

# School Readiness in North Carolina

Strategies for Defining, Measuring, and  
Promoting Success FOR ALL CHILDREN

Report of the  
Ready for School Goal Team  
Full Report



Submitted to the  
North Carolina School Improvement Panel  
North Carolina State Board of Education  
June 2000



Public Schools of North Carolina  
State Board of Education  
Department of Public Instruction

**SERVE**  
*Improving Learning through  
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North Carolina School Improvement Panel  
Ready for School Goal Team  
Final Report

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# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The North Carolina School Improvement Panel Ready for School Goal Team recommends the following actions by the State Board of Education. Please note that these recommendations are directed toward the State Board of Education because they convened and sponsored the Goal Team. We recognize the critical role of many other organizations in the adoption, endorsement, support, and implementation of these recommendations.

## 1. Approve the Goal Team's principles and definition of school readiness.

### School readiness is defined by

- ✓ The condition of children as they enter school, based on the following five domains of development:
  - Health and physical development
  - Social and emotional development
  - Approaches toward learning
  - Language development and communication
  - Cognition and general knowledge
- ✓ The capacity of schools to serve all kindergartners effectively (e.g., personnel, policies, practices, and physical resources).

## 2. Collaborate in a school readiness system to assess the conditions of children entering school.

- ✓ Use a modified version of the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) battery as its assessment tool.
- ✓ Use a random sample of children that would provide information at the state and county levels.
- ✓ Be adopted and directed by the North Carolina Partnership for Children.
- ✓ Rely on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and State Board of Education to be collaborative partners in conducting this assessment in schools.
- ✓ Be piloted for three years, beginning in the fall of 2000.

## 3. Adopt a school readiness system to assess schools' readiness for children.

- ✓ Schools' readiness for all children would include the following:
  - Ready teachers
  - Ready curriculum and instructional strategies
  - Ready school environments
  - Ready administrators
  - Ready families and communities

- ✓ Use a random sample of schools that would provide information at the state and county level.
- ✓ Be directed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.
- ✓ Be piloted for three years, beginning in the fall of 2000.

## 4. Adopt the Ready Schools Best Practice Guidelines and develop a plan for implementing these best practices.

### Recommendations to the State Board of Education include the following:

- ✓ Disseminate the Best Practice Guidelines to all schools with kindergarten programs.
- ✓ Examine state and local policies regarding personnel and resources to promote optimal instructional conditions for children (e.g., B-K licensure, training, planning time, class size, physical features of classrooms, curricula, and materials).
- ✓ Encourage schools to assess their own readiness to teach all children who enter kindergarten.
- ✓ Encourage schools to work with families and the early childhood community to develop transition plans for children entering kindergarten.
- ✓ Encourage state and local collaboration among the early childhood community, families, community organizations, and schools to support each piece of the school readiness puzzle.
- ✓ Develop and distribute to schools a list of recommended screening measures to identify children who might have disabilities and need further evaluation.

## 5. Modify the Kindergarten–Second Grade (K2) Assessment to align with the North Carolina definition of school readiness, provide training, and establish a timeline.

### More specific recommendations include the following:

- ✓ Expand the domains covered by the K-2 Assessment (e.g., adding items about children's social and emotional development).
- ✓ Expand the range of items included in the K-2 Assessment to ensure that the items represent competencies of children who are just entering school.
- ✓ Consider other modifications to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the tool.

## 6. Use the new public school student information system, NC WISE (North Carolina Window of Information for Student Education) to collect and summarize critical data relevant to school readiness and collect data on trajectories of change across cohorts or groups of school children.

# READY FOR SCHOOL GOAL TEAM

## Introduction

### *Are children ready for school?*

As thousands of children enter school for the first time at the end of the summer, parents, early childhood teachers, and policymakers wonder: “Are they ready? Have we given them the experiences and skills they need to be successful?” At the same time, school teachers, principals, and school boards ask, “What attributes do these children bring with them to school, and how can we best meet their needs so that they are successful throughout their school experience?”

These questions have no easy answers. Researchers, educators, policymakers, and parents have long searched for a magic formula to determine when children are ready for school: there is none. Each child is a unique individual. Development occurs unevenly across groups of children and within individual children, experiences before children enter school vary greatly, and schools vary in their readiness to receive children. All of these factors impact children’s readiness for school.

The North Carolina School Improvement Panel’s Ready for School Goal Team was established to recommend what “ready” children and “ready” schools should look like in the Tar Heel State and how we know when children and schools are ready.

## North Carolina’s Interest in School Readiness

The interest is keen in making sure that all children in North Carolina are “ready” for school when they enter kindergarten. Every parent and early childhood teacher wants this for each child, as do the education leaders in this state.

Governor James B. Hunt, Jr., State Superintendent Michael Ward, the State Board of Education, and the North Carolina School Improvement Panel are focusing major attention on this issue. “Ready for School” is a key priority in the Governor’s First in America challenge and in the State Board of Education’s strategic plan, ABCs Plus. Smart Start, a model early childhood program for the nation, illustrates the state’s commitment to ensuring that children are ready for school.

## Need for a Ready for School Goal Team

### **North Carolina established the Ready for School Goal Team for the following reasons:**

- ✍ There is no widely accepted definition of school readiness.
- ✍ There is no national system for assessing school readiness.
- ✍ There is an increased need to understand the characteristics of children as they enter school.

- ✍ There is an increased recognition of the need for schools to be ready for children.

Because readiness is a shared responsibility of families, early childhood programs, schools, and other community organizations, the Ready for School Goal Team was created to bring together the broad early childhood and public school communities to develop a common definition of school readiness and a system for assessing school readiness statewide.

This report outlines the process undertaken by the Ready for School Goal Team to develop a readiness profile and Goal Team recommendations for actions to ensure the following:

- ✍ All children in the state of North Carolina are ready to succeed in school.
- ✍ All schools are ready to support children and families in the learning process.
- ✍ North Carolina is “First in America” by 2010.

## Charge

### **The Ready for School Goal Team was charged with the following three important responsibilities:**

1. Develop a definition of school readiness that will help families, teachers, and communities support children’s optimal development and provide rich experiences to enhance the likelihood that each child will begin school ready and eager to succeed.
2. Identify assessment tools and processes that can be used to assess how well North Carolina is doing in preparing children for entering school. This information will be used for system-accountability purposes. As part of this, the Goal Team was charged to use the public school information management system (NC WISE) as a method of collecting school readiness data.
3. Develop a definition of schools’ readiness for each child. North Carolina should ensure that our public kindergartens are prepared to teach every child who enters school, regardless of where the child might be in his/her own readiness for school.

## Membership

The Goal Team has approximately 40 members representing many organizations that assist parents with the preschool to kindergarten years. These groups include private and public childcare and education programs, Head Start, Smart Start, and the public school system as well as national experts in early childhood development (see membership list in Appendix A).

## Overview of Work

Convened in August, the Goal Team has met nine times in a large committee, including a two-day retreat. Subcommittees have met numerous times between Goal Team meetings, with individuals committing hours of preparation aside from subcommittee meetings.

**Subcommittees were formed to accomplish the following:**

- ✍ Develop a definition of school readiness.
- ✍ Conduct a national scan of assessment tools and methods currently used.
- ✍ Develop recommendations for assessment measures and procedures that can be used to document the status of children when they enter kindergarten.
- ✍ Develop guidelines and recommendations to ensure that North Carolina schools are ready to receive all children.
- ✍ Work with NC WISE to ensure data needed to track readiness performance will be captured in the new information system.

## SCHOOL READINESS FRAMEWORK

### The National Context

*“All children in America should start school ready to learn.”*  
This is the first of the National Education Goals adopted in 1990 by President George Bush and the nation’s governors to serve as a catalyst for improvements in America’s schools. Over the years this goal has become known as the “readiness goal” and has received considerable attention. Governor Hunt has been instrumental in the work of the National Education Goals panel, and North Carolina has been a model for school readiness initiatives. Despite widespread agreement on the importance of school readiness, the nation has struggled to define what being “ready” for school means.

The National Education Goals Panel brought together a group of early childhood experts to provide a conceptual framework for readiness and recommend how readiness should be assessed. Based upon this group’s work, the Goals Panel adopted the following five domains of children’s early development and learning that must be considered when defining school readiness:

- ✍ Health and physical development
- ✍ Emotional well being and social competence
- ✍ Approaches to learning
- ✍ Communicative skills
- ✍ Cognition and general knowledge

**While significant in their own right, these readiness domains left the most critical question unanswered: How do we know when children are ready?**

This critical question of how we know when children are ready is at the epicenter of a clash between two sets of accountability: early childhood education/intervention and school performance.

Early childhood programs have utilized significant federal, state, and local resources to serve children before they enter school. How do we know if these programs are working? One way to answer this question is to assess children’s skills when they enter school.

Schools could use a measure of children’s readiness to help them understand the needs of individual children and provide individualized instruction to improve children’s performance.

**While the importance of documenting children’s readiness is clear, the means for doing so is not.**

The early childhood years are unique. Development during this stage is rapid and uneven. Standardized tests or assessments to measure development during the early years of a child’s life are extremely limited, and many in the early childhood community argue that standardized measures are inappropriate for children of this age.

The National Goals Panel Resource and Technical Planning Group of national experts in early childhood education and assessment outlined general principles for early childhood assessments in their 1998 *Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments* report but stopped short of recommending precisely how states or programs should assess young children. The report outlines four purposes for which assessments could be used and provides a number of warnings/cautions for designing and using assessments during the early years.

### Summary

The National Goals Panel has established five dimensions of development that contribute to children’s success in school but has not established a means for measuring readiness.

### The Foundation for the Goal Team’s Work

The intent of North Carolina’s Readiness Profile and the work of the Goal Team is to benefit children and the adults who work with them. To fulfill this intent, the following set of beliefs was developed as the foundation for the readiness profile and assessment:

- ✍ All children are ready for school and can succeed at some level.
- ✍ Readiness should be defined broadly to include community, school, family, and children’s developmental levels.
- ✍ Readiness definitions and measurements should be holistic, including multiple domains of a child’s development and taking individual and cultural differences into account.
- ✍ Data on children’s readiness should be used to design individualized curriculum activities but not to determine a child’s placement in school.
- ✍ Schools have the responsibility to be “ready” to serve all children.

These beliefs are further articulated in the preamble found in Appendix B. Based on these beliefs, the Ready for School Goal Team has worked to fulfill its charges: define readiness, recommend how to measure school readiness, and delineate how schools can be ready for all children. The following pages detail the committee's work and recommendations for these three charges.

## CHARGE 1: DEFINING SCHOOL READINESS

The Goal Team developed a definition of school readiness on the basis of the following three major activities:

- ✍ Researching national and state definitions of readiness
- ✍ Gathering input from educators, service providers, and parents in North Carolina
- ✍ Seeking advice from nationally known experts in the field of early childhood education

The following is a summary of our process of developing a definition.

### National Definitions

School readiness is a broad concept that encompasses schools, communities, and children, and their early experiences. The National Association of State Boards of Education described these four aspects of school readiness in their 1991 report on school readiness, *Caring Communities: Supporting Young Children and Families*.

Additionally, the National Education Goals Panel Goal One Task Force on School Readiness described five domains of children's development and learning that should be included in any definition of school readiness: physical health and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning (e.g., curiosity, persistence), language development, and cognition and general knowledge.

### These national definitions emphasize the following key points about school readiness:

- ✍ All children are ready to benefit from school.
- ✍ School readiness is much more than knowing ABCs and numbers.
- ✍ The conditions of children as they enter school—and their school success—will vary depending on their innate abilities, previous experiences, access to services, and schools' expectations. It is not appropriate to expect all children to have a standard set of skills when they enter school.

