Aparicio, Marbella

Kindergarten Readiness: Perspectives of Stakeholders

2014

Kindergarten Readiness: Perspectives of Stakeholders

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A Special Project

Presented to

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FACULTY APPROVAL

Kindergarten Readiness: Perspectives of Stakeholders

Approved for the Faculty

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ABSTRACT

What is Kindergarten Readiness? What are key stakeholders' perspectives in regards to kindergarten preparation and transition practices? This case study project researches the definitions and perceptions of stakeholders at the elementary level, such as former kindergarten parents, former kindergarten teachers, and elementary school administrators. This special project also analyzes and forms conclusions as to the common and uncommon definitions and perceptions of key stakeholders. The purpose of this project was to identify any gaps between definitions and perceptions in order to help future research close any such discrepancies. Reaching an understanding of any discrepancies between the stakeholders will help shape future kindergarten readiness activities and practices by parents, teachers, and school administrators.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

    Kindergarten was viewed as the first formal step for many children entering the public education system. The skills and abilities children took to their first formal educational experience were crucial in determining how successful they were in Kindergarten, as well as their subsequent years. Due to the nature of their age, Kindergartners depend on their parents, early learning providers, and private and public school systems to prepare them for their educational career; therefore, it was imperative to study the definitions and perceptions of key stakeholders, such as former kindergarten parents, former kindergarten teachers, and elementary school administrators to identify any possible existing gaps and discrepancies that may have hindered or altered student's preparation and success for school.

Statement of the Problem

    When it came to Kindergarten Readiness, stakeholders held different definitions and perceptions as to what that this concept meant to them. Due to their definitions and perceptions varying greatly, then it is was a fair judgment to say that students entering Kindergarten entered their first year in formal schooling

with different abilities and skills, based on the preparation they received prior to entering school.

Purpose of the Project

The main objective was to seek a better understanding of stakeholders' definitions and perceptions in preparing young children to enter their first formal educational experience as kindergartners. This project aimed to set the stage for future research intended to close gaps in kindergarten readiness preparation and transition practices by key stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and primary school administrators.

Delimitations

This special project was conducted in Central Washington in the Imaginary School District, during the 2013-2014 academic school year. The participants were selected from the school district's only primary school, which served grades Kindergarten through Third grade. The intended participants for this study, which included the school building's principal, the school district's superintendent, three Kindergarten teachers, and five former kindergarten parents, responded to a set of questions via questionnaire , followed up with an optional one-on-one interview with the researcher. The researcher followed research protocols and obtained informed consent from all participants. Some of the known and controlled boundaries for the project were: all parents in the author's Kindergarten

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were commonalities and differences in perceptions about Kindergarten Readiness.

Having an understanding of any commonalities and differences, may have helped

key stakeholders to work together to better prepare students entering

Kindergarten, or to make improvements on current readiness activities and

transition practices by stakeholders. Due to the small number of participants, the

information obtained may not accurately reflect the perceptions of a larger

population. However, this project can be used as a beginning step in exploring

important themes and questions as they relate to better preparing young children

for Kindergarten, thus consequently increasing their academic success

opportunities.

Procedure

The procedural steps are important to quality outcomes and better

understandings. The teacher-researcher followed the following steps:

1. Sent a letter to the school district's superintendent, school building's

   principal, school building's three Kindergarten teachers, and the 22

   kindergarten parents in the teacher-researcher's classroom to encourage

   voluntary participation in the study.

2. Minimized the parent group to five participants due to the large number of

   participants. Hence, the names of the participants that volunteered for the

study were put in a jar and only 5 parent participants were randomly

selected for the questionnaire portion of the survey.

3. Obtained informed consent to use the participants' responses for the

    research, as well as signed confidentiality agreements.

4. Performed follow-up interviews with one teacher and one parent who

    agreed for the follow up interview.

5. Analyzed the research data and developed themes evolving from the

    participants' responses relative to the question being explored in this

    study.

6. Provided conclusions and recommendations that may provide a

    recommended path forward for a school district, school building, and

    parent's to improve kindergarten readiness practices.

<u>Definition of Terms</u>

    <u>Kindergarten Readiness</u> is defined by the teacher researcher as the preparation

a student receives prior to entering the first formal year of public education, also

known as Kindergarten.

    <u>Stakeholder:</u> a person who has a personal or business related interest in the

something or someone, as defined by the researcher. In this study, parents,

kindergarten teachers, and school administrators are considered the stakeholders.

Acronyms

ELG'S: Early Learning Guidelines

OSPI: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

WaKIDS: Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills

CCSS: Common Core State Standard

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

From the research and the extensive literature review conducted by the author, five key themes were found to contribute significantly to the research question relating to stakeholder's perspectives in regards to Kindergarten Readiness. The following five themes were found in the literature review: Defining Kindergarten Readiness, Parent and Preschool Teacher Perceptions of K-Readiness, Pre-K and Kindergarten Readiness Practices, Kindergarten Transition Challenges/Concerns, and Washington State Data on Kindergarten Readiness.

First, the author found that the definition of kindergarten readiness varied among teachers, administrators, early childhood providers, and parents. Second, the author found that stakeholders described specific skills students should have prior to entering kindergarten. Third, the author found that stakeholders varied in the manner they prepared themselves and their students prior to kindergarten. Fourth, the author found that stakeholders faced various challenges and concerns during the transition process. And fifth, the author found state data that described both the skills students entered with and the perceptions of teachers, as related to kindergarten readiness.

Defining Kindergarten Readiness

According to Dailey, Burkhauser, & Halle (2011) states have made significant efforts in the area of defining the skills and abilities young children should develop for a successful start in Kindergarten. The skills and abilities that states developed for pre-kindergarten children are defined as Early Learning Guidelines (ELG'S) Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2012). The authors further mentioned that states emphasized that the ELG's are not intended as readiness checklists or assessment tools, rather they were intended to help in guiding early care providers and preschools in selecting the instructional tools and assessments appropriate for their children at different stages of development. Typically, ELG's were organized by developmental stages and articulated a range of skills and abilities in some of the following areas: literacy, numeracy, social-emotional, and physical development.

According to Gill, Winters, and Friedman (2006), educators and policy makers in the USA and elsewhere agreed that a smooth transition from one educational setting to the next is a "critical component of school readiness that may not only predict children's future school success, but may also set the tone for their behavior and coping skills throughout their lives" (p.214). Furthermore, the researchers added that children who were ready to meet kindergarten expectations when they started school were more likely to experience success throughout their lives. On the other hand, children who were not ready at school

entry were more likely to repeat a grade, need special education services, and more likely to have left school prior to graduation.

