

# Minnesota School Readiness Study

Developmental Assessment  
at Kindergarten Entrance  
Fall 2008



*Minnesota*  
**Department**  
**of Education** 

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Minnesota School Readiness Study: Developmental Assessment at Kindergarten Entrance**

The Minnesota School Readiness Study: Developmental Assessment at Kindergarten Entrance Fall 2008 was planned, implemented, and the report prepared by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE).

Special thanks to the 96 elementary schools involved in the study, their principals, kindergarten teachers, support staff and the superintendents of the school districts. The observation and collection of developmental information by these kindergarten teachers on kindergarten children in their classrooms was essential to the study and is much appreciated.

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## **Background**

### **Minnesota School Readiness Study: Developmental Assessment at Kindergarten Entrance - Fall 2008**

Research has shown, and continues to show, that there is a critical relationship between early childhood experiences, school success, and positive life-long outcomes. This research has been a focal point for many states as they strive to reduce the growing achievement gap between less advantaged students and their same-aged peers in the educational system.

With no systematic process in place to assess children's school readiness, the Minnesota Department of Education in 2002 initiated a series of three yearly studies focused on obtaining a picture of the school readiness of a representative sample of Minnesota kindergartners as they enter school in the fall, and to evaluate changes in the percentage of children fully prepared for school at kindergarten entrance. The studies were well-received by the public, and during the 2006 Minnesota state legislative session, Governor Tim Pawlenty proposed and the Legislature appropriated funding for the study to be continued on an annual basis.

This report describes findings from the assessment of school readiness using a random sample of children entering kindergarten in Minnesota in Fall 2008. The data provides a picture of the ratings of entering kindergartners for the state across five domains of child development. The study provides information on school readiness for parents; school teachers and administrators; early childhood education and care teachers, providers and administrators; policymakers; and the public.

#### **Definition of School Readiness**

For purposes of the study, "school readiness" is defined as the skills, knowledge, behaviors and accomplishments that children know and can do as they enter kindergarten in the following areas of child development: social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language and literacy development; creativity and the arts; cognition and general knowledge; and physical well being and motor development. This definition is consistent with school readiness definitions used by other states and the *Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards (2005)*.

#### **Assessing School Readiness**

The study is designed to capture a picture of the readiness of Minnesota children as they enter kindergarten and track readiness trends over time. To ensure that results are reliable and can be generalized to the entire population of Minnesota kindergartners, the study

uses a 10 percent random sample of schools with entering kindergartners. This sample size generates data from 6,310 kindergartners.

Given the complexities of assessing young children, the study is designed to ensure the assessment is appropriate, useful and is guided by best practices in the field of early childhood.

The study uses a developmentally appropriate observational assessment that allows children to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in various ways. The Work Sampling System (WSS®), a standards-based observational assessment system designed to provide information about individual student's learning and progress over time, is used for the assessment.

The assessment is aligned with the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress and the K-12 Academic Standards and assesses all areas of child development including cognitive, social, emotional, physical and approaches to learning. These areas of development are represented by the five domains of the Work Sampling System Checklist — Personal and Social Development; Language and Literacy; Mathematical Thinking; The Arts; and Physical Development. Children's rate of development varies, therefore, the goal of the study is to assess a cohort of children's proficiency within and across these developmental domains and not establish whether or not children are ready for school with the use of a composite "ready" or "not ready" score.

Each domain and developmental indicator within the WSS® Developmental Checklist includes expected behaviors for children at that age or grade level. For each indicator, teachers used the following guidelines to rate the child's performance as:

**o Proficient** — indicating that the child can reliably and consistently demonstrate the skill, knowledge, behavior or accomplishment represented by the performance indicator.

**o In Process** — indicating that the skill, knowledge, behavior or accomplishment represented by the indicator are intermittent or emergent, and are not demonstrated reliably or consistently.