This national work on defining school readiness greatly influenced the team's development of North Carolina's definition. Information from other states also helped us develop the definition.

## Readiness Definitions across the 50 States

The National Center for Early Development and Learning and SERVE, as charged by the North Carolina Ready for School Goal Team, surveyed the early childhood specialists/coordinators from each State Department of Public Instruction to determine each state's efforts to define and assess school readiness. Summary findings are listed below. (A more detailed description of the study and its findings are in Appendix C.)

### Results from the survey indicated the following:

- ✍ Age is the only criteria used to determine when children can enter school, and the particular cut-off date varies widely across states. No state bases school entry decisions on children's skills.
- ✍ A few states have developed profiles or benchmarks of school readiness. Arkansas, Connecticut, Maryland, Mississippi, and West Virginia have frameworks or descriptions of "ready" children.

The state scan highlighted for us the fact that there is no definition of school readiness that is used consistently across the country. The Goal Team needed to develop its own definition.

## Definition Development Process

The Ready for School Goal Team used a multi-step process to develop its definition of school readiness.

- ✍ The Goal Team discussed and agreed upon the five domains of children's development delineated by the National Education Goals Panel, with slight modifications in terminology.
- ✍ Within each domain, the Goal Team listed key characteristics and skills.
- ✍ Key constituents within North Carolina reviewed the draft domain descriptions. The Goal Team organized five focus groups across the state to solicit feedback. Some task force members also met with other groups separately to discuss the draft. A list of North Carolina reviewers is included in Appendix D.
- ✍ National experts reviewed the draft domain descriptions. The Goal Team identified the following areas of expertise and received reviews from at least one person within each area: health, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language and literacy, cognition, language and cultural diversity, and young children with disabilities. A list of the national experts and their area(s) of expertise is included in Appendix E.
- ✍ The Goal Team revised the domain descriptions and developed a definition based on feedback from national experts and in-state constituents.

## Defining School Readiness in North Carolina: The School Readiness Puzzle

School readiness is a puzzle with two pieces:

1. The condition of children when they enter school.



2. The capacity of schools to educate all children, whatever each child's condition may be.



The readiness puzzle can only be “solved” if the two pieces fit together. We can improve the fit by enhancing both the condition of children as they enter school and the capacity of schools to educate the full range of children who attend them. Each piece of the puzzle is important in the Ready for School Goal Team definition of school readiness. The condition of children as they enter schools, schools’ capacity to educate all children, and the supports to improve both pieces of the readiness puzzle are described in this definition.

School readiness as described here should not be confused with eligibility for school. All children who meet the legal age requirement are eligible—indeed, they are legally entitled—to enter kindergarten.

### Condition of Children

When we think of the condition of children as they enter school, we must consider children’s development and learning in the following five areas:

*Health and physical development* includes children’s physical development (for example, rate of growth), health status (for example, ability to see and hear), and physical abilities (for example, ability to move around the environment, assisted or unassisted).

*Social and emotional development* includes children’s feelings about themselves and others, ability to form relationships, interest in and skills needed to maintain positive relationships with adults and children, ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of others, and skills needed to get along well in a group setting (for example, conflict resolution skills).

*Approaches toward learning* includes curiosity, enjoyment of learning, confidence, creativity, attention to task, reflection, and interests.



*Language development and communication* includes verbal and nonverbal skills to convey and understand others’ meaning (for example, speaks clearly or uses a nonverbal system of communication) as well as early literacy skills (for example, awareness of print, understanding that writing has meaning). These skills and competencies apply to all languages; we should expect children who do not speak English in the home to demonstrate these skills in their primary language before they do so in English.

*Cognition and general knowledge* includes basic knowledge about the world (for example, knows own name, knows basic science concepts) and other cognitive competencies like early mathematical skills (for example, knowledge of numbers, shapes, and simple patterns), and basic problem-solving skills (for example, understanding of similarities and differences).

These five areas are linked together. Often, development in one area affects development in another. Thus, no single area adequately represents a child’s condition of readiness as he or she enters school.

Children’s development varies widely at age five. Thus, we should not expect all children to reach a common “standard” of readiness. Children from various cultures and with various experiences will express their competencies differently and should be expected to show different patterns of development. The same is true for children with disabilities.

### Capacity of Schools

All children will have an opportunity to enhance their skills, knowledge, and abilities by participating in classrooms that are sensitive to community values, recognize individual differences, reinforce and extend children’s strengths, and assist them in overcoming their difficulties.



Schools are responsible for accepting and addressing the learning needs of all children who are old enough to enter kindergarten. Teachers and administrators must have the knowledge, resources, and supports to ensure that they are ready to teach children who come to school with a broad range of skills.

### The Goal Team identified the following four cornerstones of Ready Schools:

- ✓ Knowledge of growth and development of typically and atypically developing children
- ✓ Knowledge of the strengths, interests, and needs of each child

- ✍ Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which each child and family lives
- ✍ Ability to translate developmental knowledge into developmentally appropriate practices

Additionally, teachers and administrators in ready schools establish a nurturing atmosphere, use a curriculum that provides meaningful contexts for learning and addresses the five areas of development described above, and support practices that address the unique ways in which young children learn. Schools also build strong, positive relationships with families and partner with preschool teachers, community programs, and higher education to ensure that they are able to educate all children.

### Supports for School Readiness

Each of the two pieces of the readiness puzzle—children and schools—is supported by families and communities. The condition of children at school entry depends upon their early experiences. The people and environments in children’s lives shape their readiness for school. Parents are children’s first and most important teachers. The child’s relationship with his/her parents forms the critical foundation for lifelong learning. Parents should have access to information and support in their role. With so many working parents, many children participate in some type of out-of-home early care and education before entering kindergarten. All children should have access to high-quality early care and education programs that help prepare them for school. Communities are responsible for providing the health care, early care and education, training, and other support services young children and their families need.

The capacity of schools to educate all children also depends on their collaboration with families and communities to obtain supports such as professional development, physical facilities, materials, and equipment.

The school readiness puzzle is depicted in the figure below. Children and schools are the two pieces of the puzzle, and they are supported by communities and families.



### North Carolina’s Brief Definition of School Readiness

#### School readiness is defined by

- ✍ The condition of children when they enter school, based on the following five domains of development:
  - Health and physical development
  - Social and emotional development

- Approaches toward learning
- Language development and communication
- Cognition and general knowledge
- ✍ The capacity of schools to serve all children effectively (e.g., personnel, policies, practices, facilities, materials)

### Description of the Ideal Condition of Children as They Enter School

A more detailed description of the ideal condition of children as they enter school is included in Appendix F of this report. This document describes in more detail each of the five areas of development and learning that are listed in our definition.

### Recommendations

The Goal Team recommends that this school readiness definition be officially approved as North Carolina’s definition of school readiness.

## CHARGE 2: ASSESSING SCHOOL READINESS IN NORTH CAROLINA

### Section Overview

This section of the report covers two areas related to assessing school readiness. First, we describe the Goal Team’s school readiness assessment proposal for collecting data on the condition of children and the readiness of schools. Second, we describe the data management system needed to summarize and aggregate the state school readiness data.



## School Readiness Assessment Proposal

The Goal Team recommends implementing a statewide school readiness assessment system to obtain information about each piece of the readiness puzzle: the condition of children as they enter school and the capacity of schools to educate all children. This system should provide state- and county-level data on school readiness. The assessment for each piece (children and schools) will be discussed separately in the following sections.

### Assessing Children’s School Readiness

**Tasks and Teachings:** The committee’s recommendations regarding assessing children’s school readiness are based on the knowledge gained from numerous activities. The committee examined what other states are doing in defining and assessing school readiness, reviewed national studies of entering kindergartners, reviewed instruments available for assessing readiness, and met with state and national experts in readiness assessment.



#### Specifically, the Goal Team did the following:

- ✓ Working with the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) and SERVE, we surveyed early childhood specialists/coordinators in Departments of Education in all 50 states to learn about current school readiness definitions and assessments.
- ✓ Working with SERVE, we reviewed the major instruments available nationally and a variety of locally developed instruments used in assessing children as they enter school.
- ✓ We met with representatives from three states (Georgia, Maryland, and Ohio) actively engaged in statewide readiness assessment activities.
- ✓ With support from UNC General Administration, we met with a selected group of national experts on readiness assessment.

#### These activities taught us several important lessons:

School readiness should not be confused with eligibility for school. All children who meet the legal age requirement are eligible to attend public kindergarten. Assessing the conditions of children as they enter school can provide important descriptive information, but that information should *not* be used to make (or help make) school entry decisions.

Most states report that schools assess children as they enter school, primarily for the purpose of guiding kindergarten instruction and/or screening for potential disabilities. In most states, local schools select their own assessment tools.

No state currently conducts a statewide assessment of the conditions of children as they enter school, although at least 13 states are currently studying the issue or piloting assessment strategies.

We should be clear about our primary purposes (i.e., interests) in assessing children as they enter school because we will need different assessment strategies for each purpose.

We need to include safeguards in our assessment system to ensure that children benefit from, and are not harmed by, the assessment system.

### Different Assessment Purposes

There are two major purposes for assessing children as they come to school:

1. **Accountability:** Assessment of children as they enter kindergarten provides the best source of data for examining the impact of early experiences provided by families, early child care and education programs (e.g., childcare, Head Start and prekindergarten), and communities on children’s preparedness for school.
2. **Instruction:** Assessment of children early in kindergarten provides an important source of information to help teachers effectively instruct each child in their class.

Recommended principles for early childhood assessments strongly discourage using one assessment for multiple purposes unless it is designed to do so. Because no current assessment of five-year-olds is designed to serve both accountability and instructional purposes, the committee had to design a separate assessment strategy for each purpose. This approach was confirmed in our discussions with the group of national experts that included developers of nationally recognized assessments. In this section of the report, we make recommendations about the accountability function of assessing children as they enter school. Recommendations regarding assessing children for instructional purposes are in the Ready Schools section of this report.

When the committee began working on a strategy to assess the condition of children, we knew we could not rely on the paper-and-pencil tests that are often used for accountability testing programs in grades three and above. (Five-year-old children may not be able to hold a pencil correctly, let alone take a paper-and-pencil test.) Parent and teacher ratings can be a valid source of information about some abilities and behaviors of young children (e.g., social skills) and must be an integral part of any assessment system. Thus, the committee wanted to select an assessment strategy that included parent and teacher ratings as well as information from the children themselves that was not gathered through paper-and-pencil means.

None of the states we examined are using assessments for the same purpose that the North Carolina Task Force was asked to investigate—specifically, statewide and community accountability for the well being of children birth to age five. Many states are adopting systems for assessing kindergarten readiness for instructional purposes. Because no state provided a good model, we looked for national assessment efforts that had accountability goals similar to ours. Two national studies were designed to provide such accountability

information: the national Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey-Kindergarten cohort (ECLS-K) and the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES). We examined these studies carefully and met with key people working on both projects. After this review, we decided that the ECLS-K assessment battery was less relevant to North Carolina's interests because the measures were chosen to assess growth in children's abilities from kindergarten through third grade—not to assess cohorts of kindergartners across time. The FACES battery, however, was developed for the specific purpose of assessing the skills of children entering kindergarten.

## Battery for Assessing the Condition of Children as They Enter School

**We recommend that the FACES battery be adopted as part of North Carolina's prototype school readiness assessment, with modifications and additions to meet the specific needs of North Carolina.**

FACES is being used by Westat, Inc. in its national assessment of Head Start. The FACES battery was developed for the purpose of program accountability to determine if Head Start is meeting its objectives. The FACES battery consists of individual assessments and observations of children, interviews with parents and teachers, and observations of classrooms. It has been used with over 4,000 randomly selected parents and children from a randomly selected national sample of 40 programs. It has been used successfully with children who speak Spanish as their primary language and children with disabilities. The child assessment can be completed in approximately 30 minutes.