Gill et al. (2006) further stated that historically, studies of school readiness have either examined child predictors of school success or focused on readiness as a function of the 'sending' settings, which are expected to shoulder major responsibility of preparing young children for the next stage. Recently, the field has started to shift away from blaming the child or seeking the evidence of school readiness only through what the child can or cannot do academically and socially. Child readiness indicators suggested that children should have some preparation across different domains (physical, cognitive, language, social-emotional) prior to entering school. School readiness indicators suggested that the schools had different approaches to reaching children's and their families prior to entering kindergarten and making the transition process a more clear path for all involved. Additionally, Gill et al. (2006) argued that school readiness should not have been determined solely by the capabilities of the children but instead the responsibility of meeting students' needs prior to entering schools was the responsibility of the schools.

According to Hatcher, Nuner & Paulsel (2012) Kindergarten readiness was a complex idea linked to multiple meanings and factors. Chronological age, developmental stage, specific academic and social skills, and home/school connections were associated with readiness. Local communities offered different

definitions of readiness. Roots of current definitions were traced to the National

Educational Goals Panel, which declared a national priority for all children to

enter school 'ready to learn.' While readiness definitions increasingly included

specific academic goals, a multidimensional view of readiness continued to be the

basis for many early childhood programs.

The literature demonstrated that the definition for kindergarten is not easily

defined. There are various components to be considered when looking at

kindergarten readiness, such as age, social skills, specific academic skills, and

state/local policies (Gill, Winters, and Friedman, 2006; Dailey, Burkhauser, and

Halle, 2011; Hatcher, Nuner, and Paulsel, 2012). Furthermore, while some

described kindergarten readiness as the skills children possess prior to entering

their first formal year of schooling, others consider it as a responsibility of the

schools to prepare children for school (Gill et al, 2006). A consensus for the

definition of kindergarten readiness requires parents, teachers, administrators, and

to policy makers to work together so that everyone is speaking the same language,

more importantly within the same school district and community.

Parent and Pre-School Teacher Perceptions of K-Readiness

In their qualitative study, Hatcher, Nuner & Paulsel (2012) explored parental

beliefs about children's kindergarten readiness to see if parent and teacher beliefs

were congruent. The research involved interviewing three preschool programs

from two different states. The three programs differed in location, setting (rural,

suburban, and small city), and population size. Twenty nine females participated in the study, thirteen whom were teachers and sixteen parents. As a whole, parent participants were highly educated, with fifteen having some college experience and their income ranged from $20,000-80,000. The authors found that six themes emerged, which informed their three following research questions: 1.What are the beliefs of parents and preschool teachers concerning meanings of kindergarten readiness? 2. What are parent and teacher beliefs about preschool in preparing children for kindergarten? 3. What sources of information do parents and teachers use to inform their beliefs and practices about children readiness for Kindergarten?

For question one (What are the beliefs of parents and preschool teachers concerning meanings of kindergarten readiness?), 25 out of 29 participants associated kindergarten readiness with social-emotional maturity and the ability to interact with peers and teachers successfully. Furthermore, readiness was associated as specific school-related skills such as paying attention, cooperation with school routines, working in large groups, following teacher directions, and staying on task. Finally, readiness was associated to language and literacy skills such as letter recognition, sound and letter relationship, sight word recognition, and name writing.

For question two (What are parent and teacher beliefs about preschool in preparing children for kindergarten?), the researchers found that participants

expressed positive feelings about preschool for their children's learning and social opportunities. Eleven out of thirteen teachers and fifteen out of sixteen parents believed that preschool anticipated kindergarten success. Furthermore, parents believed preschool developed worthwhile approaches to learning such as curiosity and enthusiasm while being introduced to group experiences.

For question three (What sources of information do parents and teachers use to inform their beliefs and practices about children readiness for Kindergarten?), both teachers and parents discussed a variety of assessment information that programs provided and associated that information with kindergarten readiness, such as screening prior to kindergarten, day to day communication with preschool teachers, and formal readiness materials or informative school meetings. Nine parents gave specific examples of home/school communication, informal conversations, formal conferences, and assessment information. All teachers felt they provided extensive developmental progress information to families and directly helped with concerns. Eight out of thirteen teachers noted the importance of special readiness training, such as workshop or college coursework. Teachers cited personal experiences or visits to local schools to inform themselves about kindergarten readiness expectations.

Pre-K and Kindergarten Readiness Practices

In their study, Gill, Winters, &Friedman (2006), sought to explore educator's perceptions of school readiness skills, transition practices/barriers, and the

parent's role in these domains. The researchers mailed a semi-structured survey to 57 schools (16 school districts and 72 pre-k programs in a USA county). A total of 44 schools and 42 pre-k programs participated. Three major themes came about from the study and among those were current readiness practices followed to promote school readiness and transition, as reported by educators from pre-k and kindergarten programs. The researchers discovered that pre-k and kindergarten programs were similar in regard to the emphasis placed on the development skills.

Gill et al (2006) found that almost all programs focused on academic skills such as counting to ten, naming colors, letter recognition, and prewriting skills such as tracing and drawing. Furthermore, they found that these programs also focused on teaching children to follow directions and to work cooperatively and independently. Further findings by the researchers suggested that there was a stronger focus on socio-emotional and interpersonal skills being taught by pre-k and kindergarten programs. Table 1 provides a more descriptive comparison of the skills taught to promote kindergarten readiness by kindergarten and pre-k programs.

Table 1 Range of Skills Taught to Promote School Readiness

Skill taught	Kindergarten %	Pre-kindergarten %	Significance level
Separate from parents	73	98	$\chi^2 (1, n = 83) = 10.03^\star$
Read many words	98	63	$\chi^2 (1, n = 82) = 16.09^\star$
Hop, skip, and move to music	100	95	n.s.
Recognize many letters of the alphabet	98	100	n.s.
Prewriting (coloring figures with lines, drawing shapes, tracing)	100	98	n.s.
Work independently	98	100	n.s.
Recognize feelings	95	100	n.s.
Appreciate their culture and other cultures	95	95	n.s.
The names of many colors and shapes	100	100	n.s.
Play cooperatively with other children	100	100	n.s.
Count to 10	100	100	n.s.
Cooperate with teacher	100	100	n.s.
Follow directions	100	100	n.s.

$^\star p < 0.01.$

Table I. Range of skills taught to promote school readiness.

Table 1 above demonstrates that almost all of the pre-K and kindergarten programs (ranging from 95-100%) focused on academic skills such as counting, naming colors and shapes, letter recognition, and prewriting activities. Also, it was evident that teaching children to follow directions, to cooperate with the teacher, and to work independently were also equally important to both programs. Finally, Table 1 also demonstrates that there is a significant difference in the area of reading many words to children and helping facilitate children's separation from parents (Gill et al., 2006).

