

SCHOOL READINESS: PARENT-CHILD ACTIVITIES,  
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS,  
AND STUDENTS' SKILLS

By

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Success By 6® (now known as Smart Start) is an organization that acts as a catalyst for community efforts to ensure children arrive at school healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed. In the spring of 2000, one Success By 6® community in Oklahoma requested a community needs and resource assessment for strategic planning. Since then the organization has grown, and in 2005 requested an updated assessment. The new data was then used to make decisions about the next steps for the organization.

The data from the research conducted in 2005 includes information about families, children, teachers, childcare, and community resources. Specifically, information collected from the families included family demographics, child care settings prior to school entry, child health history, family and children's weekly and monthly activities, and involvement and helpfulness of parenting programs. A final open-ended question asked the parents if they could be a part of a parenting support group, what they would hope to gain from participation and what questions would they ask. The information gathered from teachers included teacher demographics, perceptions of children's skills, abilities, and experiences, and teachers' ratings of importance of skills, abilities, and experiences needed for developmental success. Other open-ended questions were also collected from teachers regarding the three most important needs of children 0-6 years of age, changes in needs, community agencies that meet needs, and the biggest unmet needs in their community.



The teacher and family demographics, parent-child activities, teachers' perceptions of student readiness and the teachers' ratings of skills, abilities and experiences needed for developmental success may help Smart Start and others develop a common understanding of school readiness as it relates to this sample. A common understanding and definition of school readiness between parents, teachers and community efforts is the starting point for reaching the first National Educational Goal, having children starting school ready to learn (National Education Goals Panel, 1991). The present study will utilize the data to further explore the relationship between school readiness, parent-child activities reported and teachers' ratings and reports of school readiness.

### *Definitions*

School readiness is not an easy concept to define. The definition of school readiness varies among parents, teachers, schools and communities, which influences a child's ability to transition to school. Kagan, Moore, and Bredekamp (1995) report for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) that because children's performance is multidimensional and varied, it may be misleading to define readiness. As well, school readiness is socially constructed as it relates to the information available to parents, relationships between parents and schools, and a child's experiences (Graue, 1992).

For the purpose of this study, school readiness will be defined as skills needed for developmental success, which contributes to a child's ability to adjust to the social, emotional, and academic demands of beginning school. This study will further explore the activities parents and children engage in as it relates to preparing their child for

school. The study will also use teacher report of school readiness and ratings of skills needed for school readiness to further explore developmental success as it relates to the teachers' perceptions.

### *Problem Statement*

Although there is a wealth of research on school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Graue, 1992; Meisels, 1999; Pianta, 1997), there is little current research on relations among parent-child activities and school readiness. The present study would provide much-needed research documenting the relationship between activities parents engage in with their children and how that relates to teachers' report of the skills, abilities and experiences that the majority of the students demonstrate in their classrooms. It will further relate the parent report of activities, the teachers' report of children's actual skills, abilities and experiences with teachers' perceptions of skills, abilities, and experiences believed necessary for developmental success. This study could potentially guide further community efforts in aiding children to arrive at school healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed as well as provide schools with information to help them become ready for students.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The present study would provide much-needed research documenting parent report of the type of parent-child activities they engage in as it relates to teachers' perceptions of skills, abilities, and experiences necessary for developmental success and teacher report of skills, abilities, and experiences that the majority of the students demonstrate in their class. Little is known regarding the relationship between these variables. Further, the study will explore the relationship of the *frequency* and *type* of

parent-child activities as they relate to teachers' perceptions of readiness for developmental success and teacher report of the students' skills, abilities, and experiences. This study could provide important information to local teachers and community efforts regarding school readiness recommendations and practices. As well, the information gained could provide parents with the specific skills teachers' perceive important for school readiness, further guiding their school readiness activities at home.