The FACES battery was developed with extensive input from a number of early childhood experts. The Principal Investigator of FACES, Dr. Nick Zill, is also a lead investigator on the ECLS-K, another study of a large nationally representative sample of kindergartners. A substantial amount of work has gone into the planning, development, and implementation of the FACES battery. The battery provides a comprehensive description of five-year-old children and their families that can be used for accountability monitoring.

A summary table of the FACES battery and proposed North Carolina adaptations is included in Appendix G.

## Data Collection Procedures

### Who?

Parents, children, and kindergarten teachers will provide information for the North Carolina School Readiness Assessment.

- Parents of all entering kindergartners will complete a brief information sheet about their child's health, early care and education experiences, interests, etc. This sheet will be developed with input from local schools to minimize overlap between this new form and existing kindergarten registration forms. The information will be entered into the NC WISE database.

- A sample of **kindergarten children** will complete the FACES measures in a one-on-one setting with a trained, independent assessor. Children will be sampled from the total population of entering kindergartners, using procedures to ensure that children with disabilities and children who do not speak English as their primary language are included in the sample. Collecting information from a sample of children, rather than from all children, will minimize the likelihood that the information will be used inappropriately to harm children, will ensure objective and accurate results, and will be a more cost-efficient method of gathering data on the population of entering kindergartners. We are currently consulting with a sampling expert to estimate the size of the sample needed to make statewide and county-level statements.
- The **kindergarten teachers** of children in the sample will complete rating scales about children's social skills and approaches toward learning. The data collection burden for teachers will be minimized by asking them to complete measures on only some domains of interest and only for the children included in the sample.

### When?

**Parents** will complete the information sheet at kindergarten registration.

All child assessments and teacher ratings will be gathered during the first few months of school. To ensure that the sample is non-biased and representative of the population of entering kindergartners, children must be selected once they are in school rather than before they enter school. If the sample of children is selected before school begins, many children likely will be excluded (e.g., children who are not participating in an early care and education program, children from low-income families, children whose families are on vacation). This exclusion of children would make the sample less representative of the population. The sample must be representative of the population of kindergartners to yield useful information to the public and policymakers.

### Where?

All information will be collected at the schools that house kindergarten programs.

### Data Collectors?

Trained, independent assessors will conduct the one-on-one FACES child assessments. Training will ensure that measures are administered similarly across children and counties and that the results will be valid. The public needs to be confident in the data when monitoring their own county year-to-year or when comparing their county's data to state data. Using independent assessors instead of kindergarten teachers will also minimize the data collection burden among teachers. Accountability assessment is high-stakes assessment that could affect

teachers. To the extent that kindergarten teachers might be biased (positively or negatively) in their views of children's skills and abilities, an independent assessor who is less invested in the outcome of the assessment will yield more valid information. It might be possible to recruit college students to conduct these child assessments as part of their education. It will be necessary for these trained independent assessors to spend time in the kindergarten classrooms where children are being assessed so the children are somewhat familiar with the tester before the assessment is administered.

## Special Considerations When Assessing Children

A school readiness assessment system should represent all children, including those who do not speak English as their primary language and those with disabilities. The school readiness assessment battery and data collection procedures should be adapted to adequately assess the competencies of these children who are included in the sample.

## Assessing Schools' Readiness for Children

To assess school readiness in North Carolina, it is just as important to assess schools' readiness for children as it is to assess children's readiness for school. The statewide school readiness assessment system will include data about the capacity of schools to educate all children who enter kindergarten. This assessment will gather from school administrators information such as average kindergarten class size and percentage of kindergarten teachers with a B-K license. Kindergarten teachers will provide information such as professional development opportunities and availability and variety of classroom materials. Goal Team members, local school administrators, kindergarten teachers, and others will work together to develop tools for the assessment of schools' readiness.



## Recommendations

### The Goal Team recommends that

- ✍ State financial and personnel resources be allocated to implement a state school readiness assessment system that describes the conditions of children as they enter school and the capacity of schools to educate all children.
- ✍ The North Carolina Partnership for Children be responsible for conducting the assessment of the conditions of children as they enter school, with the cooperation from local schools and the support of the State Board of Education and Department of Public Instruction. We are recommending the North Carolina Partnership for Children because they have been designated as the lead organization for ensuring that all children are ready for school.

- ✍ The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction be responsible for conducting the assessment of schools' readiness for children.
- ✍ The FACES battery be approved as the basis for the child component of the school readiness assessment system and that it be completed near the beginning of kindergarten. Adaptations to the FACES will most likely need to be made to address North Carolina's five domains of children's development and learning.
- ✍ Persons with expertise in the areas of special education and assessment of children from varying cultural/linguistic backgrounds help adapt the FACES assessment battery to ensure that the battery accommodates the needs of special populations (e.g., children with disabilities and children who speak English as a second language).
- ✍ A sample of children, not all children, be included in the assessment for conditions of children as they enter school.
- ✍ The sample of children be large enough to allow us to describe adequately children across the state and to compare children across the 100 counties. We also recommend that the sample not be large enough to compare individual schools or programs at the county level. However, the system could be designed to collect data from a larger sample to provide additional county-level information. This accommodation would require county-level funding.
- ✍ The state sample of children be large enough and selected purposefully to allow reporting on a program-by-program basis (e.g., Head Start, public preschool, community childcare programs).
- ✍ A pilot study of the school readiness assessment system be conducted in the fall of 2000.
- ✍ The tools for assessing schools' readiness be developed as part of the pilot study.
- ✍ Data be collected for a trial period of at least three years.
- ✍ The information management system of the public schools (NC WISE) currently being developed be used to collect and summarize critical data relevant to school readiness and collect data on trajectories of change across cohorts or groups of school children.
- ✍ The Ready for Schools Goal Team be continued as an advisory group for implementation of the readiness assessment system.

## Use of NC WISE to Manage Assessment Data

### Data Management Needs

When we begin collecting information for the Ready for School assessment, it will need to be systematically entered into a central place in order to summarize it within and across counties. The ideal information management system would

handle child-level, family-level, school-level, and even community-level data and allow linkages between information on preschool children and data collected about those children from K-12. When aggregate scores are viewed over years, the data could help a community gauge whether their early childhood quality initiatives are having an effect or, perhaps, whether some efforts are more effective for specific sub-groups of children. The new student information system being implemented by the public schools of North Carolina, NC WISE is, in theory, ideally suited to handle the type and amount of new information that will be collected as part of the recommended Ready for School measurement.

## NC WISE Description

Through discussion with experts in the Office of Student Information and Accountability (the office responsible for overseeing the NC WISE system), the Goal Team learned that the NC WISE database will be able to include almost any counted, scored, or coded information on entering kindergartners or preschool children and their families. For example, in compliance with federal law concerning documentation about preschool children with special needs, a component of NC WISE allows entry of data concerning these children's development and the types of services they are receiving. A school system should thus be able to include similar information on other, non-special-needs preschool children in their community. The NC WISE database could also include data on teachers and schools or be linked to other databases that include such data (i.e., DPI teacher licensing database).

## Data Management Issues to Consider

Optimism about documenting different components of kindergarten readiness through NC WISE should be tempered, however, by three points of realism.

- First, NC WISE is new, and school systems will just begin using it in the years 2000-2002. Three school systems (with 18 sites) and DPI are piloting NC WISE in the 1999-2000 school year, and a state data warehouse is being developed where all data will ultimately be stored. About one-third of North Carolina's school systems will convert to NC WISE in each of the next three years, with every system on board by 2003. An advantage of the system's being new is that modifications to accommodate preschool and kindergarten entry data might be more readily made during this time while the system is being developed and as system modifications are made each year in response to problems that are discovered during the roll-out phase. Communication should be frequent between the Ready for School Goal Team and the NC WISE development team.

- Second, we must be realistic about the data we expect the NC WISE system to handle and cognizant of the data entry ability of the variety of people who enter data into NC WISE. Data entry must be a simple, straightforward process that requires minimal training.
- Third, the following concerns related to security and confidentiality will need to be resolved: Who has access to the data? Do we need parental permission to enter preschoolers' data? How long will the data remain in the system? Will preschool data become part of the child's permanent record? Existing rules and procedures address, in theory, these types of security concerns, but maintaining the integrity of the day-to-day operations of such an ambitious new endeavor will clearly be challenging. Because the NC WISE system is new and open to changes, however, now is the perfect time for those interested in having relevant preschool data included in NC WISE to be a part of the decision-making group(s).

## Recommendations

The Goal Team recommends that the NC WISE system be used to collect and store data related to school readiness indicators and that this effort be coordinated with the school readiness assessment system described in this report.

We recommend that the readiness assessment system pilot study be coordinated with the NC WISE system pilot study. This will allow us to determine any adaptations needed to include the school readiness assessment information in the NC WISE system.

We also recommend a trial period of at least three years before any school readiness data are officially reported from the NC WISE system. Expectations of data reports on child, family, and school readiness assessments will be high. Analysts producing such reports will be dealing with complex issues, both substantive and logistical. North Carolina leaders should not expect reportable data within a year or two. We think it is worth noting that Ohio, the state with one of the most sophisticated, computerized readiness assessment systems, allowed three years before the first report on readiness was expected. Data on 10,000 children were collected in the first year, 20,000 in the second year, and 40,000 in 1999—after three years of implementation, they are 40 percent of the way to their goal of 100,000 children per year. (Ohio's population is similar to North Carolina's.)

# CHARGE 3: SCHOOLS' READINESS FOR ALL CHILDREN: BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR NORTH CAROLINA

## Are All Schools Ready for All Children?

This is a question of equal importance for the Goal Team. Children come to schools with a wide variety of experiences, skills, and attitudes. The overarching question is whether schools are prepared to provide a learning environment that meets the needs of each child so that children can be successful in school.

The Goal Team formed a subcommittee with the charge of developing a profile of schools that are ready to receive all children. The "Schools' Readiness for All Children" subcommittee gleaned from many sources what is deemed philosophically sound and reflective of the national early childhood research knowledge-base to develop strategies and standards for parents, schools, and community leaders to consider to better prepare our schools to receive our children. A full report from this committee is included in Appendix H. This attached report describes best practices that all North Carolina schools can strive to achieve as they prepare to teach all children entering kindergarten.

## Cornerstones of Ready Schools

"It is the responsibility of schools to meet the needs of children as they enter and to provide whatever services are needed in the least restrictive environment to help each child reach his or her potential" (NAEYC, Position Statement on School Readiness, revised, 1995).

**The Ready Schools subcommittee identified four cornerstones that ready schools should take into account as they prepare to receive children:**

1. Knowledge of growth and development of typically and atypically developing children
2. Knowledge of the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child
3. Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which each child and family lives
4. The ability to translate developmental knowledge into developmentally appropriate practices

## Features of Ready Schools

**Building upon these four cornerstones, the subcommittee identified the following additional key features of ready schools:**

- ✓ **Ready Teachers** who are knowledgeable of basic child development principles, "tuned in" to individual children's interests and abilities, able to provide a

classroom environment where children are actively involved in learning activities, and working in partnership with families and other adults in the child's world

- ✓ **Ready School Environments** where children are nurtured through ongoing relationships with caring adults, have opportunities to learn through play and "hands-on" experiences with a variety of materials, and experience predictable routines and schedules
- ✓ **Ready Curriculum and Instruction Strategies** that provide meaningful learning experiences to build upon children's individual abilities and interests and that are grounded in developmentally appropriate practices
- ✓ **Ready Administrators** who are knowledgeable of child development and developmentally appropriate practices, support teachers in their role, nurture family involvement, and put the needs of children first

## Transitions to Ready Schools

Special attention must be paid to the period of transition when children first enter school. As children and families move from home, preschool, or other types of early childhood programs, the child's first experiences in kindergarten set the stage for his or her success in school. A smooth transition that provides as much continuity for children as possible is the goal.