In their study, Gill et al (2006) found that a majority of their participants reported screening children before school entry. The screening assessments included: speech, hearing, vision, and developmental screening. Very few kindergarten and pre-k programs reported having a formal kindergarten transition plan in place. Of the respondents who reported having some type of transition plan in place, a majority of them used formal assessments to measure outcomes for children entering kindergarten. When asked to report current school transition activities, kindergarten programs, compared to pre-k programs, demonstrated a higher involvement in several information sharing activities related to school transition, such as sending information to families via brochures, flyers, phone calls, and letters. Table 2 provides a clear comparison in school transition activities by both Kindergarten and pre-K programs.

Table 2 Current School Transition Activities in Kindergarten and Pre-K Programs

Transition activity	Kindergarten %	Pre-kindergarten %	Significance level
Send flyer or information brochure to the family	98.0	50.0	$\chi^2(1, n = 76) = 22.80^{**}$
Send a letter to the child/ child's parents	95.0	67.6	$\chi^2(1, n = 77) = 9.72^{**}$
Make a phone call	44.6	5.6	$\chi^2(1, n = 75) = 14.32^{**}$
Coordinate kindergarten registration	92.5	33.3	$\chi^2(1, n = 76) = 28.90^{**}$
Bring preschool children to visit their public schools	87.2	21.6	$\chi^2(1, n = 76) = 33.01^{**}$
Help inform parents about kindergarten readiness and expectations	97.6	84.2	$\chi^2(1, n = 79) = 4.35^{*}$
Hold a meeting with the family and child	65.0	44.4	n.s.
Visit the child's home	4.9	5.4	n.s.
Principal visits community preschools and programs for four-year-olds	27.5	22.2	n.s.
Kindergarten teachers visit community preschools and programs for four-year-olds	22.2	21.6	n.s.
Make informal contacts with kindergarten teachers about children	56.4	48.6	n.s.
Talk with kindergarten teachers about social and academic skills to prepare children for school	60.0	68.4	n.s.
Participate in joint training for pre-K and kindergarten	23.1	39.5	n.s.
Open house for parents and children	100.0	49.0	$\chi^2(1, n = 77) = 27.27^{**}$
Other	83.0	27.5	$\chi^2(1, n = 77) = 4.43^{*}$

$^{*}p < 0.01$; $^{**}p < 0.05$.

Table II. Current school transition activities in kindergarten and pre-K programs.

Table 2 demonstrates that it was evident that more kindergarten programs than pre-kindergarten programs reached out to families during the kindergarten transition process. Sending flyers and information to the families, alone, was at a 98% by Kindergarten programs compared to 50% by Pre-kindergarten programs.

Kindergarten Transition Challenges/Concerns

Wildenger and McIntyre (2012) stated that approximately half of typically developing children encountered problems in transition to elementary school. Also, the authors mentioned that the transition to formal schooling was considered an important developmental milestone for children, their families, and teachers. Furthermore, they mentioned that children experienced multiple ecological changes as they transitioned from early childhood programs that may have been play-based to more structured academically-oriented elementary classrooms. Additionally, they stated that a positive school entry experience was important in the sense that it may have impacted later academic and social outcomes in a child's educational experience.

Wildenger and McIntyre (2012) stated that one variable that may have been especially important for children's school readiness and early adaptation to elementary school was access to early childhood education programs. According to the researchers, evidence suggested that children who participated in formal, center-based preschool programs prior to beginning school experienced better

academic and social outcomes in kindergarten compared with children who received informal care or no extra care.

According to a large, representative national sample of kindergarten teachers 53% of children transition to kindergarten successfully, 32% of typically developing children experience a moderate level of problems in transition, and 16 of incoming kindergartners have particularly difficult entries with serious concerns. Furthermore, more than one-third of teachers reported that at least half of their entering kindergarten classes exhibited specific difficulties. The problems most frequently reported to impact at least half of incoming kindergartener were: difficulty following directions (46%), a lack of academic skills (36%), disorganized home environments (35%) and difficulty working independently (34%) (Wildenger and McIntyre, 2012).

According to Hatcher, Nuner, and Paulsel (2012), one of their studies in the area of kindergarten readiness suggested that there were feelings of anxiety about kindergarten and children's readiness by the parents. Parents in their study presenteded concerns about their children being ready for the expectations regarding behavior and academic performance they believed to be part of kindergarten. In addition, parents voiced concerns about children's academic preparation, social skills, and ability to adapt to school routines, as well as other kindergarten program demands. The biggest concerns were in the areas of literacy and reading skills.

In their study, Wildenger and McIntyre (2012) investigated the perspectives and involvement in kindergarten transition. The study focused on parent concerns during transition, perceived needs during transition, and parent involvement in kindergarten preparation activities. Although the study suggested, on average, parents expressed less concerns about kindergarten transition than did the caregivers, the concerns expressed seem to reflect common sentiments in the kindergarten transition literature regarding the perceived importance of child socio-behavioral skills for early skills success. The two highest perceived needs of more than half of the families included the need of more information regarding kindergarten academic expectations and a need for more information on what skills their children currently had (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012).

According to McWayne, Cheung,Wright, and Hahs-Vaughn (2012), the transition from preschool to kindergarten caused young children new and diverse developmental challenges. These challenges included learning how to engage successfully with adults that were outside of their close networks. Additionally, children were faced with having to learn how to negotiate the physical and psychological space of the early childhood classroom, and learning to manage performance expectations in a school setting.

Washington State Data on Kindergarten Readiness

In 2004, Dave Pavelcheck (2005), in conjunction with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), commissioned a survey titled

Student Readiness For Kindergarten: A Survey of Kindergarten Teachers in Washington State in an effort to learn about the school readiness of Washington State children. The report included that school readiness is vitally important and that science proved that a child's early nurturing and learning experiences laid the foundation of the child's future in school and life. Furthermore, Pavelcheck (2005) argued that closing the preparation gap that existed prior to children entering the K-12 system was one of the keys to eliminating the academic achievement gap and that at the moment there was little information regarding the readiness of Washington State children entering the public school children.

The online survey was completed fall of 2004 and included a total of 398 kindergarten teachers. The survey included student preparedness perceptions, classroom characteristics, and other information about incoming students. Some of the key results were as follows: 1. Teachers reported that 44% of the incoming students in 2004 were adequately prepared, 2. A significant lack of preparedness existed across five domains (24 specific indicators), 3. Student readiness had decreased over time, 4. School system expectations of kindergarten academic progress increased, 5. Teachers reported routinely screening or assessing incoming students, 6. 46% of incoming students had prior preschool or childcare experience, and 7. Teachers received information about entering students from prior preschool teachers or childcare providers in only about 1/3 of the cases, and

student preparedness levels tended to be lower in classless with high poverty

(Pavelcheck, 2005).

