



## INTRODUCTION

Measuring school readiness is important outcome for many grants such as Even Start, Good Start, Grow Smart, Early Reading First, Ready-to-Learn, Educational Research and Development Centers Program and Safe Schools, Healthy Students (SSHS) that are designed to stimulate early childhood development and learning. School readiness may be defined as “a quality that renders the child able to participate successfully in a regular public school curriculum” (Carlton & Winsler, p. 338).

School readiness is typically assessed by evaluating the child’s developmental and academic skills through the use of standardized group or individually administered school readiness tests. It is not surprising that this approach has been shown to poorly predict later (Ellwein, Walsh, Eads & Miller, 1991; Carlton & Winsler, 1999) academic success as it largely ignores the influence that the home and school environments play in the student’s progress in school. Mashburn and Henry (2004) have shown that kindergarten teachers are the best raters of school readiness skills. Their ratings take into account not only the child’s skills but also the child’s personal and family characteristics, and the stability and support of the home environment.

Using teacher ratings to assess school readiness is derived from a promising approach called judgment-based assessment (JBA-Lee & Iverson, 1993). JBA asks members (typically the teacher) of the child’s environment to make judgments about the child’s skills and abilities. The judge takes into account the ecology of the environment and the child’s interaction with it in making judgments about the child’s skills and abilities (Paget & Nagle, 1986).

In this study, a JBA method was employed for evaluating school readiness. The authors developed a school readiness instrument comprising a “Ready to Learn Skill Set” based on the Kansas Framework for School Readiness and the extant research literature on the skills most often associated with school readiness.

## METHOD

### Participants

The participants included fourteen teachers from eleven different schools in a medium-sized Midwestern school district. These teachers provided data on the perceived readiness of level of 450 kindergarten students in 22 different kindergarten classes (morning and afternoon classes).

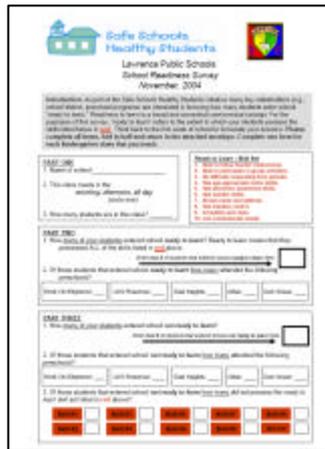
### Instrument

Items comprising the initial skill set were determined based upon review of current literature regarding school readiness. This review included examination of the position statements published by early childhood associations in which school readiness is addressed. In the fall of 2003, an initial survey was piloted using kindergarten teachers. Based on feedback from the grant partners and the teachers, revisions were made to the survey. The 2004 version presented here contained a ten-item skill set used by teachers to report the number of students in their respective classrooms who entered school “ready to learn.”

### Procedure

Each kindergarten teacher was sent one readiness survey instrument. Based on the ten skills contained in the set, teachers reported the number of students who entered school “ready to learn.” Any student not possessing all skills was categorized as “not ready.” Based on the number of students “not ready,” further data was collected on the number of students who did not possess each readiness skill.

This approach allowed for teachers to report students’ readiness for their entire class after they had already been in school for approximately two months. In addition, it allowed evaluators to sample a relatively small number of teachers (n = 14) while obtaining data on many students (n=450).

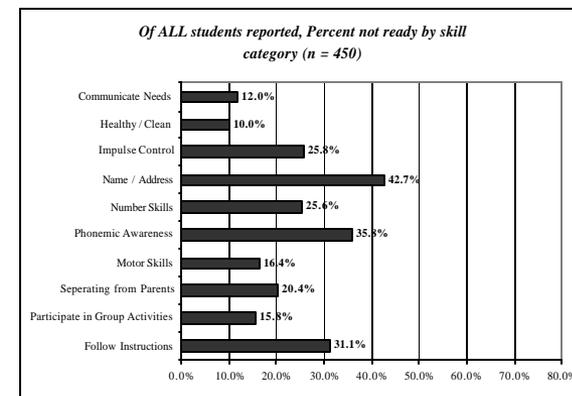


## Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the number and percent of students identified as “not ready” for kindergarten according to their classroom teachers. Further analysis of the of the ten-item skill set allowed evaluators to determine the skills most students lack in terms in “readiness” for school.

## RESULTS

Findings suggest that under this methodology of identifying “readiness,” 61.8% (n = 278) of students were reported “not ready” by their classroom teachers. Knowing name/address (42.7%), phonemic awareness (35.8%), following instructions (31.1%), impulse control (25.8%) and number skills (25.6%) were among the top five readiness skills students did not possess upon entering kindergarten as reported by classroom teachers.



## DISCUSSION

The Judgment-Based Assessment (JBA) method using teachers’ ratings to assess school readiness is an efficient way to collect data that does not require the logistically difficult and time-consuming testing of students. This approach is based on advancements in ecological psychology and provides a snapshot of the child’s skills as shown in the kindergarten classroom. Much work is still needed on the instrument including a thorough examination of the psychometric properties of the tool and bias that may be present in teacher ratings of school readiness (Mashburn & Henry, 2004).