**The Ready Schools subcommittee developed a description of the following elements of successful transitions:\***

- ✓ Community-wide planning that involves families, childcare and other early childhood providers, school teachers and administrators, and a variety of community service agencies
- ✓ Transition activities, such as visits to the school, planned cooperatively for children by their families, care providers, teachers, and community service providers
- ✓ Transition policies, programs, and practices that reflect the diversity and uniqueness of children, their families, and the community
- ✓ Developmentally appropriate practices in all programs of care and education from birth to age eight to ensure continuity in assessment, curriculum, and instruction
- ✓ Coordinated staff development to bring early childhood providers and kindergarten teachers together
- ✓ Shared decision making that involves families as active partners in their children's care and education
- ✓ Written community transition agreements that are created jointly between schools and service providers and are reviewed and revised as ongoing transition efforts are expanded

- ✍ Ongoing leadership and advocacy for effective transition practices by designating Transition Coordinators and representatives of each participating program/group with specific responsibilities for the community's transition plan

*\* Adapted from It's a Big Step (1995), Bridging Early Services Transition Taskforce, Coordinating Council on Early Childhood Developmental Services, Kansas State Board of Education*

### **Screening and Assessment for Instructional Purposes**

Screenings for potential disabilities and assessments for instructional purposes are another feature of schools that are ready to meet the needs of all children.

#### **Screenings**

It is essential that schools have reliable and valid screening instruments to identify children with disabilities early in their school careers. These screenings identify children who need further evaluation. This early detection is essential to increasing the likelihood that children with disabilities will receive special services quickly.

Currently, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction requires that all schools screen children for potential disabilities. However, school districts use a myriad of screening tools, ranging from locally designed instruments with no documented reliability or validity to commercially available tools that vary widely in quality.

#### **Assessment for Instructional Purposes**

Understanding children's skills and abilities is important for teachers as they plan curriculum activities to meet the needs of children. This assessment for instructional purposes should not be limited to reading and math, but should provide a broad picture of the child's development and learning (i.e., should include information about each of the five domains). The teacher can then use this information to plan activities that will help children develop skills they may not have when they enter school.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has developed two instructional assessment tools for kindergarten through second grade, known as the K-2 Assessment. The first tool assesses children's literacy skills, and the second tool assesses mathematics skills. The instrument provides information for teachers as they plan curriculum activities and document children's progress in these areas over time. However, the K-2 Assessment addresses only two of the five domains and includes few items to assess children's readiness at the time they enter kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers need an instructional assessment tool that documents children's levels of readiness across all five domains at the time they enter school. The K-2 Assessment could be modified to fit these purposes.

#### **Assessing Schools' Readiness for Children**

Schools can conduct self-assessments of their readiness for children. The Ready Schools subcommittee developed the Ready School Inventory as a self-assessment tool for schools to use. This inventory is included in Appendix I.

## **Ready Schools Summary**

It takes families, teachers, schools, and communities working together to help children experience success in school. Teachers need accurate information about their children to plan curricular activities to meet children's individual needs. No one piece of the puzzle is sufficient to ensure success.

## **Recommendations**

In order for schools to be ready to receive all children, the Ready for School Goal Team recommends the following:

1. Data on schools' readiness to educate all kindergartners be collected as part of the state school readiness assessment system.
2. The Department of Public Instruction be responsible for conducting the assessment of schools' readiness for children.
3. The Department of Public Instruction encourage schools to self-assess their readiness to educate all children. The Ready School Inventory should be disseminated to all elementary schools to ensure that every school in North Carolina is aware of the best practices for schools to successfully serve all children entering kindergarten. Staff development activities will also be needed.
4. The Department of Public Instruction encourage schools to work with the early childhood community, families, and community agencies to develop transition plans to ensure a coordinated effort to support children moving into kindergarten.
5. The State Board of Education and local boards of education examine policies regarding personnel and other resources to promote optimum instructional conditions of children entering kindergarten, including the following:
  - Qualifications of teachers working in kindergarten classrooms, including requirements for Birth to Kindergarten (B-K) licensure for kindergarten teachers
  - Ongoing staff development opportunities for teachers
  - Improved class sizes and student-to-teacher ratios
  - Time allocated for teachers to plan, conduct home visits, etc.
  - Improved physical features of classrooms such as size, availability of in-class sinks and toilets for children, and developmentally appropriate outdoor playground/learning areas
  - Developmentally appropriate and individualized curricula and classroom activities
6. State Board of Education, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and local boards of education work with other strategic partners, such as private school systems, Head Start, and preschool programs, to implement policies and procedures that support best practices for all kindergarten children.

7. The Department of Public Instruction encourage schools to use screening measures that are appropriate for the intended purpose and have demonstrated reliability and validity. They can do this by providing a list of recommended screening measures to all school districts.
8. The Department of Public Instruction modify the K-2 Assessment tool, a tool to help teachers improve their instruction, to cover additional domains of children's early development and learning. These modifications can best be described in the following ways:
  - **Vertical Extension** of the measure downward includes items that will assess the competencies of children who enter kindergarten below age-level on various domains.
  - **Horizontal Extension** of the measure provides a more holistic assessment of children across the domains identified by the Ready for School Goal Team. The K-2 Assessment should be modified to include, at minimum, assessment of the social/emotional domain.

Consideration for the feasibility of administering the modified K-2 Assessment should be paramount in planning for these future modifications. The modifications should be completed during the three-year pilot phase of the school readiness assessment system.

9. The Department of Public Instruction provide professional development opportunities to ensure appropriate administration of the modified K-2 Assessment.
10. The State Board of Education continue the Ready for School Goal Team as an advisory group for implementation of these Ready Schools recommendations.

## FUNDING STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Short-term and long-term funding will be required to implement the Goal Team recommendations. For the Ready for School Assessment, funding for the pilot phase could be secured from early childhood funding sources. Full implementation of the recommendations will require allocations from the General Assembly or significant support from private sources such as foundations.

Funding for the pilot, or short-term start-up phase, of the Ready Schools recommendations could be secured from Goals 2000, other education funds, or private sources. Significant funding from the Public School Fund will be required to ensure that all schools implement best practices for kindergarten over the long-term. Funds for modifying the K-2 Assessment could be provided by the Department of Public Instruction. Incorporating school readiness data into the NC WISE system can be accomplished for minimal cost if completed in the design phase.

## CONCLUSIONS

School readiness includes two key pieces: the condition of children as they enter school and the capacity of schools to educate all kindergartners. Each of these pieces requires strong support from families, the early childhood community, public schools, and other community agencies. In this report, the Goal Team has articulated the ideal characteristics of children and schools as pieces of the readiness puzzle and proposed a comprehensive school readiness assessment system to provide information about school readiness at the state as well as county level. We have delineated several short-term and long-term recommendations for assessing school readiness, supporting the optimal development of children, and enhancing the capacity of schools to receive and educate kindergartners. Appendix J assembles each of these ideas and recommendations into a framework, depicting the major components of the Goal Team's work and the recommendations for future activities.

Implementing these recommendations will require substantial resources. However, we must make these investments to ensure that we provide the best education possible during both the early childhood and public school years. Families, early childhood providers, and schools working together can help ensure children in North Carolina are ready for school and schools are ready for children.

APPENDIX A  
Ready for School Goal Team  
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## APPENDIX B Ready for School Goal Team Preamble

*North Carolina has accepted the challenge of increasing the readiness of all children for school and to improve the readiness of schools for all children. The fundamental foundation for all of our efforts toward these goals is set forth below.*

### **WE BELIEVE**

1. Each child can succeed in school and reach his/her potential.
2. The needs of the children come first.
3. Parent(s)/guardian(s) are the child's first and most important teachers and are valued partners with teachers and caregivers throughout the child's education.
4. Schools should be prepared to respond to each child's strengths and needs.
5. The readiness of a child should be viewed from a holistic perspective.
6. Individual and cultural differences are to be valued and supported.
7. A variety of developmentally appropriate assessment tools/approaches that encompass a range of readiness domains/elements is needed.
8. Communication, training, resources, and support are critical areas for successful achievement of "ready kids" and "ready schools."
9. The community should be a partner in helping parents and schools meet these needs.
10. There should be a systemic approach to ensuring that all children are ready to benefit from school.

### **READINESS PROFILE AND TOOLS WILL**

1. Better inform teachers and caregivers, including parents, of the strengths/needs of children.
2. Assist all children in reaching high expectations.
3. Assist teachers and caregivers in identifying and building on children's strengths.
4. Allow caregivers in the early childhood years to provide children with the appropriate foundation for emerging language/literacy, numeracy, and other important skills.
5. Help kindergarten teachers move children toward educational accomplishment in the K-12 system.
6. Better equip private and public early childhood delivery systems to serve children and families.
7. Enhance instruction as well as establish system accountability for children's readiness.
8. Inform early childhood and school systems about adjustments that are needed to improve services.
9. Prepare early childhood and school systems to address the needs of children at all levels of development and readiness.
10. Create a positive transition to kindergarten for all children.

### **READINESS PROFILE AND TOOLS WILL NOT BE USED TO**

1. Exclude children in any way.
2. Establish a pass/fail standard.
3. Label children.
4. Blame any part of the early childhood or education system.
5. Leave any child behind.
6. Create a deficit model that implies failure or shortcomings.
7. Push the curriculum down to a developmentally inappropriate level.

# APPENDIX C

## State Scan Survey Results

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### Purpose

Although there has been some effort to study school readiness at the national level, little is known about what is happening in individual states with regard to children's readiness for kindergarten. To help fill this gap, SERVE and the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL), with assistance from several other Regional Educational Laboratories, conducted a national survey to document how states are defining and assessing school readiness. They conducted interviews with at least one early childhood specialist or other representative in all 50 states. The information below represents the information gathered through this effort. For more detailed information on the results of this survey, including information on specific states' responses, please visit the following NCEDL website: [http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/school\\_readiness/](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/school_readiness/).

Note: The information below is meant to paint a general picture of states' policies on school readiness. Because of the nature of this survey and the fact that some respondents shared more information about their state than others, it is likely that some information is not included in our results.

### When states were asked if they had a statewide definition of school readiness (for kindergarten), they reported the following:

- ✍ Forty-nine states responded that they had no formal, statewide definition.

*Georgia responded as follows: Since the establishment of the lottery-funded pre-k program in 1993, the state of Georgia has defined school readiness in two ways: (1) through the implementation of the school readiness goals of the lottery-funded pre-k program, which are to provide appropriate preschool experiences emphasizing growth in language and literacy, math concepts, science, arts, physical development and personal and social competence, and (2) through the support of Goal One of the National Education Goals, which states that "all children will enter school ready to learn" and then defines school readiness to include family support, health care, and nutrition.*

- ✍ Twenty-eight states responded that they use age to determine eligibility for kindergarten. They all stated that children were eligible for kindergarten based on the date of their fifth birthday. These dates ranged from June 1st to January 1st of their kindergarten year. See Table 1.

- ✍ Five states (Illinois, Colorado, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota) indicated that local districts may have formal definitions for school readiness.
- ✍ Five states (California, Indiana, Kansas, Ohio, Wisconsin) indicated they believe that states should place emphasis on schools being ready for all children.