**o Not Yet** — indicating that the child cannot perform the indicator (i.e., the performance indicator represents a skill, knowledge, behavior or accomplishment not yet acquired).

Rubrics for each rating level were distributed to teachers at the start of the study. The rubrics, provided by the publisher in 2008, provide additional detail for each indicator for a *Not Yet*, *In Process* or *Proficient* rating.

## **2008 Results**

A total of 6,310 kindergartners from 96 randomly selected elementary schools across the state were included in the Fall 2008 cohort. This reflects just over 10 percent of the entering kindergartners for the 2008-2009 school year.

The domain rankings by proficiency for the 2008 cohort are consistent with previous years of the study. Physical Development had the highest percentage of children assessed *Proficient* on average, followed in order by The Arts; Personal and Social Development; Language and Literacy; and Mathematical Thinking.

Domain level results for 2008 adjusted for stratified cluster sampling. While there are trends towards increases in estimates of *Not Yet* results, the estimates are not outside the margin of error. Also, the existing data set does not allow for examination of potential reasons for shifts in the overall results.

Table 1 - Results By Domain

Domain/Result	Not Yet	In Process	Proficient
Physical Development	4% SE 1%	35% SE 2.3%	61% SE 2.7%
The Arts	8% SE 1.6%	43% SE 2.6%	49% SE 2.9%
Personal & Social Development	11% SE 1.2%	41% SE 1.9%	49% SE 2.4%
Mathematical Thinking	12% SE 1.6%	43% SE 2.0%	44% SE 2.6%
Language & Literacy	13% SE 1.5%	41% SE 1.8%	47% SE 2.5%