The following figure represents teacher's evaluation of the preparedness of

incoming kindergarten across the following domains: Physical and Health, Social

& Emotional, Approaches to Learning, Cognition & General Knowledge,

Language and Literacy.

Figure 1 Percentage of Entering Kindergarten Students Adequately Prepared in

Specific Indicators

Figure 1
Percentage of Entering Kindergarten Students Adequately Prepared in Specific Indicators
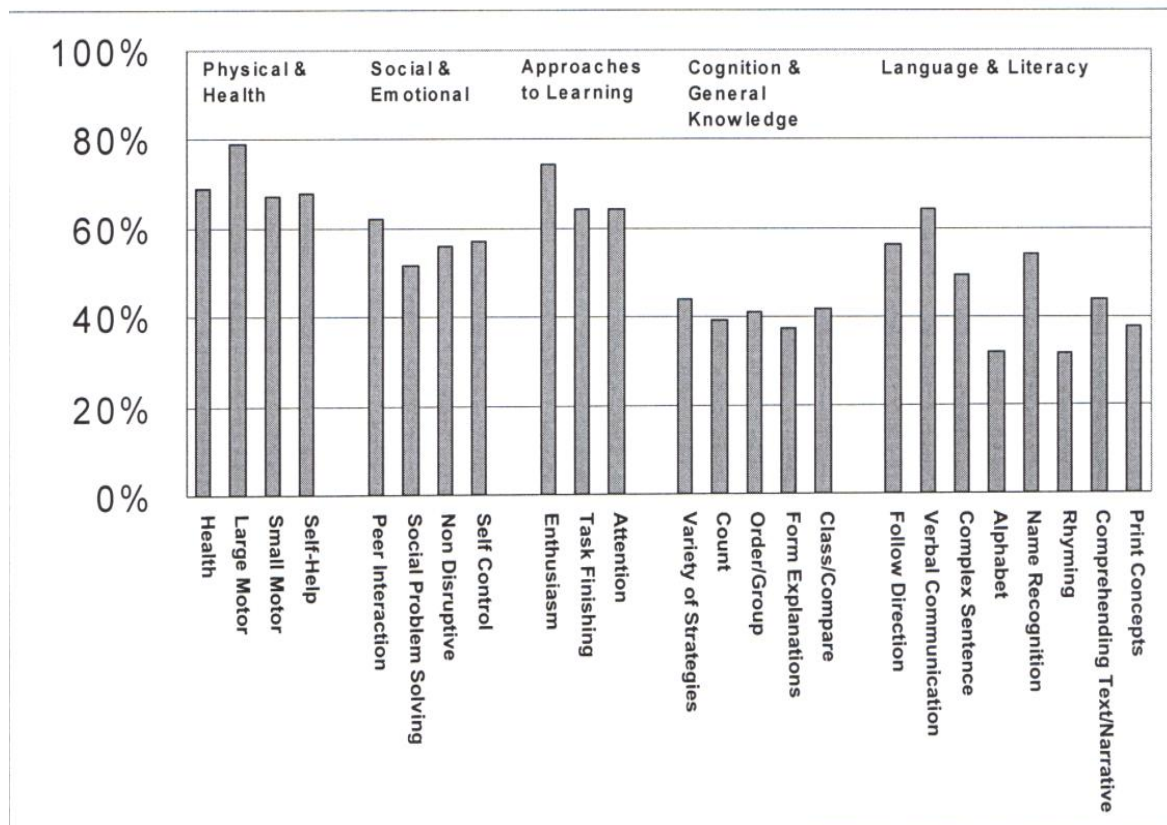
Figure 1 demonstrates that children came in more prepared in the Physical &

Health domain (averaging from 70-80%) as well as Approaches to Learning

(averaging from 65-75%). The domain with the least preparedness was Cognition

& General Knowledge (with an average of 40% across its five indicators)

(Pavelcheck, 2005).

WaKIDS Data

The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) was

developed to help ensure that children in Washington State obtained a great start

in kindergarten. WaKIDS became a state-mandated initiative for state-funded,

full-day kindergarten programs during the 2012-13 school year. WaKIDS aimed

to provide teachers and families a warming encounter prior to the child entering

kindergarten, as well as to be used as a tool for teachers to learn more about the

students' strengths and weaknesses. Teachers were to use this observational

assessment tool within the first seven weeks of school to get a good idea where

their students were at across six domains. And finally, WaKIDS, aimed at sharing

information with pre-kindergarten communities in order to help improve the

transition for students and families into kindergarten (Office of Superintendent of

Public Instruction, 2013).

The 2012-2013 school year was the second year for WaKIDS to be used by

qualifying school districts. During that school year, 21, 811 kindergarten students

were evaluated by their teachers across six domains as measured by the WaKIDS

tool. This included the participation of 102 school districts, 308 full-day

kindergarten schools (state-funded). The following areas were measured through

the teacher observational tools: physical development, social emotional

development, literacy, cognitive development, language, and math. Figure 2

demonstrates the percentages of where students entering kindergarten during the

2012-2013 school year fell among those six domains, as observed by their

teachers.