### When states were asked how they assess readiness for school, they answered with the following:

- ✍ Thirteen have a statewide screening or assessment that is conducted on children entering kindergarten (See Table 2). However, the majority of these states did not refer to this as "readiness testing."
- ✍ Thirty do not mandate any readiness assessments, but their local districts may choose to assess children previous to, or as they enter, kindergarten.
- ✍ Seven states (Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Virginia) indicated that they do not assess school readiness. Nebraska prohibits districts from assessing readiness.
- ✍ Several states expressed concerns about readiness assessments being misused to keep children out of school.
- ✍ No states indicated that they used school readiness data to delay children from school entry.

### Conclusion

School readiness assessment has received considerable attention across the nation. By far, the most common approach to defining and measuring school readiness is to define a child as "ready" when he or she reaches a certain age criterion and to leave measurement of readiness to local districts. Several states are, however, in the process of studying the issue, piloting measures, and/or have developed a framework for addressing readiness issues.

Table 1:  
Cut-off Dates for Eligibility for  
Kindergarten

| Date   | States           |
|--|------------------|
| June 1st .....   | Indiana          |
| August 1st .....   | Missouri         |
| August 15th .....  | Alaska           |
| August 31st .....  | Delaware         |
| .....  | Kansas           |
| .....  | North Dakota     |
| .....  | Washington       |
| .....  | Washington, D.C. |
| September 1st .....  | Alabama          |
| .....  | Arizona          |
| .....  | Florida          |
| .....  | Georgia          |
| .....  | Idaho            |
| .....  | Illinois         |
| .....  | Minnesota        |
| .....  | Mississippi      |
| .....  | New Mexico       |
| .....  | Oklahoma         |
| .....  | Oregon           |
| .....  | South Carolina   |
| .....  | South Dakota     |
| .....  | Texas            |
| .....  | West Virginia    |
| .....  | Wisconsin        |
| September 2nd .....  | Utah             |
| September 10th .....                                       | Montana          |
| September 15th .....                                       | Arkansas         |
| .....  | Iowa             |
| .....  | Wyoming          |
| September 30th .....                                       | Nevada           |
| .....  | Ohio             |
| .....  | Tennessee        |
| .....  | Virginia         |
| .....  | Louisiana        |
| October 1st .....  | Kentucky         |
| October 15th .....   | Nebraska         |
| .....  | Maine            |
| October 16th .....   | North Carolina   |
| December 1st .....   | Michigan         |
| .....  | New York         |
| December 2nd .....   | California       |
| December 31st .....  | Rhode Island     |
| .....  | Hawaii           |
| .....  | Maryland         |
| January 1st .....  | Connecticut      |
| .....  | Vermont          |
| <b>Dates are determined at the local or district level</b> |                  |
|  | Colorado         |
|  | Massachusetts    |
|  | New Hampshire    |
|  | New Jersey       |
|  | Pennsylvania     |

Source: Education Commission of the States. *Kindergarten: State Characteristics*. <<http://www.ecs.org/ecs/ecsweb.nsf/>>, March, 2000.

Table 2:  
State Efforts to Assess  
Prekindergarten and  
Kindergarten Children

| State          | Type of Screening  |
|----------------|--|
| Alabama        | Alabama Learning Inventory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administered by teachers to every public school kindergarten student within the first four weeks of school.</li> <li>Measures pre-reading and quantitative concepts.</li> <li>Information used for instructional purposes.</li> <li>Data compiled at the local and state level.</li> </ul>           |
| Alaska         | Alaska Developmental Profile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Global measure used to provide summary information on each school to the state Department of Education.</li> <li>Districts decide how to gather the information.</li> <li>Information is used to determine patterns and identify areas with high need.</li> </ul>                                  |
| Arkansas       | Health and developmental screening is conducted on all children entering kindergarten.   |
| Florida        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All children entering kindergarten are assessed by their teachers within the first three weeks of school.</li> <li>Local districts can decide upon instruments, as long as they measure the 16 indicators outlined by the state Department of Education.</li> <li>Information is used to guide instruction.</li> </ul>          |
| Louisiana      | Kindergarten Developmental Readiness Screening Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Every kindergarten child is screened within 30 days of the first day of school (before or after).</li> <li>One of four state identified instruments may be used.</li> <li>Information is used to guide instruction, but is also collected at the state level.</li> </ul> |
| Maryland       | Work Sampling System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data used as a school improvement device.</li> </ul>   |
| Minnesota      | Early childhood health and developmental screening.  |
| New Mexico     | All children undergo an initial screening upon school entry.   |
| New York       | All children are screened for health, English proficiency, and motor, cognitive, and language development.   |
| North Carolina | Early childhood health and developmental screening.  |
| Ohio           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through naturalistic observations, teachers collect data on children in preschool programs.</li> <li>The Galileo computer system is used to aggregate data.</li> <li>Information is used for program accountability.</li> </ul>   |
| Tennessee      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General screening is done (usually the Brigance is used) of all students entering kindergarten.</li> <li>Information is used to guide instruction.</li> </ul>   |
| Utah           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All kindergarten children are assessed during the first two weeks of school.</li> <li>Information is used to guide instruction.</li> </ul>  |

## APPENDIX D

### List of North Carolina Reviewers

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*Commission*  
*Webster*

# APPENDIX E

## National Expert Reviewers

### Health

**David Bruton:** Pediatrician; Secretary of North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

### Social and Emotional Development

**Marion Hyson:** Director of Professional Development for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); former university, preschool, and kindergarten teacher; studies early emotional development

**Stanley Greenspan:** Professor of Clinical Psychiatry, Behavioral Science, and Pediatrics at the George Washington University Medical School; expert in young children's social and emotional development

### Approaches toward Learning

**Sam Meisels\*:** Professor, Michigan University; expert in early childhood assessment and school readiness; author of the *Work Sampling System*

### Language and Literacy

**Marilyn Adams:** Professor, Harvard University; member of the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children; expert in literacy acquisition

**Catherine Snow\*:** Professor, Harvard University; chair of the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children; expert in language and literacy acquisition

### Cognitive Development and General Knowledge

**Robert Siegler:** Professor, Carnegie Mellon University; expert in the development of children's problem-solving and reasoning skills

**Prentice Starkey:** Associate Professor of Cognition and Development at the University of California at Berkeley; expert in the development of young children's mathematical skills

### Overall Reviewers

**Sue Bredekamp\*:** Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition; co-editor of NAEYC's *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*

**Sharon Lynn Kagan\*:** Senior Associate, The Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, Yale University; current president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children; chair of multiple national school readiness committees

**Sam Meisels\*:** Professor, Michigan University; expert in early childhood assessment and school readiness; author of the *Work Sampling System*

### Special Needs Issues

**Don Bailey:** Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center; expert in young children with disabilities; co-author of *Assessing Infants and Preschoolers with Handicaps*

**Scott McConnell:** Professor in the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Minneapolis; investigator for the Early Childhood Research Institute on Measuring Growth and Development; expert in the development of young children with disabilities

**Mary McEvoy:** Professor in the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Minneapolis; investigator for the Early Childhood Research Institute on Measuring Growth and Development; expert in the development of young children with disabilities

**Pat Wesley:** Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center; expert in young children with disabilities; Principal Investigator of Partnerships for Inclusion

### Cultural Diversity Issues

**Kenji Hakuta\*:** Professor, Stanford University; expert in language acquisition and bilingual education

**Evelyn Moore\*:** President of the National Black Child Development Institute; expert in how schools can best serve young African-American children

**Catherine Snow\*:** Professor, Harvard University; chair of the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children; expert in language and literacy acquisition

\* Member of or advisor to the Goal One (Ready to Learn) Subgroup of the National Education Goals Panel

## APPENDIX F

# Description of the Ideal Condition of Children

A description of the condition of children as they enter school should include children's development and learning in five domains:

- Health and Physical Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches toward Learning
- Language Development and Communication
- Cognition and General Knowledge

These five domains are linked together. Often, development in one area affects development in another. Thus, no single area adequately represents children's condition as they enter school. Additionally, some skills, such as asking complex questions, fall under more than one domain (e.g., language and cognition). For purposes of clarity, however, each skill or condition described in this report is placed under only one domain.

Children's development varies widely at age five. Thus, we should not expect all children to reach a common "standard" of readiness. Children from various cultures and with various experiences will express their competencies differently and should be expected to show different patterns of development. The same is true for children with disabilities.

This document describes the *ideal* condition of children as they enter school. We should not expect any one child to demonstrate all of the skills delineated in this document. However, we should work hard to ensure that each child—including those with disabilities—has the opportunities needed to develop competencies across all five domains.

Finally, this description of the ideal condition of children should *not* be used to determine whether a child should enter kindergarten. All children who meet the legal age requirement are entitled to attend kindergarten, regardless of their competencies.

The domains and their descriptions are based on (a) the work of the National Education Goals Panel, (b) the North Carolina Goal Team members' expertise, (c) feedback from key constituents in North Carolina, and (d) feedback from national experts in each of the five areas. In the following sections, each of the five domains is described in detail.

### Health and Physical Development

Ideally, children entering school will be able to see and hear well or have their vision and hearing problems addressed to the extent possible. They will also have healthy teeth (or have their dental problems treated). Children entering school will have been immunized on schedule to prevent diseases. Diseases and other health problems will be detected and treated as early as possible. Early identification and

intervention are also critical for children with disabilities. Ideally, children entering school will be adequately rested, physically fit, and will have a balanced, nutritious diet to ensure that they have the energy needed to focus on learning. Children will also be as mobile as possible (assisted or unassisted) to maximize their ability to explore the environment. Ideally, children will demonstrate many age-appropriate motor skills such as balance, coordination, strength, and ability to grasp writing tools. Finally, children entering school will demonstrate some self-help skills, such as dressing themselves.

### Social and Emotional Development

When children enter school, they ideally will demonstrate the emotional well being and social skills needed to interact well with adults and other children. They will be able to form and keep close relationships with familiar adults and other children. Ideally, children entering school will begin to identify and express their own feelings age-appropriately. This includes beginning to develop the ability to manage their anger. Children will also begin to understand others' feelings and intentions (e.g., tell the difference between accidental and intentional actions). They will respect (i.e., not hurt/damage) other people and property. When conflict arises, they ideally will work to resolve it positively and seek adult help when needed.

Ideally, children will demonstrate some degree of independence by separating relatively easily from their parents and working or playing alone at times. They will follow basic rules and routines and be able to adapt to small changes in routines. They also will participate in group activities and work or play cooperatively with other children.

In this section, we have described some ideal indicators of social and emotional development for children entering school. However, children will demonstrate a wide range of skills. Additionally, it is important to recognize that social and emotional development is influenced by cultural expectations. Thus, it is important to understand children's social and emotional development in the context of both their home and school cultures.

### Approaches toward Learning

This domain includes children's attitudes toward and interests in learning. Unlike the other four domains, the indicators that fall under this domain are less well-defined and less observable. However, this domain is equally important.

Ideally, children entering school will be curious and confident in their own ability to learn (e.g., show pride in their accomplishments) and enjoy exploration and discovery through play. They will enjoy learning and demonstrate some personal areas of interest as well as strategies for finding out more about those interests (e.g., asking questions). They will express creativity and imagination through a variety of avenues that may include movement, music, dramatic play, and art. They will take initiative when appropriate. Ideally,

children will be able to attend to a task for a short period of time. Finally, children entering school will persist with tasks even after encountering obstacles.