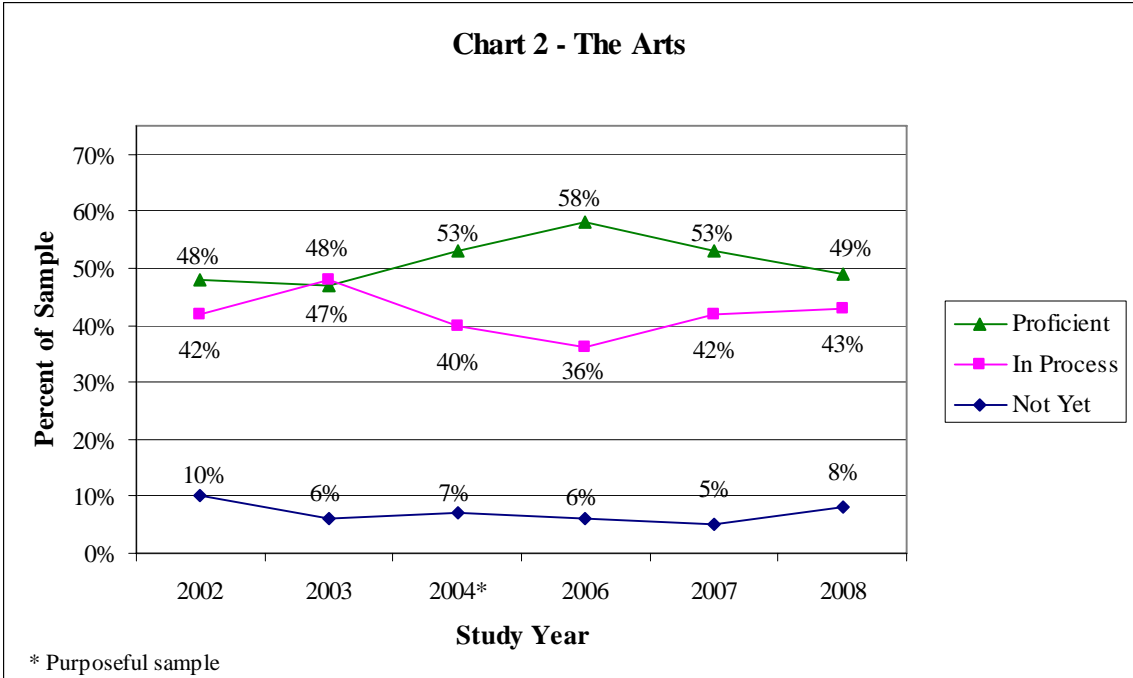
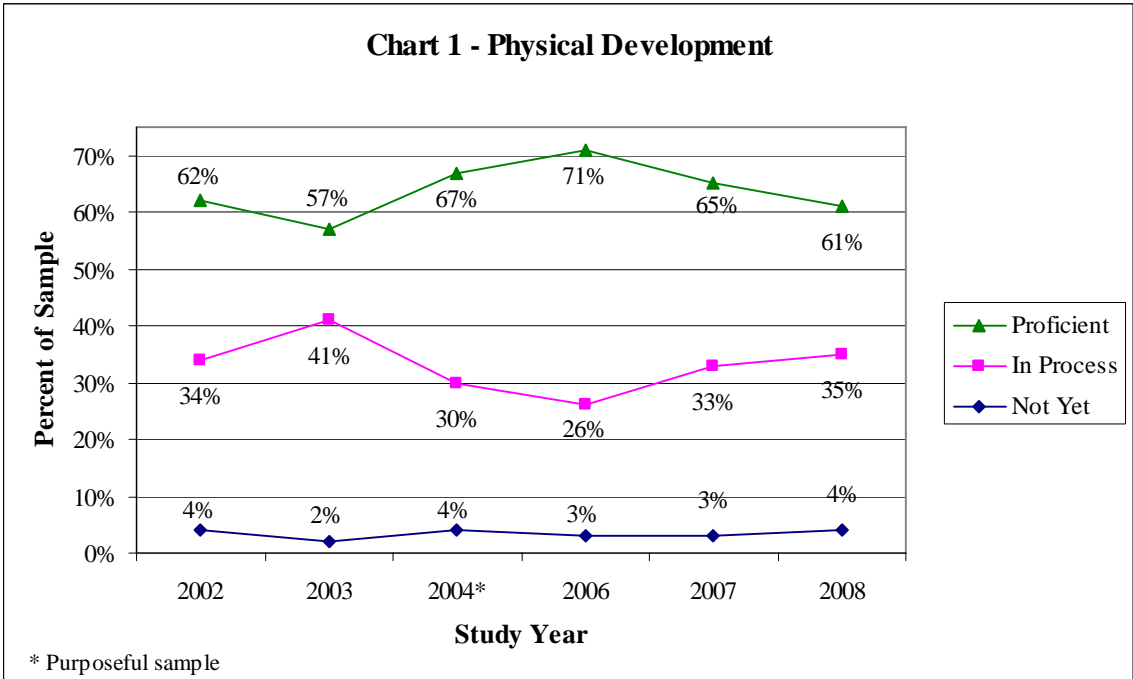
Note that categories may not add to 100% due to rounding and are adjusted for stratified cluster sampling.