Figure 2 Percent of Entering Kindergartners by Range of Demonstrated Skills

Percent of Entering Kindergartners by Range of Demonstrated Skills
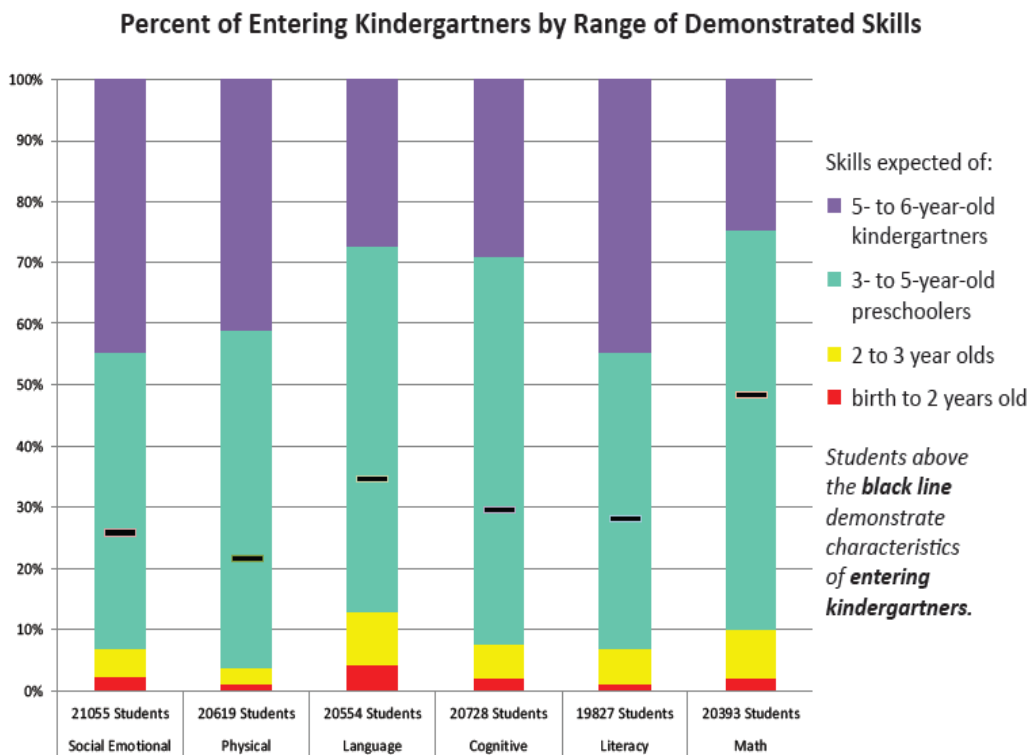
It is evident in Figure 2 that students came in with a wide range of skills and abilities. In the Language and Cognitive domains, students (about 70%) came in with skills expected of birth to 2 years old through 3-5 years old, and only about 30% of the students demonstrated the skills expected by the end of kindergarten in these two domains. On the other hand, students demonstrated more preparedness in the Literacy and Social Emotional domains, averaging at about 45% of students demonstrating end of year kindergarten skills.

Figure 3 demonstrates the percentages of students who demonstrated entering kindergarten characteristics, as measured by teachers administering the WaKIDS during the 2012-13 school year. Student percentages range from 52% in math to 79% in physical development. In descending order, the percentages represented in the chart below are the following: physical development (79%), Social Emotional Development (74%), Literacy (72%), Cognitive Development (71%), Language (66%), and Math (52%).

Figure 3 Percentages of Students Who Demonstrate Characteristics of Entering Kindergartners.
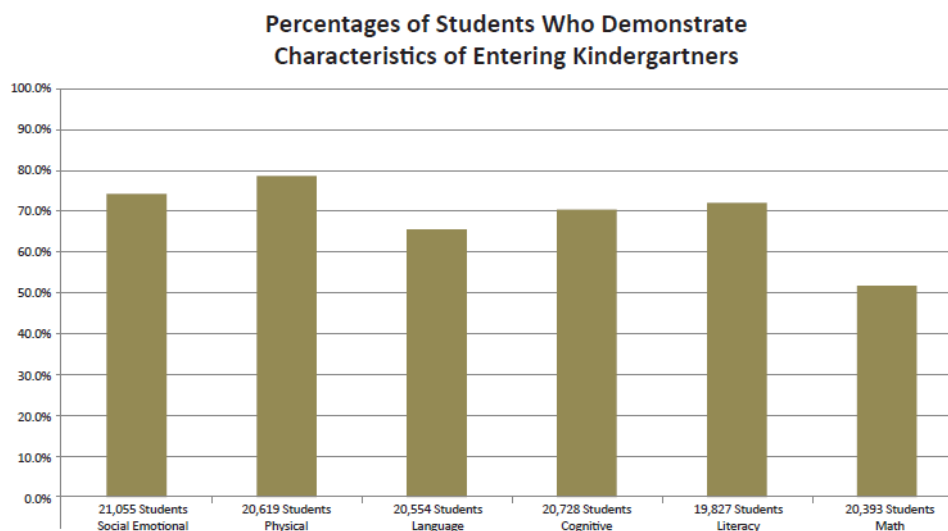
Table 3 depicts the same information as the prior figure but it is broken down by ethnicity. It is apparent that even though the figure above shows that 71% of students statewide demonstrated characteristics of entering kindergartners in cognitive development, the percentages from the table below range from 62% to 80% in cognitive development, depending on the racial group or gender.

Table 3 Percent of Students Who Demonstrate Characteristics of Kindergartners (by Ethnicity)

Percent of Students Who Demonstrate Characteristics of Entering Kindergartners							
	Number	Soc. Emo. Devel.	Physical Devel.	Language Devel.	Cognitive Devel.	Literacy	Math
Amer. Indian or Alaska Native	376–386	68%	72%	56%	62%	66%	42%
Asian	904–988	79%	80%	60%	72%	79%	65%
Black/African Amer.	1,369–1,464	73%	75%	71%	71%	79%	57%
Hispanic	7,496–8,102	70%	79%	53%	62%	59%	36%
Nat. Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	230–247	75%	81%	62%	65%	67%	44%
White	6,921–7,211	78%	79%	78%	80%	84%	66%
Two or More Races	1,139–1,202	76%	79%	75%	76%	79%	62%
Not Provided	1,392–1,470	75%	78%	62%	70%	69%	46%
Male	10,158–10,813	69%	75%	62%	68%	70%	51%
Female	9,632–10,208	80%	82%	69%	73%	75%	53%
Total		21,055	20,619	20,554	20,728	19,827	20,393

Summary

The literature demonstrated that defining kindergarten readiness has been a challenge among kindergarten teachers, early childhood programs, parents, and school administrators. While some stakeholders define and describe kindergarten readiness as specific skills a child must possess prior to entering school, others describe it as the school's responsibility to meet the needs of transitioning students and their families during this critical period for entering kindergarten students and their families (Gill, Winters, and Friedman, 2006). Furthermore, another theme that consistently emerged within the literature was that namely all stakeholders recognized the importance of preparing children across many domains, prior to entering kindergarten in order to ensure long-term school success. Additionally, stakeholders also recognized that the transition from a home setting or any school setting to formal school is a critical development milestone for children and their family. As stated by Wildenger and McIntyre (2010), "the kindergarten transition period has been labeled a 'sensitive period' necessary for later school success" (p.387).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The author solicited voluntary participation from 3 kindergarten teacher

colleagues, 2 elementary school administrators, and 22 former kindergarten

parents from the teacher researcher's classroom. The author reviewed the

questionnaire one-on-one with each participant in order to clarify any

misunderstandings about any of the questions on the forms. The author analyzed

and categorized participant responses into several themes, based on the

similarities and differences of their responses.