## Language Development and Communication

By the time children enter school, they have developed many language and communication competencies. Children entering school will use language as a tool to communicate their needs, to interact socially with others, and to describe events, thoughts, and feelings. Ideally, they will have a large vocabulary in their home language, be able to produce sentences of several words, and be able to ask and answer open-ended and cognitively challenging questions (e.g., where, when, why, and how). Ideally, children's speech will be understandable to unfamiliar adults. Children will be able to demonstrate age-appropriate listening skills, such as recognizing rhymes and identifying two words that start with the same sound.

Children entering school will also be aware of print (e.g., recognize the association between spoken and written words, recognize familiar alphabet letters). They ideally will be interested in books and stories and will understand basic story components (e.g., know that a story follows a sequence). When they enter school, children will know that writing involves making marks that convey meaning on paper. Ideally, children entering school will also use language creatively (e.g., play with rhymes, develop and relate a story).

In North Carolina, an increasing number of children entering school come from families who speak a language other than English. The competencies listed above can be developed in any language and, for most children, will be developed first in their primary language (i.e., whatever language the parents feel the most comfortable with and competent to support). Strengthening the language and communication competencies in children's native language will help prepare them for the additional task of learning English.

## Cognition and General Knowledge

Children entering school will have a basic knowledge about the world. They will, for instance, know their own name and know the names of some colors. They will have a basic awareness of self, family, and community. They will understand that their actions have an effect on their environment and be able to think about things that are not present. When children enter school, they ideally will understand simple science concepts such as living vs. non-living things. Additionally, children will demonstrate good problem-solving skills.

As children enter school, they will also demonstrate some age-appropriate mathematical skills. Ideally, children will understand basic dimensions such as time (e.g., before and after), distance (e.g., longer, shorter), speed (e.g., faster, slower), and size (e.g., bigger, smaller). They will understand one-to-one correspondence and will know some basic cardinal number names (e.g., one, two) as well as ordinal

number names (e.g., first, second). Ideally, children will understand spatial concepts (e.g., left, right) and basic geometric concepts (e.g., square). They will also have a beginning understanding of patterns and be able to informally measure properties of concrete objects (e.g., identify which of two sticks is longer).

## Children with Special Needs

The five domains of development and learning are important for all children, including those with disabilities. It is also important to note that every child, including those with disabilities, will demonstrate strengths in particular areas. We can support each child's optimal development by recognizing, building on, and expanding those strengths. However, adaptations and modifications may be necessary when considering the development and learning of children with disabilities. The following examples illustrate this point. Children with some disabilities may have significant challenges to their health. Maximum health and physical development for them may be substantially different from that of their peers. By considering the characteristics described in the Health and Physical Development domain, families of such children and the professionals serving them can ensure that necessary monitoring and interventions are provided to minimize the potentially negative impact of such challenges on the children's capacity to grow, learn, and develop.

For the Approaches toward Learning domain, it is necessary to consider first the unique ways in which each child interacts with his or her environment and the factors affecting that interaction. For example, children who have experienced safety, stability, predictability, and stimulation in their environments prior to coming to school may manipulate and explore materials and space in different ways from those who have not. Children with cognitive challenges or sensory impairments may express curiosity and demonstrate persistence differently from other kindergarten children.

## Summary

This description of the ideal condition of children as they enter school is intended to help schools, early childcare and education programs, families, and communities in North Carolina develop a common understanding of the ideal characteristics of entering kindergartners. The description is not intended to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the kinds of skills to support in young children as they enter school. Children's development in each of these areas will vary widely, and we should not expect children to have a particular set of skills before they enter school. However, we should work to ensure that every child has opportunities to develop competencies in each of the five areas of development and learning.

## APPENDIX G FACES Assessment Battery Chart

| <b>School Readiness Domain</b>          | <b>FACES Battery</b>   | <b>Possible NC Adaptations/ Additions</b>   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Health and Physical Development</b>  | Parent questionnaire includes several questions about health, including the Rand health status question  | Add data from Kindergarten Health Assessment on immunizations and screenings      |
| <b>Social and Emotional Development</b> | Parent and teacher: adaptation of Social Skills Rating Scale (SSRS)  | Use the SSRS in its original form   |
| <b>Approaches toward Learning</b>       | Not covered  | Use SSRS  |
| <b>Language and Communication</b>       | Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III) receptive vocabulary measure<br><br>Woodcock-Johnson-Revised (WJ-R) Letter-Word Identification<br><br>WJ-R Early Writing<br><br>Print Awareness | Consider Oral and Written Language Scale instead of PPVT-III and WJ-R             |
| <b>Cognition and General Knowledge</b>  | WJ-R Knowledge of Numbers and Counting<br><br>WJ-R Arithmetic Calculations<br><br>McCarthy Number Memory<br><br>Child questionnaire about basic self and family facts                          | Consider adding Bracken Basic Concept Scale—Shape and Direction/Position subtests |

# APPENDIX H

## Schools Ready for All Children Report

### Best Practice Guidelines for North Carolina

#### Making Schools “Ready” for Kindergartners: Executive Summary

All children are ready for school when they reach the age of eligibility! Ready schools believe that children entering kindergarten come with a variety of skills and abilities. Because of children’s individual differences, Ready Schools respond to this uniqueness by initially assessing each child’s experiential base and individualizing curriculum and teaching practices.

After extensive review of the documented, research-supported early childhood knowledge base, the “Schools’ Readiness for All Children” committee has developed recommendations for strategies and standards that parents, schools, and community leaders should consider to better prepare schools to receive our children. These strategies and standards are deemed philosophically sound and reflect the national early childhood knowledge base. This Executive Summary provides a summary of the committee’s work. Full recommendations and background information are provided in the complete report.

Readiness hinges on many factors including (1) children’s health and physical development; (2) social and emotional development; (3) approaches to learning; (4) language and communication skills; and (5) cognitive factors. Schools are responsible for enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning that will go on in the classroom as children enter eager to learn and “ready to succeed.”

#### The committee identified the following four cornerstones that should guide Ready Schools:

1. Knowledge of growth and development of typically and atypically developing children
2. Knowledge of the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child
3. Knowledge of social and cultural contexts in which each child and family live
4. The ability to translate developmental knowledge into developmentally appropriate practices

#### The committee deemed the following as most important to Schools’ Readiness:

- ✍ Knowledge and understanding of developmentally appropriate early education practices needed to help children reach their full potential

- ✍ The importance of teachers’ readiness if children are to experience success in the early school years
- ✍ The importance of establishing a nurturing atmosphere in the classroom and making the facilities serve the curriculum and instructional needs of children and families
- ✍ A curriculum that provides meaningful contexts for learning and addresses learning in all developmental areas—physical, social, emotional, linguistic, aesthetic, and intellectual
- ✍ Administration’s readiness, which translates the unique ways young children learn into classroom and schoolwide best practices
- ✍ Administrators who develop and nurture authentic partnerships with children, site-based teachers, pre-school teachers, parents, community, and institutes of higher education

Parents, teachers, administrators and communities forming partnerships and working together to provide “what is best for children” will be North Carolina’s cause for celebration when children have access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate “Ready Schools.”

#### Best Practice Guidelines for North Carolina: Making Schools “Ready” for Kindergartners

All children are ready for school when they reach the age of eligibility!

Ready schools believe that children entering kindergarten come with a variety of skills and abilities. Because of children’s individual differences, Ready Schools respond to this uniqueness by initially assessing each child’s experiential base and individualizing curriculum and teaching practices.

#### I. Philosophy, Research, and Early Childhood Knowledge Base

Current understandings and philosophical approaches to developmentally appropriate early education indicate that “it is the responsibility of schools to meet the needs of children as they enter and to provide whatever services are needed in the least restrictive environment to help each child reach his or her potential” (NAEYC, Position Statement on School Readiness, revised, 1995).

“The nature of children’s development and learning dictates two important school responsibilities. Schools must be able to respond to a diverse range of abilities within any group of children, and the curriculum in the early grades must provide meaningful contexts for children’s learning rather than focusing primarily on isolated skills acquisition” (NAEYC, Position Statement on School Readiness, revised, 1995).

Children entering kindergarten come with a variety of skills and abilities. Because of children's individual differences and variations in their development and experiences, schools and teachers must be able to respond to their uniqueness by individualizing their curriculum and teaching practices.

Broad agreement has been reached by the early childhood development community that programs that will contribute to children's development and enhance their learning must be based on the following:

- ✓ Knowledge of growth and development of typically and atypically developing children
- ✓ Knowledge of the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child
- ✓ Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which each child and family lives
- ✓ The ability to translate developmental knowledge into developmentally appropriate practices

Schools and teachers must know how to plan a developmentally appropriate curriculum that places a major emphasis on child-initiated, teacher-supported learning experiences; both small and large group activities; integrated lessons; hands-on learning with a variety of materials and activities; and continual progress evaluation and assessment throughout the primary grades.

Schools, teachers, parents, and community need to work together to ensure that every child enters kindergarten (school) with the opportunity to experience success and to attain educational achievement. Exclusion is not acceptable. In a Ready School, all children are provided with a firm foundation for learning. As the children arrive at school, they will learn best in the context of the community where they are valued and safe and where developmentally appropriate practices address their physical, social, and emotional needs as well as their intellectual development.

## II. The Teacher's Readiness for the Child

The primary goal for kindergarten teachers is to support the development of all children. To achieve this goal, teachers need to know the uniqueness of each child with regard to individual learning styles, interests and preferences, personality and temperament, skills and talents, challenges and difficulties. The teacher must support the development of a positive sense of self-identity in all children if they are to experience success in the early school years. Essential dimensions of the early educator include the following:

- ✓ Knowledge of child development
- ✓ Knowledge of the implications of child development
- ✓ Knowledge of curriculum that promotes children's learning in cognitive, language, social, physical, and affective domains

- ✓ Planning, creating, and organizing learning environments for active exploration and a high level of interaction
- ✓ Communicating and forming partnerships with important influences in the child's world (parents, colleagues, administrators, the public, and others)
- ✓ Seeking continual professional growth, advocating for developmentally appropriate early education, and engaging in self-evaluation of their teaching behavior

To perform these functions effectively for all children, the teacher must have knowledge of growth and development of both typically and atypically developing children and be able to translate that knowledge into developmentally appropriate practices by

- ✓ Employing developmentally appropriate practices (Management of Instructional Time)
- ✓ Fostering self-regulation in children (Management of Student Behavior)
- ✓ Facilitating active learning (Instructional Presentation)
- ✓ Observing children's activity in naturalistic settings (Instructional Monitoring of Student Performance)
- ✓ Facilitating children's inquiry and discovery (Instructional Feedback)
- ✓ Planning for children's learning (Facilitating Instruction)
- ✓ Interacting positively with children, parents, co-workers, and community (Interaction with the Educational Environment)
- ✓ Interacting with and relating to the professional/family/community environment (Performance of Non-Instructional Duties) (TPAI, revised 4/25/97)

"Early educators must be schooled in and encouraged to use a wide variety of developmentally appropriate curricula, materials, and procedures to maximize each child's growth and development" (Position Statement on Goal One of America 2000, December 1996).

## III. The Readiness of the Environment and Curriculum

"The most important strategy for addressing school readiness is to prepare the school to be responsive to the wide range of experiences, backgrounds, and needs of the children who are starting school."

*Readiness: Children and Schools*, Lillian G. Katz, 1991

### The Environment

Establishing a nurturing atmosphere in the classroom and making the facilities serve the curriculum and instruction needs of the children is challenging. Learning centers allow choices of materials and activities by

providing stability and order to the classroom while encouraging children to explore and experiment. They provide interrelated, hands-on experiences that meet children's developmental needs and interests. Multicultural materials reflect heritages and communities. Well-planned centers foster development of physical and social skills as well as language and cognitive processes.