Table 2 Results by Domain Indicators Ranked by Proficiency Rating						
	Not Yet		In Process		Proficient	
	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N
<b>Physical Development</b>						
Physical Development Average Score Summary	4%	266	35%	2,231	61%	3,795
Performs some self-care tasks independently.	4%	224	32%	2,002	65%	4,061
Coordinates movements to perform simple tasks.	4%	231	35%	2,233	61%	3,833
Uses eye-hand coordination to perform tasks.	5%	342	39%	2,459	55%	3,491
<b>The Arts</b>						
The Arts Domain Average Score Summary	8%	490	44%	2,735	49%	3,069
Participates in group music experiences.	6%	357	41%	2,582	53%	3,367
Participates in creative movement, dance and drama.	8%	487	42%	2,637	50%	3,176
Uses a variety of art materials for tactile experience and exploration.	8%	490	44%	2,784	48%	3,018
Responds to artistic creations or events.	10%	624	47%	2,935	43%	2,714
<b>Personal and Social Development</b>						
Personal and Social Development Domain Average Score Summary	10%	652	41%	2,583	48%	3,043
Interacts easily with familiar adults.	8%	494	37%	2,344	55%	3,454
Shows eagerness and curiosity as a learner.	8%	482	38%	2,417	54%	3,401
Interacts easily with one or more children.	8%	526	38%	2,424	53%	3,354
Shows empathy and caring for others.	10%	613	40%	2,522	50%	3,154
Follows simple classroom rules and routines.	9%	588	42%	2,637	49%	3,079
Manages transitions.	11%	686	40%	2,545	49%	3,065
Shows some self-direction.	10%	650	43%	2,727	46%	2,917
Seeks adult help when needed to resolve conflicts.	11%	716	44%	2,771	44%	2,792
Attends to tasks and seeks help when encountering a problem.	13%	808	43%	2,730	44%	2,762
Approaches tasks with flexibility and inventiveness.	16%	955	44%	2,715	40%	2,454

Table 2 Results by Domain Indicators Ranked by Proficiency Rating , continued						
	Not Yet		In Process		Proficient	
<b>Mathematical Thinking</b>						
Mathematical Thinking Domain Average Score Summary	12%	771	44%	2,753	44%	2,770
Begins to recognize and describe the attributes of shapes.	11%	676	42%	2,664	47%	2,961
Shows beginning understanding of number and quantity.	11%	670	45%	2,803	45%	2,824
Shows understanding of and uses several positional words.	13%	827	41%	2,603	45%	2,851
Begins to use simple strategies to solve mathematical problems.	14%	912	47%	2,942	39%	2,443
<b>Language and Literacy</b>						
Language and Literacy Domain Average Score Summary	13%	805	41%	2,582	46%	2,908
Shows appreciation for books and reading.	6%	391	38%	2,404	56%	3,502
Speaks clearly enough to be understood without contextual clues.	11%	705	33%	2,087	56%	3,508
Gains meaning by listening.	8%	535	43%	2,696	49%	3,065
Comprehends and responds to stories read aloud.	10%	651	41%	2,563	49%	3,082
Begins to develop knowledge about letters.	12%	747	41%	2,589	47%	2,961
Shows beginning understanding of concepts about print.	12%	777	42%	2,638	46%	2,889
Follows two- or three-step directions.	14%	910	40%	2,498	46%	2,890
Represents ideas and stories through pictures, dictation and play.	11%	719	46%	2,888	43%	2,688
Uses expanded vocabulary and language arts for a variety of purposes.	18%	1,127	40%	2,539	42%	2,619
Uses letter-like shapes, symbols and letters to convey meaning.	17%	1,081	44%	2,747	39%	2,464
Demonstrates phonological awareness.	19%	1,213	44%	2,751	37%	2,325

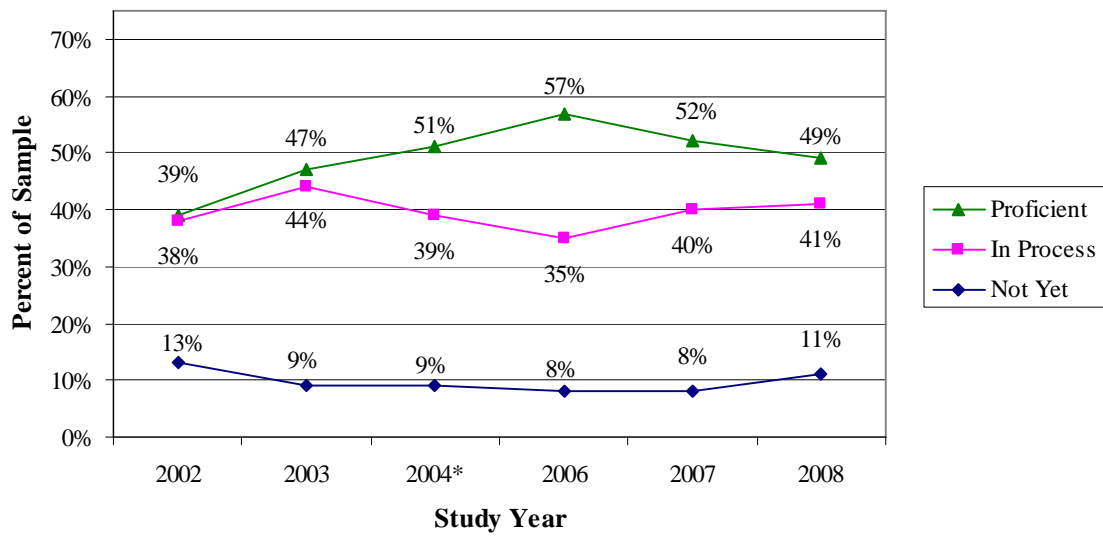
Note that categories may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Note that domain summaries are raw and unadjusted for stratified sample.