Methodology

A Case Study approach was taken by the author for this research. The

qualitative approach was the most appropriate method for the special project

because perceptions, beliefs, and opinions of the key stakeholders were the focus

of the project.

Participants

The three kindergarten teachers from the school building being researched

were asked to be part of the project. Out of the 3 teachers, all 3 of them took part

in the questionnaire portion of the project. Also, all 3 teacher participants agreed

for a follow up interview with the teacher researcher. Two administrators were

asked for their voluntary participation, the school building's principal and the school district's superintendent, but participation was not obtained from either of them. Finally, all of the 22 set of parents in the teacher-researcher's classrooms were invited to participate in order to increase the chances of obtaining parent participants. Out of the 22 sets of parents, 5 parents gave their consent to take part in the project. All 5 parents were considered for the special project and none of the parent names had to be drawn from a jar because the researcher obtained the desired amount of parent participants.

<u>Instruments</u>

The author sent the informed consent form attached to the questionnaire form to all the three kindergarten teachers, the school building principal, the school district superintendent, and all 22 sets of kindergarten parents from the teacher researcher's classroom. All participants received the same set of questions for the questionnaire. The questionnaire titled, Kindergarten Readiness: Perspectives of Stakeholders consisted of the following five open ended questions: 1.What does the phrase "ready for kindergarten" bring to mind? 2. What skills do you believe students should have prior to entering kindergarten? 3. What skills are you teaching or working on with your child/student to better prepare him for kindergarten? 4. What are your concerns/challenges during the kindergarten

transition period? and 5.What skills do you believe your child/student has that makes him/her ready for kindergarten?

Design

The author primarily utilized a Case Study, qualitative approach, for the research. A questionnaire was the selected methodology for obtaining the participant's beliefs and perceptions relative to kindergarten readiness.

Procedure

The researcher solicited participation from all three kindergarten teachers, the school building principal, the school district's superintendent, and all of the 22 set of parents in the teacher-researcher's classroom. The participants selected a time to meet with the author in order to go over the questions prior to them filling out the questionnaire. Additionally, participants were given a two week period to respond and return the forms to the author.

Treatment of the Data

The researcher utilized the program Microsoft Word to create the tables used for the qualitative components of the questionnaire. Additionally, the researcher made sure to store the participant's responses in a locked file cabinet where they would remain safe, untouched, and confidential. Special coding was assigned to each parent and teacher for the tables used to represent the data.

Summary

     Collecting the responses to the five focus themes pertaining to Kindergarten

Readiness, as found in the researcher's literature, was done through a

questionnaire and follow up interviews. While the data obtained from the project

provides insightful information to the school district, further study would need to

be performed before making any generalizations from this small-scale research

study.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

It is a generally held belief in the Kindergarten educational community that stakeholders hold different beliefs and perceptions about kindergarten readiness. Consequently, the preparation and expectations vary among families and children, thus creating preparation discrepancies among children. If stakeholders can work cooperatively and communicate effectively regarding kindergarten readiness, than students will be more prepared and consequently set the stage for a successful kindergarten year and subsequent educational years.

Description of the Environment

The environment in which this study was conducted was within the boundaries of the Imaginary School District, a small rural town located in Central Washington. Cubs School was the elementary school where kindergarten teachers, administrators, and kindergarten parents were invited to participate in the study.

Hypothesis/Research Question

How are key stakeholders, such a former kindergarten parents, kindergarten teachers, and elementary school administrators, defining kindergarten readiness and consequently preparing young children to enter Kindergarten?

Results of the Study

The following tables respectively demonstrate the perspectives of all
participants (parents, teachers, administrators) as outlined in the questionnaire.
KEY: P1=PARENT 1, P2=PARENT 2, P3=PARENT 3, P4=PARENT 4,
P5=PARENT 5, T1=TEACHER 1, T2=TEACHER 2, T3=TEACHER 3.

1. What does the phrase "ready for kindergarten" bring to mind?
Table 4 Defining Kindergarten Readiness

Definitions	K-Parent	K-Teacher
Child is at age of learning	P1	
Challenges of counting and learning to read	P1	
Socially/emotionally ready	P2	
Knowing colors	P2	
Distinguishing letters vs. numbers	P2	
Language skills	P2	
Socially and mentally prepared to learn and develop	P3	
Social/emotionally ready	P4	
Physically ready	P4	
Knowing basics: letters, numbers, colors, shapes	P5	
Potty trained	P5	
Know about discipline	P5	
Experiences and prior learning opportunities		T1
Be able to communicate needs, thoughts, ideas		T1
Curios about learning		T1
Eager to learn		T1
Basic literacy background: parts of a book and tell a familiar story		T1
Basic math ideas such as: counting to 10		T1
Alphabet knowledge (names/sounds)		T2
Write first name		T2
Counting to 20		T2
Write their numbers to 5		T2
Birth to 5		T3
WA State Standards		T3
Preschool experience		T3

2. Name up to ten specific skills you believe are important for children to have prior to entering kindergarten?

Table 5 Specific Skills Students Should Have Prior to Kindergarten

Skills	K-Parent	K-Teachers
Counting	P5	
Letter recognition	P5, P3, P1 X4	
Number Recognition	P5, P3	T3
Colors	P5, P3	
Shapes	P5, P3,	
Social Interaction	P5, P3	
Knowing about Rules	P5	
Following Directions	P5	T1
Discipline	P5	
Name Spelling	P5, P3	T2
Parent Information	P5	
Tying Shoes	P5, P4	
Language	P4	
Listening	P4, P1	T2
Able to Focus	P4	
Sight Words	P3	
Social-emotional	P2	
Persistence	P2	
Fine motor skills	P2	
Attention/Engagement	P2	
Sitting for long period of time	P2	T2
Excitement about learning	P2	
Sharing	P1	
Communication	P1	
Numbers 1-10	P1	
Hold pencil/crayon		T2
Carful coloring		T2
Counts to 20		T2
Writes Numbers to 5		T2
Counting 5 Objects		T2
Say letters in own name		T2
Recognize alphabet		T2
Recognize numbers to 5		T2
A few sounds in the alphabet		T2
Curiosity and Eagerness		T1
Oral Language Skills		T1

Independence		T1
Getting Along Well		T1
Count up to 10		T1
Some letter sounds		T3
Writing		T3
Experience with cutting		T3
Has been read to a lot		T3