Additionally, learning centers provide many ways for children to develop skills and concepts in learning. At the kindergarten level, centers provide for rigorous exploration and experimentation with many materials and ideas, along with opportunities for children of varying abilities and needs to expand their understanding and knowledge. Play is the essence of young children's understanding. Informal work and play activities are major environmental components that enhance children's learning. Center activities and experiences develop language (literacy, reading, writing, listening, and spelling) skills and mathematics (numeracy) concepts as well as knowledge in other disciplines.

"It is the responsibility of schools to meet the needs of children when they enter school and to provide whatever services are needed in the least restrictive environment to help each child reach his or her fullest potential."

*NAEYC Position Statement on School Readiness, 1995*

### **Dimensions of the Environment**

- ✍ The younger the child, the more informal is the environment.
- ✍ Informal learning environments encourage spontaneous play.
- ✍ Group projects that include investigations of worthwhile topics strengthen dispositions to observe, experiment, inquire, and examine the worthwhile aspects of the environment. This should include constructions and dramatic play as well as early literacy and numeracy activities.
- ✍ The environment is designed for active learning, with well-equipped centers addressing all areas of development.
- ✍ Classrooms are multi-cultural, with respect for diversity.
- ✍ Learning and discovery occur naturally during play.
- ✍ The environment promotes appropriate behavior, positive self-concept, social interaction, self-regulation, independence, and effective supervision in the classroom.

### **The Physical Environment**

The layout of physical space welcomes anyone entering the schools and fosters encounters, communication, and relationships. The arrangement of centers, materials, and activities encourages choices, problem solving, and discoveries in the process of learning and is designed for safety and appropriate safety supervision. The physical space should include classroom learning centers based

on the needs and the size of the group, using the centers and the space needed for the materials. Teachers face the challenge of space useable for children, and in doing so, must value and respect children's perspectives. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction suggests guidelines for both indoor and outdoor facilities.

### **The Schedule**

Effective scheduling is key to the success of an early childhood curriculum. Four principles for developing schedules are

- ✍ Include daily rituals and routines.
- ✍ Balance open-ended and structured time.
- ✍ Allow sufficient time for activities and routines.
- ✍ Encourage children to develop awareness of time.

*The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)* by Harms, Clifford & Cryer (1988) provides evaluative descriptions of schedules.

### **Curriculum and Instructional Strategies**

The early childhood (kindergarten) curriculum is the planned management of time, materials, and activities to guide children's learning and development. It is an organized framework that delineates the content children are to learn, the processes through which they achieve the identified curricular goals, what teachers do to help children achieve these goals, and the context in which teaching and learning occur. Ideally, the curriculum is shaped by communities and families as well as by children and teachers. Classroom practice is driven by the information teachers gain from developmentally appropriate assessment (including K-2 assessment). While gaining content knowledge is a goal, curriculum includes everything that happens from the time children walk into the classroom until the time they leave, including human interactions, teaching strategies, language and tone, and the physical arrangement of the room and the materials in it.

### **Curriculum Should**

- ✍ Provide meaningful contexts for the child's learning rather than focusing on isolated skill acquisition.
- ✍ Emphasize informal work and play, activities related to the child's direct, first-hand experience, opportunity to apply skills to meaningful contexts, and a wide variety of teaching methods.
- ✍ Respond to the range of children's backgrounds and needs.
- ✍ Reflect that young children learn most effectively when they are engaged in interaction rather than in receptive and passive activities.
- ✍ Reflect that young children are most likely to strengthen their natural dispositions to learn when they are interacting with adults, peers, materials, and surroundings in ways that help them make better and deeper sense of their own

experiences and environment. (This is best done through investigating and purposefully observing, recording, and representing their findings and observations through activities such as talking, painting, drawing, construction, writing, and graphing.)

- ✓ Employ developmentally appropriate practices using a wide variety of materials; allow for child initiation; provide for child engagement (time on task), exploration, etc.
- ✓ Respond to information gained from developmentally appropriate assessment (including K-2 assessment).
- ✓ Construct integrated goals that address learning in all developmental areas: physical, social, emotional, linguistic, aesthetic, and intellectual.
- ✓ Facilitate language and communication development.
- ✓ Respect and support individual, cultural, and linguistic diversity.
- ✓ Provide for children with special needs.

#### **IV. The Readiness of the Administration**

“Instead of asking ‘Are our children ready for kindergarten?’ it is more appropriate to ask ‘Are our kindergartens ready for children?’ Neither raising the entry age nor using other readiness criteria will ensure children’s success in kindergarten. Only an appropriate curriculum can make that success possible.”

Peck, McCraig, & Sapp, 1988, p. 27.

##### **A. Administrator’s Role in Preparing School Environment**

- Possesses knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices and HOW schools MUST translate this knowledge into classroom and schoolwide best practices.
- Establishes an authentic site-based management team that includes parents.
- Utilizes authentic and appropriate teacher evaluation tools.
- Insists that staff development is research based with site-based delivery or professional leave time granted; staff should be involved in development of training needs and delivery of instruction.
- Puts the needs of children FIRST.

##### **B. Administrators Develop and Nurture Authentic Partnerships with Children**

- Needs are assessed authentically via teacher observations, work samples, interviews, etc.
- Individual needs are acknowledged and met via personalized education plans.
- Whole child development is valued and reinforced in ALL settings.

##### **Site-Based Teachers**

- Teacher leadership/empowerment is encouraged.
- Teachers are involved with Site-Based Management Team.
- Release time is offered to attend developmentally appropriate trainings and for team planning/sharing to include all educators who work with this age group.

##### **Preschool Teachers**

- Continuum of learning exists.
- Relationships are cultivated and valued.
- Ongoing communication is supported.
- Expectations are clearly defined.
- Readiness and transition workshops are offered jointly by preschool and kindergarten teachers.

##### **Parents**

- Innovative vehicles exist for real involvement within schools.
- Partnerships value parents.
- Relationships are cultivated and valued.
- Open, ongoing, and varied types of school-to-home/ home-to-school communication are present.
- Communication of expectations is clearly defined.
- Parents are involved with site-based management team.
- Community resources are recommended and made available.
- Education opportunities regarding child development are available.

##### **Community**

- Innovative vehicles exist for real involvement within schools.
- Relationships are cultivated and valued.
- Community is involved with Site-Based Management Team.
- Mentoring/tutoring opportunities are provided for community members.
- Reciprocal work-to-school training opportunities are encouraged.
- Focus groups are held to educate public about schools.

##### **Institutes of Higher Education**

- Undergraduate observations focus on both classroom experiences and school governance groups as well as parent/community involvement activities.
- Students secure outstanding, site-based internships early in undergraduate experience.

- Institutes offer personnel to conduct on-site training in return for schools' release of staff to share school-based experiences and insights.
- Institutes emphasize leadership as an appropriate and necessary role for teachers.

## V. Transition to Ready Schools

Transition to Ready Schools is about children and their families moving from home, preschools, or other types of childcare programs into the educational system. Transition is a major milestone for all involved and a change that offers both challenges and new opportunities for growth.

Ready Schools employ transition practices that operate throughout the year and involve an exchange of information and experiences that create as much continuity as possible for children moving from one setting to another. Transition planning ensures that the special needs of children and families are addressed and helps minimize later problems.

Communitywide planning for transition to kindergarten works best and involves children, parents, guardians, grandparents, other family members, care providers, preschool and kindergarten teachers, and a variety of community service agencies and programs. The Ready School takes into account the complex ways in which these parties interact to influence the developing child and provides continuity and reinforcement in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Successful transition to school is currently undergoing careful scrutiny and discussion. Lack of research on effective transition procedures, the limitations of present policies, and concern over the type of school environment that awaits the child reflect the gaps and overlaps in the knowledge base about transition to kindergarten. At the same time, an available, somewhat broad perspective reveals the following trends that need to be carefully considered in transition planning:

- ✓ The changing nature of transition and the complex interaction of contextual factors
- ✓ The emerging conceptual base that integrates knowledge of how children learn and develop with best practices in early education
- ✓ The increasing diversity of families in America and the younger age school population group
- ✓ The increase in public school programs for very young children (ages three and four)
- ✓ The movement for accountability across the nation as both readiness and outcomes are assessed

These emerging trends are particularly important in understanding how children are affected by transitions.

To summarize the findings, transition periods are those in which the child's development is reorganized and new

competencies emerge. Transitions occur in an ecological context and are important for later competencies. It is believed that adjustment in the early school years is highly related to adjustment and experience from infancy through the preschool years. Ready Schools direct serious attention to the many factors influencing the transition process. There is greater coordination and information sharing with all "players" as they work to make schools ready for *all* children who attend.

## Elements of Effective Transitions Include the Following:\*

- ✓ All parties responsible for children's care and education work collaboratively in developing a *written transition plan* for the community.
- ✓ *Transition activities* are planned cooperatively for children by their families, care providers, teachers, and community representatives.
- ✓ *Transition policies, programs, and practices* reflect the diversity and uniqueness of children, their families, and the community.
- ✓ *Developmentally appropriate practices* (age appropriateness and individual appropriateness) are employed in all programs of care and education from birth to age eight to ensure continuity in assessment, curriculum, and instruction.
- ✓ A *coordinated staff development* approach is employed to bring care providers and preschool and kindergarten teachers together to discuss, learn, and plan.
- ✓ Parents and families are involved in *decision making* and are active *partners* in their children's care and education.
- ✓ A written *community transition agreement* is created, evaluated, reviewed, and revised as ongoing transition efforts are expanded.
- ✓ Ongoing *leadership* and *advocacy* for effective transition are ensured by naming Transition Coordinators, representatives of each participating program/group, to work together over time to guide and refine the community's transition plan.

\* Adapted from *It's a Big Step* (1995), Bridging Early Services Transition Taskforce, Coordinating Council on Early Childhood Developmental Services, Kansas State Board of Education

## VI. Summary

### What Is Best for Kids?

This report has focused on the major themes and directions Ready Schools must take to facilitate the success of all children entering kindergarten. There is a shared belief that it takes parents, families, teachers, schools, and communities to help children experience success in school. There is a focus on the continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools. Ready Schools assume a strong leadership role to create developmentally appropriate learning climates for young children from preschool to grade three.

Finally, Ready Schools celebrate each initiative and undertaking with a flourish that invites participation from all contexts and levels of context that influence children's development. Celebrating the influence of each context is as follows:

#### **Celebrating Parents as the Child's First and Most Important Teacher**

- Honoring families' linguistic and cultural characteristics
- Developing opportunities with parents to share two-way information about the child
- Valuing and encouraging beneficial home-school partnerships

#### **Celebrating Teachers Who Employ Best Practices**

- Recognizing a teacher, class, or school for doing a good job
- Offering grants for "Ready to Succeed" schools (to supplement regular funding)
- Creating child/teacher celebrations
- Creating community celebrations

#### **Celebrating Administrators and Site-Based Management Teams**

- Recognizing elementary school professionals who support Ready Schools
- Recognizing Superintendents who support Ready Schools

### **VII. Recommendations for "Ready Schools"**

The community members of Ready Schools believe that children come to school with a variety of skills and abilities. In order to meet children's diverse needs, Ready Schools respond to this uniqueness by initially assessing children's experiential base and then providing an individualized, developmentally appropriate curriculum with age- and stage-appropriate teaching practices. Quality kindergarten experiences profoundly influence later achievement and attainment as basic skills are acquired and children's strengths are nurtured. Early learning experiences serve as the foundation for later learning (Zill, 1988).