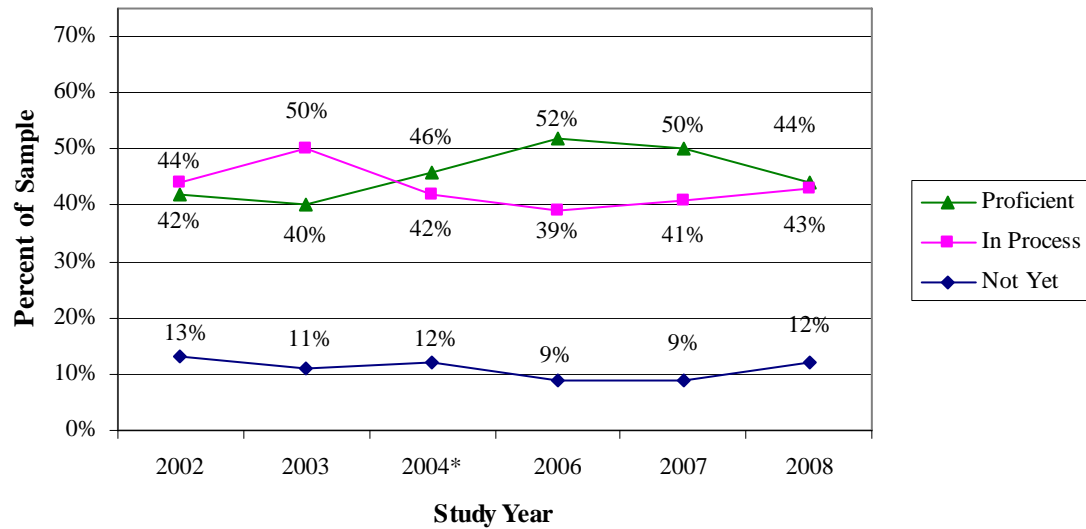


**Chart 3 - Personal and Social Development**

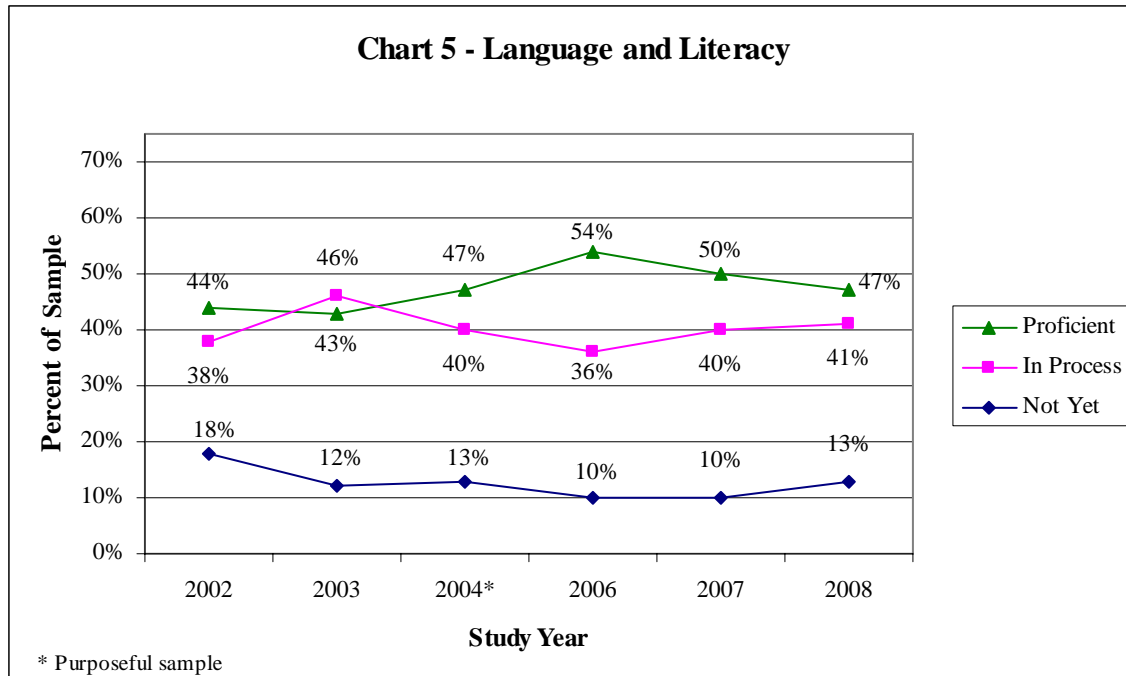


\* Purposeful sample

**Chart 4 - Mathematical Thinking**



\* Purposeful sample



## Demographic and Domain Results

The analysis of the data included examining how a particular child or family characteristic may affect that child's ratings while controlling for the effects of other demographic variables with which it may be confounded (e.g., a child from a family with a lower household income is more likely to have a parent with a lower education level). The result of *Not Yet* vs. *In Process* or *Proficient* for each domain was analyzed with respect to the demographic characteristics of gender, parent education level, household income, primary home language and race and ethnicity collected from parent surveys.

### Household Income

The odds of being *In Process* or *Proficient* for a student whose household income was at or above 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) were two to four times as great than a student whose household income was less than 250 percent FPG across the domains when holding all other variables constant.

### Parent Education Level

Parent education level was not found to be statistically significant in any of the domains in the 2008 cohort when holding all other variables constant. Recent work from the Census (National Household Education Surveys Program, 2005) continues to describe the impact of maternal education on school readiness. Previous years of this study did show a relationship between parent education level and children's results.

## **Primary Home Language**

The odds of being *In Process* or *Proficient* for students who speak English primarily at home were more than twice as likely in Language and Literacy and Mathematical Thinking as compared to students who spoke multiple languages or another primary language when all demographic variables were considered jointly. Speaking English primarily at home was not statistically related to the domains of Physical Development and Health, Personal and Social Development or The Arts after controlling for other demographic variables.

## **Race and Ethnicity**

The odds of being *In Process* or *Proficient* for students who indicate their race/ethnicity was White and another race/ethnicity were twice as likely in Personal and Social Development domain for students whose race/ethnicity was White. Students who did not list White as a category were not found to be statistically different when controlling for all related variables. There were no statistical differences by race/ethnicity in Physical Development and Health, Language and Literacy Development, The Arts or Mathematical Thinking.

## **Gender**

Gender continues to be a statistically significant factor in all domains. The odds of being *In Process* or *Proficient* for females were up to twice as likely in the Personal and Social Development, Language and Literacy and The Arts domains as compared to males.

## **Limitations**

Because children develop and grow along a continuum with great variability, the goal of the study is to assess children's proficiency within and across these developmental domains over time and not establish whether or not children, individually or in small groups, are ready for school with the use of a "ready" or "not ready" score.