#### *Research Questions*

- What skills, abilities and experiences do teachers report are important for children's developmental success? Due to the exploratory nature of the question, no hypotheses were generated.
- What skills, abilities and experiences do teachers report children demonstrate? Due to the exploratory nature of the question, no hypotheses were generated.
- What school readiness activities do parents report that their children participate in? Due to the exploratory nature of the question, no hypotheses were generated.
- What is the relationship between parent report of *type of activities* and teacher report of children's skills and abilities? It is hypothesized that parents who report reading with their child, helping their child do chores, and build things with their child will have higher teacher report of children's skills and abilities.
- What is the relationship between parent report of *frequency of activities* and teacher report of children's skills and abilities? It is hypothesized that parents who report engaging in school readiness activities more frequently will have higher teacher report of children's skills and abilities.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory encompasses the multiple groups of environmental factors such as families, schools, and communities that influence child development. In ecological systems theory, a "child develops within a complex system of relationships affected by various levels of the surrounding environment" (Berk, 2006, p.26). This theory is an organization of the environmental factors and relationships impacting child development.

In the theoretical model, the child is in the center of layers of systems. The relationship a child has with school, family, and the neighborhood is described as the *microsystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The connection between the different components of the microsystem is called the *mesosystem*. An example of the mesosystem could be parent-teacher interactions. Further, the social settings that do not include the child but affect the child, such as the community, parents' workplace, or extended family, is called the *exosystem*. Customs, values, and laws are examples of the *macrosystem* that affect activities within the layers of the systems.

This theory demonstrates the various dynamic influences on a child's development. All of the indirect and direct influences of the ecological systems theory impact a child's readiness for beginning education. While educational laws, policymakers, and national educational values indirectly impact a child's development

via the macrosystem, the expectations, beliefs, and practices of parents and teachers directly influence children's school readiness via the microsystem and mesosystem. The multiple influential components of ecological systems theory, specifically school and family, provide the theoretical foundation for the present study.

### *School Readiness History*

The history of the phrase "school readiness" is quite elaborate. During the 1980's, attention had been given to early childhood achievement and experiences (Raudenbush & Bryk, 1986; Swick & Lovingood, 1981; Willer & Bredekamp, 1990). Then, in 1983, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) promoted the need to develop more challenging school curricula and raise standards in education. The unintentional domino effect impacted the academic demands for school entrance and placement.

In 1991, an educational summit that included 51 governors met, giving rise to the National Educational Goals Panel. As a result, a renewed federal commitment for improving educational achievement and an increased commitment to education as a whole developed. The six National Education Goals were established, becoming known as Goals 2000. This was later expanded by Congress to eight goals. The first of the eight goals stated, "All children in America will start school ready to learn" (National Education Goals Panel, 1995).

The "readiness goal," as it has become known, has fueled the flame of much debate and study. A great deal of empirical research on school readiness is available (Graue, 1992; Kim, Murdock, & Choi, 2005; Mashburn & Henry, 2004; Piotrkowski, Botsko & Matthews, 2001). School readiness has become a catchphrase familiar to

educators, school administrators, and young families. Furthermore, defining “readiness” has become problematic. With diverse understanding, experiences, and definitions of school readiness, confusion has become the norm. Definitions and practices of school readiness tend to differ among schools, teachers, parents, and communities. As parents and schools come together for the common good of children during the critical transition into formal schooling, it is important that congruent ideas and practices of school readiness are created.

Developing a definition has not been easy. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) holds the position that “child performance is multidimensional and varied; therefore it would be misleading and dangerous to define readiness” (Kagan et al., 1995, p.6). Graue (1992) concludes that readiness is socially constructed as well as a relative entity dependent on information available to parents, relationships between parents and schools, and child experiences. Further, Graue rejects the notion of children needing to be ready for school; rather, Graue advocates the idea that schools need to be ready for children.

### *The Child*

Age has long-been the predominant defining factor for school readiness. Most states deem children eligible for kindergarten if they are five years old by a cutoff date in early fall (Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000). Age is a universal characteristic, but each child is unique in gender, family composition, experiences, and temperament. Common factors that tend to influence a child’s experiences in being ready for school include: previous preschool experience, social skills, intelligence, general health and

well-being, gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Each of these factors and their relationship to school readiness will be described in more detail.