In order for schools to be ready to receive all children, the Schools' Readiness Committee recommends the following:

- ✓ The Ready School Self-Inventory be disseminated to all elementary schools with accompanying staff development activities to ensure every school in North Carolina is aware of the policies and practices necessary for schools to successfully serve all children entering kindergarten.
- ✓ Schools and communities develop transition plans to ensure a coordinated effort to support children moving from the early childhood setting to kindergarten.

✓ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, public and private school systems, Head Start, and preschool programs work together to ensure that the following personnel and environmental resources are in place to support ready schools.

- Personnel resources include reasonable class size and student-teacher ratios; sufficient time for teachers to plan, conference with families, conduct home visits and reflect on best practices; ongoing teacher professional and personal development; and Birth-Kindergarten (B-K) License requirement for kindergarten teachers.
- Environmental resources include individualized developmentally appropriate curriculum and classroom activities; financial appropriations for manipulatives, books, and other learning materials; and reasonable classroom space with an in-class sink and child's toilet. In addition, an outdoor playground/learning area designed for typically and atypically developing children should be included.

✓ NC DPI continues to refine the K-2 assessment process, both vertically (by adding earlier developmental pieces) and horizontally (by adding parameters embracing our social and emotional domains). This assessment must be used to inform practice and drive curriculum instruction in North Carolina's kindergartens.

#### **Rationale for Recommendations**

*Reasonable Class Size and Teacher-to-Student Ratios:* American kindergarten students vary in both the skills and knowledge they bring to school. Variations in developmental levels of kindergarten children run the gamut. Schools must maintain teacher-student ratios that ensure all teachers provide quality experiences for the diverse needs of children. Guidelines put forth by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommend a class size of a maximum of 20 students (this class size mandates two classroom teachers: one B-K Licensed Teacher and one Teacher Assistant). This recommended ratio ensures the possibility of conducting a diverse set of learning activities with an emphasis on informal work and play; activities related to the child's direct, first-hand experience; opportunity to apply skills in meaningful contexts; and a wide variety of teaching methods.

*Sufficient Time for Teachers to Plan, Conference, Home Visit, and Reflect on Best Practices:* Teachers must understand the uniqueness of each student with regard to individual learning styles, interests and preferences, personality and temperament, skills and talents, challenges and difficulties. To gain and apply this knowledge requires enough time for the teacher to plan so all children participate to the fullest extent possible. Opportunity to conference with parents (both at school and

in the student's home) offers teachers a clearer understanding of each child's experiential base, skills, strengths, and vulnerabilities. This understanding will enable teachers to develop a curriculum focusing on the "whole" child. Educators who reflect on this knowledge as they plan offer a flexible curriculum suitable for a wide variety of young children from various backgrounds. They address varying maturity levels and are better able to meet diverse needs.

*Ongoing Teacher Professional and Personal Development:* Teachers must understand the process of learning, for themselves as well as for children. Kindergarten teachers must possess knowledge of growth and development of both typically and atypically developing children. Moreover, they must be able to translate that knowledge into developmentally appropriate practices. Teachers must also use assessment information (including K-2 assessment) to inform practice and drive curriculum and instruction. Members of the school community—administrators, physical education specialists, teachers of music, art, technology, media, and others should be offered opportunities to gain current information about young children's growth and development. Professional development must include, but not be limited to, ongoing, planned staff development involving current early childhood related research, child growth and development information; interactive, multidisciplinary instructional strategies and more; attendance at statewide and national early childhood conferences; and membership in professional organizations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

*Birth-Kindergarten (B-K) License Required for Kindergarten Teachers:* Properly certified kindergarten teachers possess an in-depth understanding of the varied patterns of child growth and development. Early educators must be schooled in and encouraged to use a wide variety of developmentally appropriate curricula, materials, and procedures to maximize each child's growth and development (Position Statement on Goal One of America 2000, 1996).

*Individualized, Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum and Classroom Activities:* Learning centers provide a varied approach for children to develop skills and concepts in learning. Students' ability to choose materials and activities provides stability and order to the classroom. At the kindergarten level, learning centers provide for rigorous exploration and experimentation with many materials and ideas. Centers also give children of varying abilities and needs opportunities to expand their understanding and knowledge. Play is the work of young children and the essence of young children's understanding. Supported by the facilitation of a qualified early childhood teacher, work and play activities form major environmental components that enhance children's learning.

*Financial Appropriations for Manipulatives, Books and other Learning Materials; Consumable Materials; and Capital Equipment:* The essence of an excellent kindergarten environment embraces a developmentally appropriate, integrated curriculum with a variety of activities offered in a meaningful manner. Materials are "hands-on," interactive, and open-ended. For example, manipulatives are critical to children as they can be used individually or in small groups; prior experience with the manipulatives increases the potential for innovation, problem-solving, strengthening fine motor/hand-eye coordination skills, and creative thinking. Consumable materials, such as paint and large paper, offer opportunities for self-expression, creative problem solving, and midline development. Tables and chairs, water and sand tables, easels, storage cabinets and shelves, blocks, and other equipment are child-sized, in excellent repair, and physically support a developmental environment. All these materials are critical to Ready Schools, yet require a significant initial investment with ongoing budget appropriations for consumable and replacement materials.

*Reasonable Class Space with an In-Class Sink and Child's Toilet:* Kindergarten classes must be large, physically safe, well ventilated with plenty of natural light, and pleasant in appearance. In-class sinks allow easy cleaning up and encourage good hygiene; in-class toilets promote self-help skills and encourage independence in meeting children's toileting needs.

*Outdoor Playground/Learning Area:* The education of young children extends beyond the classroom. Outdoor playground/learning areas are important to support and expand children's understanding of their world. The playground/learning area should be designed for the whole child and to enhance children's physical, language, cognitive, and social-emotional development. Outdoor learning centers should include opportunities for cooperative play, art and science activities, nature studies, fine and gross motor development, water and sand play, and space for children to move freely. It is important to choose quality outdoor equipment and material and to design and organize the area to accompany the classroom.

## Ready School Inventory

The Ready Schools' subcommittee developed a questionnaire to help schools determine their level of readiness to receive all children. This self-inventory was designed to highlight crucial components of high-quality and developmentally appropriate kindergarten programs. The Inventory, included in Appendix I of this report, is designed for schools to use as part of a self-assessment process. A team including the principal, kindergarten teachers, parents, and other personnel involved with children's transition to kindergarten should work together to complete the inventory and develop strategies to ensure that the school is prepared to receive all children.

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# APPENDIX I

## Ready Schools Self-Inventory

Schools must be ready to receive all children in order for children to succeed. “Ready schools” will assess their degree of readiness in a variety of ways. This self-inventory was designed to highlight crucial components of high-quality and developmentally appropriate kindergarten programs. Items reflect concrete policies and strategies that schools can employ to help each child grow in competence and meet high expectations.

**A team including the principal, kindergarten teachers, parents, and other personnel involved with children’s transition to kindergarten should work together to complete the following inventory and develop strategies to ensure that the school is prepared to receive all children.** Use the comments column to make notes about each individual item and the space at the end of the Inventory to document a Ready Schools Improvement Plan.

| INDICATOR FOR A READY SCHOOL  | READY | NOT<br>READY | COMMENTS |
|---|-------|--------------|----------|
| Administrators have read, processed, and understood NAEYC’s Developmentally Appropriate Practices.  |       |              |          |
| Teachers have read, processed, and understood NAEYC’s Developmentally Appropriate Practices.  |       |              |          |
| Parents have been offered information (via workshops, NAEYC brochures, and other reading materials) about child development and best practices for kindergarten children.   |       |              |          |
| Parents are valued as genuine (authentic) partners with ongoing communications (weekly newsletters or audio-taped information, home visits, volunteering opportunities, parent-teacher and/or student-led conferences).   |       |              |          |
| School offers a parent resource library and a place for families to gather, network, reflect, and share discussions with others.  |       |              |          |
| School uses developmentally appropriate assessment instruments that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess early life experience</li> <li>• Recognize and support individual differences</li> <li>• Determine reasonable/appropriate expectations of children’s capabilities</li> <li>• Attend to the WHOLE child and seek information about all five readiness domains</li> </ul> |       |              |          |
| Teachers assess each child’s growth and development authentically via collected work samples, student and parent interviews, teacher observations, photographs, etc.  |       |              |          |
| Physical environment is welcoming and child-centered.   |       |              |          |
| Physical environment is arranged in learning centers encouraging choices, problem-solving, and discovery in the learning process.   |       |              |          |
| Curriculum provides meaningful contexts for the children’s learning (rather than focusing on isolated skill acquisition).   |       |              |          |
| Curriculum offers learning centers, values “play” as the work of young children, and provides interrelated, hands-on, active learning experiences.  |       |              |          |

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| Curriculum contains goals addressing all five domains of learning and is based on the interests and needs of individual children.           |  |  |  |
| Curriculum integrates new learning with past experiences through project work and mixed-ability/mixed-age grouping in an unhurried setting. |  |  |  |
| Teacher uses a wide variety of teaching materials and methods.  |  |  |  |
| Schedule balances open-ended and structured time.   |  |  |  |
| Schedule includes daily rituals and routines.   |  |  |  |
| Cultural and linguistic diversity of students is nurtured and celebrated.   |  |  |  |
| Multicultural materials reflect global heritage and culture.  |  |  |  |
| Language and communication development is a rich and valued curriculum component.   |  |  |  |
| Children's social skills are developed with conflict resolution strategies taught in meaningful contexts.                                   |  |  |  |
| Inclusion is practiced, and each child is placed in the least restrictive environment.  |  |  |  |
| Students are well fed, rested, and immunized; on-site health assessments for physical, vision, and dental health are conducted annually.    |  |  |  |
| Teachers participate in research-based, state-of-the-art, developmentally appropriate, ongoing professional development.                    |  |  |  |

**Our school's top three areas needing improvement to enable us to be ready for all children are**

| <b>TOP THREE PRIORITIES</b> | <b>PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT</b> |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
|                             |                              |

# APPENDIX J Ready for School (R4S) Framework

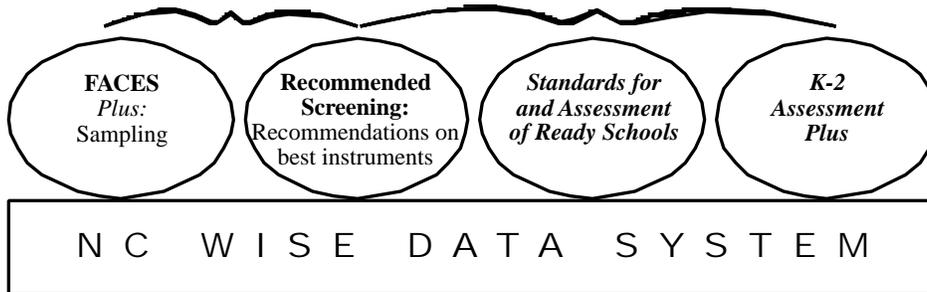
Preamble of Beliefs and Guidelines



R4S System Accountability  
Ready Kids



Schools Ready for Children  
Ready Schools



Goals

- ✓ Assess the readiness of all children for school
- ✓ Increase the readiness of all children for school
- ✓ Improve the readiness of schools for all children

Alignment to Definition ~ Uniformity ~ Consistency ~ Data for Improvement

# **SERVE**

*Improving Learning through  
Research & Development*

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SERVE is an education organization with the mission to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. To further this mission, SERVE engages in research and development addressing education issues of critical importance to educators in the region and provides technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs that are striving for comprehensive school improvement. This critical research-to-practice linkage is supported by an experienced staff strategically located throughout the region. This staff is highly skilled in providing needs assessment services, conducting applied research in schools, and developing processes, products, and programs that inform educators and increase student achievement.

The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. This document was produced with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RJ96006701.

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