The study is not designed to provide information on the history or the future of the individual student. The infrastructure to support such a process does not currently exist and would be a resource-intensive process if developed adequately to meet current demands. Any such system would need to have adequate supports for families and programs in place, detailed information on progress, data quality processes and privacy protections. Recent national reports have discussed the complexities in the development of state level accountability systems. *Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality* (2007) and The National Academy of Science report *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What and How?* (2008) details the necessary steps to use authentic assessment results, also referred to as instructional assessments, in accountability initiatives. The National Academy of Science reports that even in upper

grades, extreme caution is needed in designing high stakes accountability and that for children birth to five “even more extreme caution is needed.”

## **Discussion**

Students in each demographic category were assessed *Not Yet*, *In Process* and *Proficient*. This report analyzes the relative risk of being assessed *Not Yet* by demographic groups when a single demographic group is held constant. In line with national research, family household income was found to be a predictor across all domains for students with incomes under 250 percent FPG. Race/ethnicity and primary home language were found to be predictors in a few domains, but not all. Future reports will continue to analyze these predictors in all domains.

Kindergarten is the year with the greatest variability in a student’s history. Efforts across the state are underway to improve transitions into kindergarten. More communities are able to put into practice methods for treating the transition into kindergarten as the process that it is rather than a point-in-time event. This requires planning by schools and communities. Head Start and Early Childhood Special Education have specified protocols in place to help support smooth transitions.

## **Conclusions**

The 2008 study again confirms that children enter kindergarten with a range of skills, knowledge, behaviors and accomplishments.

1. In all of the developmental domains assessed, a certain percentage of children entering kindergarten did not yet show the indicators of focus.
2. The results by household income are consistent with national research showing the impact of poverty on children's school readiness and school success.
3. The total percentage of students rated on average as *Not Yet* in each of the five developmental domains has remained consistent throughout the six years of the study. The 2008 report details the possible beginning of an increase in the percentage of students rated, on average, as *Not Yet*.
4. Schools with a higher percentage of entering kindergartners with disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have fewer children fully prepared for kindergarten at the beginning of the school year.
5. Using performance-based assessments such as the Work Sampling System ® is appropriate when working with elementary school principals and kindergarten teachers to assess children's readiness as they enter kindergarten.

## **Recommendations**

1. Continue to support parents in their role as children's first teachers. Teachers should communicate assessment data throughout the school year when discussing children's progress with parents.
2. Focus on improving children's early language and literacy and mathematical skills, but not to the neglect of their personal and social skills and development. Providing compensatory services in the area of literacy and mathematical thinking accelerates learning for young at-risk children.
3. Continue to examine the impact of parent education level on children's school readiness.
4. Target intervention strategies to children not yet demonstrating proficiency in at least one developmental domain.
5. Continue to work toward improving the quality of early childhood education and care programs in Minnesota by emphasizing the importance of the teacher-child interactions and content-driven curriculum and instruction. The most successful prekindergarten programs provide instructional content through programming that is sufficient in length and intensity to address learning needs.
6. Promote use of school readiness information as school district and community leaders work together to identify best practices and support children's transition to kindergarten.

### **For further reading**

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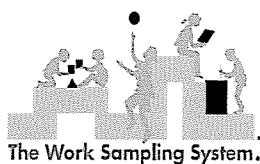
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# FOR TEACHER COMPLETION ONLY



## The Minnesota Work Sampling System® Kindergarten Entry Developmental Checklist

### INSTRUCTIONS

CORRECT: ●

USE A NO. 2 PENCIL ONLY

INCORRECT: ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔

Choose One

FEMALE  MALE

Does this student have an IEP or ILLP?  yes  no

BLDG CODE	MARSS CODE	DATE OF BIRTH	
		Month	Year
		19	
0 0	0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	0 0	0 0
1 1	1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	1 1	1 1
2 2	2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2	2 2	2 2
3 3	3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3	3 3	3 3
4 4	4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4	4 4	4 4
5 5	5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5	5 5	5 5
6 6	6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6	6 6	6 6
7 7	7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7	7 7	7 7
8 8	8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8	8 8	8 8
9 9	9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9	9 9	9 9