3. What specific skill(s) did you work on or teach your child(ren) to better prepare them for Kindergarten?

Table 6 Skills Taught by Stakeholders

Skills Taught	K-Parent	K-Teacher
Letters	P5	T2, T3
Numbers	P5	T3
All of Quizzes Answers	P4	
Writing Name	P3	T2
Colors	P3	T3
Shapes	P3	T3
Expressing Himself	P2	
Using his words	P2	
Counting	P1, P2	
Letter Recognition	P2	
Reading	P2	
Social (asking for help)	P1	
Respectful	P1	
Coloring		T2
Following 1-2 step directions		T1
Listening Skills		T1
Writing		T3
Cutting		T3
Following 3 part directions		T3
Enrichment opportunities		T3

4. What are your concerns/challenges during the transition period?

Table 7 Transition Concerns/Challenges

Concerns/Challenges	K-Parent	K-Teacher
No Concerns/Challenges	P1	
Child will not get the extra help needed	P2	
Go from daycare to a school: learn vs. play	P3	
Full school day with no nap	P2	
Behavior	P1	
Coping with hyperactivity	P1	
Taking in what she is being taught	P1	
Students low on listening skills and unable to following simple directions		T1
Dependent students		T1
That children feel comfortable		T2
Students that have no experience with taking turns		T3
Students who have had no group learning experience…		T3

5. What skill(s) do you believe your child(ren) have that makes them ready for Kindergarten?

Table 8 Readiness Skills Students Have

Skills Students Have	K-Parent	K-Teacher
Letter Names/Sounds	P5	
Count past 100	P5	
Reading simple sentences	P5	
Shapes	P5	
Colors	P5	
Comparing/Contrasting	P5	
Sight Words	P5	
Spelling	P5	
Likes/Wants to learn	P3, P4	
Social	P3	
Follows directions	P3	

Language Skills	P2	
Exposure to Sight Words	P2	
Counting	P2	
Letter Recognition	P2	
Helpful, kind, shares	P1	
Getting along with others		T1
Curiosity/eagerness to learn		T1
Alphabet knowledge		T2
Number knowledge		T2
Love books		T2
Enjoy writing		T2
N/A		T2

Findings

For Table 3, Defining Kindergarten Readiness, the data demonstrates that

there are about 22 definitions by both the parent and teacher group. Some of the

responses were similar but none were identical. It is apparent that defining

kindergarten readiness consisted of the child having those skills and not the

stakeholders playing a significant role in the readiness of the child. The common

themes associated with kindergarten readiness among the parents were the social

emotional readiness of a child, as well as counting, and having some knowledge

in letters, numbers, colors, and shapes. Among the teacher group, there seemed to

be more of a variance. For the most part, teachers were more concerned with kids

being eager, and curios about learning, as well as having some letters and number

background. The theme that was common among the teacher group was the

counting; however it varied from counting to 10 to 20. For table 4 Specific Skills

Students Should Have Prior to Kindergarten, 37 specific skills were listed across

both groups. Out of those 37 skills listed, 7 were found in common among parents and teachers. The seven common skills were: letter recognition, number recognition, following directions, name spelling, listening, and sitting for a long period of time. For Table 5 Skills Taught by Stakeholders, 16 skills were listed as actually being taught by them in order to better prepare their children for kindergarten. Out of those 16 skills, the following 4 skills were found in common across all participants: letters, numbers, name writing, and counting, all of which are academic skills. For Table 6 Transition Concerns/Challenges, 8 concerns were named across all participants but none which were in common between parents and teachers. It is apparent, however, that both groups were concerned about the behavior and attentions skills of the children. Furthermore, as her concern, one parent stated, "to go from a daycare to a school where they need to learn, and not just play." For Table 7 Readiness Skills Students Have, 21 readiness skills were observed and listed between both groups. Out of those 21 skills, both teachers and parents shared that students started school with letter names and sounds as a readiness skill. It should be noted that teachers listed characteristics of a ready child, such as eagerness to learn, curiosity, love books, enjoy writing, etc. while parents named academic skills such as counting, shapes, colors, comparing, spelling, etc.

<u>Discussion</u>

The results presented in the project are comparable to similar studies that have been completed in the past and have been included in the previous literature. The author found that there are, in fact, existing varying perspectives between parents and teachers in how they define kindergarten readiness and how they prepare their children for kindergarten entry. In addition, the author found that there are some discrepancies among the teachers in their expectations of the skills students should have prior to kindergarten. For example, the teacher group viewed counting as an important readiness skill to have prior to kindergarten entry, but the quantity wasn't in agreement between them.

Unfortunately one limitation to this project was not being able to obtain the perspectives of the administrators. Because administrators play a huge role in how the school district and buildings communicate and collaborate about incoming kindergartners, their input would have given powerful insight to this study. A second limitation to this research was that it was only offered in English, which made it only available to English speaking parents. Spanish speaking parents could have provided insightful input into this research had it been provided in their language.

Summary

By conducting the special project, the author came to the affirmation that varying perspectives among teachers, among parents, and across both of these important groups exist. The author's intentions for the project were to find similarities and discrepancies between parent, teacher, and administrator perspectives in regards to kindergarten readiness. So, how are key stakeholders, such as former kindergarten parents, kindergarten teachers, and elementary school administrators defining kindergarten readiness and consequently preparing young children during the transition process towards Kindergarten? This Case Study project has demonstrated that parents and teachers define kindergarten readiness as the "sending" of the child with certain cognitive, behavior, and physical skills such as: having some letter/number background, counting, name writing, colors, shapes, eagerness and curiosity to learn, fine motor skills, listening, and following directions to name just a few. The author noticed that although some common skills were associated with readiness, parents and teachers did not have one common definition of this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Kindergarten Readiness: Perspectives of Stakeholders; what do parents, teachers, and administrators, really believe are the skills and measures to prepare young children? If leaders in early education are able to gain an insight on how teachers, parents, and administrators are defining kindergarten readiness and consequently preparing their children for Kindergarten entry, measures may be taken by stakeholders to reach some a consensus on defining kindergarten readiness and in how they are all going to take an active role in giving the students the best preparing within their reach.

Summary

Due to their young age, entering kindergarten children depend on their parents and other key stakeholders to prepare them for their educational career. The author explored parent perspectives in how they define kindergarten readiness and how they go about preparing their children prior to kindergarten entry. The five following questions were asked to key stakeholders, such as kindergarten parents, kindergarten teachers, and elementary administrators, in order to gain a better understanding: 1. What does the phrase "ready for kindergarten" bring to mind? 2. Name up to ten specific skills you believe are important for children to have prior to entering Kindergarten? 3. What specific skills did you work on or teach your

child(ren) to better prepare them for Kindergarten? 4. What are your

concerns/challenges during the transition period? And 5.What skills(s) do you

believe your child(ren) have that makes them ready for Kindergarten?

