Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Practices in Indiana

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“Research to Reality - Advancing early education that works for all children”
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From October 1, 2006 through December 20, 2006, the Early Childhood Center, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, Indiana University-Bloomington invited approximately 4500 preschool and kindergarten teachers in Indiana to participate in an online survey of their current practices for assessing school readiness of children entering kindergarten. The purpose of the survey was to gain a snapshot of current assessment practices and to compare these practices with those recommended in the literature. Three hundred and forty-three individuals (8%) responded by completing an online survey through Survey Monkey. The participants were primarily kindergarten teachers and represented practices carried out in over half of the public school districts in Indiana (and 14 private and/or parochial schools). They respond to 30 questions asking how they assessed school readiness, what areas were assessed, who was involved, the types of decisions made, and the quality of their assessment process.

From the survey results, we found the following:

1. Approximately ¾ of the participants indicated that they were engaged in assessing school readiness for children entering kindergarten.
2. 1/3 of the participants indicated their assessment practices comprehensively looked at the whole child—assessing children in at least 5 of the 6 different skill domains we surveyed.
3. Assessment procedures most often included teacher observation, teacher checklists, and parent report. A majority of the sites surveyed also indicated the use of commercial assessment instruments.
4. Kindergarten teachers were almost always involved in the readiness assessment, but a majority of them were helped by speech and language therapists, school nurses, and other school personnel.
5. Kindergarten readiness assessment usually took place at school, either in the building as part of a spring event, or in the classroom at the beginning of school.
6. Assessment results were used for a number of purposes, including class placement decisions, recommendations to defer entry, informing families, curriculum planning and classroom instruction.
7. Kindergarten readiness assessment events and opportunities were generally accessible to all children; however, the information yielded was not always helpful, particularly when children and/or their families were non-English speakers, for children with physical or sensory disabilities, or for children who come from families that place them at risk.

We found very little research evidence to guide practitioners in their assessment of children’s readiness for kindergarten. The one exception is research evidence that discourages using the assessment results to make placement decisions or delay children’s enrollment until they are “more ready,” particularly when the results come from a single instrument or source.
1. **Who participated in the survey to assess kindergarten readiness assessment practices?**

   a. 343 individuals participated in the survey. The overwhelming majority of respondents were kindergarten teachers (82%). The pie chart outlines all positions.

   b. 77% of the survey respondents indicated they assess children's preparation or readiness for entering their kindergarten and school.

   c. Survey respondents indicated they worked in 56% of the public school districts and 14 private/parochial schools in Indiana.

2. **What class placement decisions or recommendations do the respondents make based upon the assessment results?**

   a. Respondents indicated they used the assessment results to make high stakes decisions concerning when and where children enter kindergarten just over ½ the time (54%), including recommendations to parents that children delay entry into kindergarten for a year (34%) or go into a developmental/transitional kindergarten (19%) or special education classroom (16%).

   b. The most frequent use of assessment data concerning placement decisions was to determine the need for full day programming.

   c. Approximately ¼ of the respondents (28%) indicated that the assessment results did not influence placement decisions.
3. How do the assessment results influence classroom planning and work?
   a. A majority of the respondents uses the assessment information to inform families about what they can do at home (79%) and to plan their curriculum and instruction (76%).
   b. Respondents also noted they use the assessment results to monitor children’s progress (75%) and identify the need for additional resources (74%).

4. Survey participants were asked if their kindergarten readiness assessment practices addressed skills in the following domains: Physical Health and Well-Being, Motor, Social-Emotional, Cognitive and General Knowledge, Language and Literacy, and Approaches to Learning. The results indicated that:
   a. Most of the six domains were included, ranging from Health and Physical Well-Being (96% of the time) to Approaches to Learning (74% of the time).
   b. The extent to which respondents felt they were assessing skills either adequately or very well varied more greatly across the six domains, ranging from Health and Physical Well-Being (86% of the time) to Approaches to Learning (48% of the time).
   c. Although not shown in this figure, additional analyses showed that 62% of the respondents engaged in readiness assessment practices that looked at skills in four or more of the six domains (i.e., more comprehensive assessments looking at the whole child); however, only 45% of these same respondents indicated that they assessed skills *adequately or very well*. 
5. What methods did survey respondents use to assess kindergarten readiness in children?
   a. Across all of the 6 skill domains, the following table presents the percentage of respondents using each of the six assessment methodologies.
   b. Assessment methodologies varied across the six skill domains. The following table indicates which methodologies were used by domain when respondents expressed their assessment of that domain was adequate or better. On the average, respondents generally used and were satisfied with the use of Teacher Observation and Parent Report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Methodology</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Motor</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Observation &amp; Judgment</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Report/Checklist</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-created Checklist</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Assessment Tool</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-wide Checklist</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool/Child Care Report</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   c. Respondents indicated that they used, on the average, 4 of the above assessment methodologies (M=3.87).
   d. Assessment procedures generally reflected school-wide policies and procedures (65%).

6. “Who, When, and Where” was Kindergarten Readiness Assessment conducted.
   a. The kindergarten teachers were usually involved in the school assessment procedures (96%), but they frequently had help from others.
   b. Other school personnel typically included paraeducators and Title1 teachers.
   c. The location of kindergarten readiness assessment would appear to reflect when it happens. Just over ½ of the events take place in the school building but not the classroom (56%), most likely corresponding to the spring roundup events. Another ½ of the assessments take place in the classroom (47%), likely corresponding to those school districts that conduct kindergarten readiness assessment in the fall at the beginning of the school year.
d. The majority of respondents indicated that kindergarten readiness assessment occurs at spring events (59%) prior to kindergarten (Parent Information Events, Kindergarten Roundup); almost ½ indicated that it also occurs at the beginning of school (46%).

7. How well did readiness assessment practices include and yield useful information for all children?
   a. We asked respondents to indicate how well the following groups of children were included in their general kindergarten readiness assessment events. Most respondents indicated that all children were included (M=93%). Challenges typically involved children with significant disabilities, of which 80% were included; and children whose families (93%) or themselves (90%) spoke another language.

   b. When we asked survey respondents how well the assessment results help their decision making for these groups of children, on the average 31% of them indicated very well, and another 47% indicating fairly well. According to respondents, assessment results were least helpful for: children and parents who do not speak or read English proficiently, children with physical or sensory disabilities, and children who come from families that place them at risk.

![Figure 8: When Does Assessment Occur?](#)

![Figure 9: Inclusion Certain At Risk Groups in Readiness Assessment](#)