#### LEGEND

- (N)** Not Yet—child cannot demonstrate indicator
- (I)** In Process—child demonstrates indicator intermittently
- (P)** Proficient—child can reliably demonstrate indicator

The Work Sampling System *Preschool-4 Developmental Guidelines* (4th edition) contains full descriptions of each performance indicator. (Number in parentheses indicates the page in the Guidelines where the indicator is described.)

## I Personal and Social Development

### A Self concept Fall

- 1 Shows some self-direction. (p. 1) (N I P)

### B Self control Fall

- 1 Follows simple classroom rules and routines. (p. 1) (N I P)  
 2 Manages transitions. (p. 2) (N I P)

### C Approaches to learning Fall

- 1 Shows eagerness and curiosity as a learner. (p. 2) (N I P)  
 2 Attends to tasks and seeks help when encountering a problem. (p. 2) (N I P)  
 3 Approaches tasks with flexibility and inventiveness. (p. 3) (N I P)

### D Interaction with others Fall

- 1 Interacts easily with one or more children. (p. 3) (N I P)  
 2 Interacts easily with familiar adults. (p. 3) (N I P)  
 3 Shows empathy and caring for others. (p. 4) (N I P)

### E Social problem-solving Fall

- 1 Seeks adult help when needed to resolve conflicts. (p. 4) (N I P)

## II Language and Literacy

### A Listening Fall

- 1 Gains meaning by listening. (p. 5) (N I P)  
 2 Follows two- or three-step directions. (p. 5) (N I P)  
 3 Demonstrates phonological awareness. (p. 5) (N I P)

### B Speaking Fall

- 1 Speaks clearly enough to be understood without contextual clues. (p. 6) (N I P)  
 2 Uses expanded vocabulary and language for a variety of purposes. (p. 6) (N I P)

### C Reading Fall

- 1 Shows appreciation for books and reading. (p. 6) (N I P)  
 2 Shows beginning understanding of concepts about print. (p. 7) (N I P)  
 3 Begins to develop knowledge about letters. (p. 7) (N I P)  
 4 Comprehends and responds to stories read aloud. (p. 7) (N I P)

### D Writing Fall

- 1 Represents ideas and stories through pictures, dictation, and play. (p. 8) (N I P)  
 2 Uses letter-like shapes, symbols, and letters to convey meaning. (p. 8) (N I P)

## III Mathematical Thinking

### A Mathematical processes Fall

- 1 Begins to use simple strategies to solve mathematical problems. (p. 11) (N I P)

### B Number and operations Fall

- 1 Shows beginning understanding of number and quantity. (p. 11) (N I P)

### C Geometry and spatial relations Fall

- 1 Begins to recognize and describe the attributes of shapes. (p. 12) (N I P)  
 2 Shows understanding of and uses several positional words. (p. 12) (N I P)

## IV The Arts

### A Expression and representation Fall

- 1 Participates in group music experiences. (p. 21) (N I P)  
 2 Participates in creative movement, dance, and drama. (p. 21) (N I P)  
 3 Uses a variety of art materials for tactile experience and exploration. (p. 21) (N I P)

### B Understanding and appreciation Fall

- 1 Responds to artistic creations or events. (p. 22) (N I P)

## V Physical Development and Health

### A Gross motor development Fall

- 1 Coordinates movements to perform simple tasks. (p. 23) (N I P)

### B Fine motor development Fall

- 1 Uses eye-hand coordination to perform tasks. (p. 24) (N I P)

### C Personal health and safety Fall

- 1 Performs some self-care tasks independently. (p. 24) (N I P)

**For teacher use only**