Conclusions

　　Based on the findings of this project, the researcher has gained a more

informed understanding of the current perspectives, as related to defining

kindergarten readiness and preparation practices, of a small participant group

sample. The author recognizes that both the parents and teachers are associating

kindergarten readiness skills with having a general background with the alphabet,

numbers, counting, name writing, following directions, and listening skills.

Furthermore, the author recognizes that although parents are able to list many

readiness skills they believe students should have prior to kindergarten entry, they

are only working on a few such as name writing, letter names and sounds, and

counting. In addition, as far as concerns and challenges faced by stakeholders,

they namely listed concerns associated with behavior and learning challenges

students might face going from a play based center to a more structured school

day. And finally, although parents and teachers were able to list 21 skills they

believed their children had that made them ready for Kindergarten, only one skill

was in common between parents and teachers: students came in with some

knowledge in letter name and sounds. It is apparent that this is one of the key

skills that both parents and teachers associate with kindergarten readiness and consequently work on those skills to better prepare their children.

<u>Recommendations</u>

Based on the small sample of participants included in this Case Study research, it is recommended that future research is conducted with a larger sample size to gather the insight of more parents, teachers, and administrators. Ideally, a more representative sample would include the perspectives of parents across all four kindergarten classrooms within the school building, the school building's principal, as well as the school district's superintendent. Additionally, future research may also attempt to include the perspectives of Spanish speaking parents, since this is the second spoken language by the population of families included in this project. The author did not obtain participant background such as social status, highest level of education, salary, etc. but recommends that future research includes this type of information to see if any patterns in perspectives arise in participants depending on any of these factors.

Based on the conclusions, the author recommends that teacher leaders work collaboratively with parents and administrators when it comes to preparing incoming kindergarten students and their families. Being that, at this moment, the Imaginary School District does not have a public preschool, it is imperative that school personnel take on the responsibility of reaching its incoming kindergarten families months prior to kindergarten entry, and attempt to establish more

communication and trainings/workshops for both parents and students. If this is

done, the likelihood of all stakeholder speaking the same language and students

coming in with common skills, will increase and consequently better prepare them

for long term educational success.

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APPENDIX

INFORMED CONSENT
Kindergarten Readiness: Perspectives of Stakeholders

Researcher: Marbella Aparicio
Heritage University
Department of Education
(509)910-8442
apariciomarbella@yahoo.com
March 25, 2014

Dear Participant:

Background:
I am a Master's student in the Department of Education majoring in
Organizational Leadership at Heritage University. I am conducting research under
the supervision of Professors Erich Bolz, Robert Smart, and Tony Howard.
Furthermore, I am researching the topic of Kindergarten Readiness: Perspectives
of Stakeholders. This study is not being funded by any outside agency and is a
graduation requirement for the Master's program.

Research in the area of Kindergarten Readiness has shown that a child's long term
educational success can be linked to the positive preparation they receive prior to
entering Kindergarten. Furthermore, research has also shown that key
stakeholders hold different perspectives in regards to preparing students for
Kindergarten.

Study Procedure:
There are two steps to this project. In the first step, I invite participants such as
parents of pre-k children, parents of current kindergartners, kindergarten teachers,
pre-k teachers, and administrators at the pre-k and kindergarten level. Participants
complete a questionnaire, followed by a survey that will take about 30-60 minutes
of their time. The participants will have a 1 week period to complete both of these
items.

In the second part of the study, I would like to conduct follow-up interviews with
those who are willing from the group that has filled out this questionnaire. Your

involvement in the first step doesn't obligate you to be a part of the follow-up interview.

Risks:
There are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study.

Benefits:
There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, I hope that the information obtained from this study will inform all stakeholders of similarities and discrepancies in perspectives regarding to Kindergarten Readiness, thus encouraging all involved to take the measures necessary and work collaboratively to improve Kindergarten Readiness practices.

Confidentiality
All information that you provide through your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Further, your name will not be mentioned in the thesis or in any report or publication based on this research.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Also, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Person to Contact:
Should you have any questions about the research or any related matters, please contact the researcher at 509-910-8442 or via email apariciomarbella@yahoo.com.

Consent:
By signing this consent from, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent from. I am aware that excerpts from the questionnaire and/or interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from the research. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.
Please Initial Your Level of Participation

I agree to participate in the first part of the study (questionnaire and survey).

I agree to have the in-person interview and any follow-up telephone conversations audio-recorded.

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

Participant Name:_____(Print)
Participant Signature:_____
        Date:_____

Kindergarten Readiness: Perspectives of Stakeholders
PARTICIPANT QUESTIONAIRE

Please circle your title/position:
K-Parent   K-Teacher   Pre-K Parent   Pre-K Teacher Pre-K Administrator
K-Administrator

Use the provided lined paper (you may also type your responses) to answer the following questions. You may attach any additional sheets as needed. Make sure to write the question number for each response (for ex. Question 1 I think it means….)
1. What does the phrase "ready for kindergarten" bring to mind?
2. Name up to ten specific skills you believe are important for children to have prior to entering kindergarten.
3. What specific skills did you work on or teach your child(ren) to better prepare them for kindergarten?
4. What are your concerns/challenges during the kindergarten transition period?
5. What skill(s) do you believe your child(ren) have that makes them ready for kindergarten?

Kindergarten Readiness: Perspectives of Stakeholders
Participant Survey

Please circle your answer.
1. What is your position or title?
Pre-K Teacher Pre-K Administrator   Pre-K Parent
K-Teacher   K-Administrator   K-Parent

2. How long have you been at your position(as a parent, teacher, administrator)?
1-2 years   3-5 years   6-8 years   10 or more years

3. How confident do you feel or did you feel about preparing your child(ren) for kindergarten entry?
Very Confident   Confident   Not Very Confident

4. Rank the following screening sources in <u>helping you understand the readiness of your child(ren)</u> for kindergarten. 1 being the MOST helpful and 3 being the LEAST helpful.

               WaKids by an Early Learning Provider
               WaKids by Kindergarten Teacher
               n/a
               Other Source: _____

5. Please rate <u>each source</u> in <u>helping you gain a better understanding in how to better prepare your child(ren)</u> for kindergarten, by placing a check in the correct box.

Source	Very Helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not Helpful
Pre-K Administration			
K-Administration			
Pre-K Teacher			
K-Teacher			

6. Please rank the following kindergarten readiness domains by importance **to you** in preparing your child(ren) for kindergarten. 1 being the MOST important and 6 being the LEAST important.

               Physical
               Cognitive
               Literacy
               Math
               Language
               Social-Emotional

Thank you for taking the time to complete these two forms. Please turn your forms into the Hilton Elementary office with Mrs. Burns and say they are for Ms.Aparicio or turn them in to your child's school secretary.