beginning at birth. Babies thrive when they are securely attached to the adults who care for them, and they are able to demonstrate attributes critical to school readiness; curiosity, willingness to explore, persistence, enthusiasm, pleasure in learning, and independence. The infant is able to learn how to regulate her emotions which can then enable them to focus attention on learning about the world around them. A child that is focused on learning is set for achievement, academically in life.¹⁰

Because children's readiness to learn is strongly predictive of future academic performance, children who enter kindergarten behind their peers are unlikely to ever catch up.¹¹ Research shows that screening and early intervention are key to improving a child's health and well-being. Standardized screening allows professionals to identify red flags in a child's development and early intervention programs provide the child and family with the support needed for optimal development. Newborn screening, timely well child care visits that utilize standardized screening instruments, home visiting programs such as Nurse Family Partnership, Part C Early Intervention, the Follow Along program, WIC, and high quality early care and education programs are proven methods to improve school readiness outcomes for young children.

Current Resources and Capacity

From a systems perspective the following programs are collaborating; Minnesota Early Childhood Comprehensive System (MECCS), The Build Initiative, and Wilder Research produced a document titled *Early Childhood Minnesota: Indicators and strategies for Minnesota's early childhood system, a joint report of Minnesota Build and Minnesota Early Childhood Comprehensive System*. The Early Childhood Funders Collaborative is developing a statewide assessment on early childhood and will release a Collective Action Plan in fall 2009.

Minnesota offers a variety of programs that serve young children. Home visiting programs such as; Nurse Family Partnership, Healthy Families America, Parents As Teachers, etc. are available to families Part C and the Follow Along Program provide screening and early intervention supports for children ages birth-five. The Department of Human Services has developed a set of Core Competencies for professionals working in the field of early childhood as well as the Parent Aware quality rating system to ensure children are enrolled in high quality child care settings.

Minnesota requires screenings of all children before they enter public school kindergarten, typically at age 3 to 4. School districts are reimbursed at fifty dollars per child for screening for three year olds, forty dollars per child for 4 year olds, and thirty dollars per child for five year old. Each screening includes height, weight, hearing, vision, developmental skills, social and emotional, immunization review, identification of risk factors that may influence learning, and a summary review with parents.¹²

A public school readiness program is available to Minnesota children age 3 ½ to 4 years and their families. Usually, children are identified to participate in the program through Early Childhood Screening. School districts offer programs and services unique to the needs of children and the resources in their communities. The goal of School Readiness is to help preschoolers enter school with the skills and behaviors necessary to be successful in future learning.¹³

Head Start is a full-service program for preschool children and their families that primarily serves three and four year olds from low-income families. Head Start services include education, health, nutrition, mental health, and social services.¹⁴

School Readiness – page 3

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth to kindergarten entrance. The program is offered through public schools. ECFE works to strengthen families and its goal is to enhance the ability of all parents to provide the best possible environment for their child's learning and growth.¹⁵

Currently data on early childhood care and education can be found through the Department of Human Services (DHS) Health Assurance unit and the Child Development Services unit, MDH's Maternal and Child Health section as well as MN Children With Special Health Needs section and the Department of Education's (MDE) Early Learning Services division. This data is limited in use because it is not connected between departments/systems and often does not provide the disparity information such as race/ethnicity, income, and or geographical information.

¹ Minnesota Department of Education. (2008). *Kindergarten readiness study*. Retrieved August 26, 2009, from, <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/EarlyLearning/documents/Report/013941.pdf>

² Wilder Research. Presentation to Child Care Professionals at the Healing Vessels Conference 2009. Improving kindergarten readiness: Overview and selected results.

³ State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network. School readiness briefing paper. Retrieved August 28, 2009 from, <http://www.finebynine.org/uploaded/file/Briefing%20Paper%201.pdf>

⁴ Wilder Research. Early Childhood Minnesota: indicators and strategies for Minnesota's early childhood system, a joint report of Minnesota Build and Minnesota early Childhood Comprehensive Systems. Retrieved August 15, 2009 from, <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2173>

⁵ Ready 4 K. What helps and hinders Hmong Pre-kindergartners' school readiness: learning from and about the hmong in St. Paul, Minnesota. Retrieved August 28, 2009 from, <http://www.ready4k.org/vertical/Sites/%7BC2E38BFF-E19D-4F31-8282-94D11BD421A4%7D/uploads/%7B0712DB5F-3755-4DC7-8E31-E733674FECAD%7D.PDF>

⁶ National Conference of State Legislatures. Early childhood education fact sheet. Retrieved August 24, 2009 from, www.ncsl.org

⁷ Barnett, W. (1996). *Lives in the balance: Age 27 benefit-cost analysis of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program* (Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 11). Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

⁸ Wilder Research. The Cost burden to Minnesota K-12 when children are unprepared for kindergarten. Retrieved August 28, 2009 from, <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2117>

⁹ Shonkoff, J.P., & Phillips, D.A. (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods : The science of early childhood development* by Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, Youth, and Families Board on Children, Jack P. and Deborah A. (Hardcover - Nov 2000)

¹⁰ The Ounce of Prevention Fund, *Learning Begins at Birth*. Retrieved June 17, 2009 from <http://www.ounceofprevention.org>

¹¹ Shonkoff, J. & Phillips, D. (2001). *Neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.

¹² Minnesota Department of Education. (2008). *Early Childhood Screening – FY 2008 Participant Data*. Retrieved August 26, 2009, from, <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/EarlyLearning/documents/Report/014507.pdf>

¹³ Minnesota Department of Education. (2008). *School Readiness Program*. Retrieved August 26th, 2009 from, http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Learning_Support/Early_Learning_Services/Early_Childhood_Programs/School_Readiness_Program/002667

¹⁴ Minnesota Department of Education. (2008). *Head Start*. Retrieved August 26th, 2009 from, http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Learning_Support/Early_Learning_Services/Early_Childhood_Programs/Head_Start/index.html

¹⁵ Minnesota Department of Education. (2008). *Early Childhood Family Education*. Retrieved August 26th, 2009 from, <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/EarlyLearning/documents/Manual/006376.pdf>