### *Preschool Experience*

Previous school experience has been associated with school readiness. Many preschool programs, such as Head Start, have been formed to help children become ready for school. The preschool experience is meant to enrich a child's family and home experiences. Early education has been found to help reduce achievement gaps in school readiness (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Dependent on preschool curriculum, Lunenburg (2000) asserts early childhood educational experiences bridge the readiness transition into kindergarten. In a study on the effects of universal Pre-K on cognitive development in Oklahoma, Gormley, Gayer, Phillips and Dawson (2005) researched the overall effect of Pre-K for children of varying race, ethnicity and income. They found statistically significant positive effects of preschool attendance on Hispanic, Black, White, and Native American children's performance on cognitive tests of pre-reading skills, reading skills, pre-writing skills, spelling skills, and math reasoning and problem-solving abilities. These findings held across all income brackets. Generally, children who attend a preschool program prior to kindergarten tend to adjust and have more readiness skills than their peers who have not attended a preschool program.

### *Social Skills*

It is beneficial for young children to develop social skills including prosocial behavior, following instructions, age-appropriate communication, getting along with peers and adults, and independence in order to experience early school success. Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) explored the teacher-child relationship between teachers and their

preschool, kindergarten and first grade students. They found that teachers' report of higher conflict was associated with lower social skills and closer relationships were associated with higher social competence. Mashburn and Henry (2004) found that social-emotional development is likely a fundamental characteristic for a child's overall success in school. Studies also find that negative behaviors such as disruptive, disorganized, disturbing, inattentive, uncooperative, or off task behaviors are noted as the most obvious predictor of failure prone-students (Johnson-Fedoruk, 1991). It may seem that social skills enhance teachers' and parents' perceptions of school readiness (McBryde, Ziviani, & Cuskelly, 2004). Contrary to these findings, a longitudinal study linking school readiness and later achievement found behavior was an insignificant predictor of later achievement (Duncan et al., 2007). Social skills tend to be beneficial for school readiness, but may not be related to later school achievement.

### *Gender*

Gender has been found to be an influential factor in school readiness. Angenent and deMan (1989) found a significant relationship between social maturity and females. Girls appeared to be more socially mature than boys. Additionally, 20% of boys were identified as not ready for school compared to 11% of girls. Consistent with this study, Zill (1999) has reported that boys tend to have more academic and behavioral problems than girls.

### *Academic Readiness*

Cognitive readiness assessments such as one-dimensional, group-administered, computer scored or multiple-choice achievement tests used for placement, grouping, retention, or labeling may be frowned upon by early childhood experts (Kagan et al.,



1995; Meisels, 1999), yet some achievement tests have credible predictive power. Across six longitudinal data sets, Duncan et al. (2007) found that early math and literacy skills had the greater predictive power over reading and attention for later school reading and math achievement. Additionally, Agenent and deMan (1989) found that higher intelligence is associated with greater readiness. However, Carlton and Winsler (1999) have found assessments that only regard academics fail to predict future academic success. Undoubtedly a child with basic knowledge would have an easier adjustment to the increasing academic demands of school.

### *Socioeconomic Status and Ethnicity*

Children from low socioeconomic families and minority children concern educators in their ability to adjust to school. Some areas of concern may include cultural perspectives, nutrition, language barriers, parent involvement, single parent families, or typology of “at-risk”. Perez-Johnson and Maynard (2007) discuss the concern with achievement gaps between children of low income and diverse ethnicity/race as an influence on policy and productivity in the educational system. In their study, they find that “early, vigorous” intervention for disadvantaged children is the best chance to reduce gaps in school readiness. Although seemingly unrealistic, Duncan and Magnuson (2005) found that increasing family income could be a promising intervention to narrow the achievement gap in school readiness. In a large study involving 501 Pre-K students in five different states’ public education programs, Barbarin et al. (2006) found that children from high socioeconomic families had higher academic skills in math and language and fewer behavior problems than their disadvantaged peers. Low socioeconomic status and

race/ethnicity are characteristics that are often negatively associated with school readiness.

### *Health*

Related to socioeconomic circumstances and ethnicity is a child's health and well being. Specifically, prenatal care, low birth weight, immunizations, and preventive health care are areas of concern. Community schools have been created with clinics in the school to promote health care. As well, schools host dental, immunization, flu-shot, or wellness check clinics. Communities are developing parenting classes that include information on nutrition and health. Also, schools not only have lunch, but now breakfast is served for children who may not receive a healthy meal at home. Dworkin (1993) asserts that pediatric care can monitor and screen while being an effective predictor of school readiness. More specifically, Janus and Duku (2007) found that a child's suboptimal health contributes to vulnerability when starting school. It can be concluded that a child's school readiness is influenced by their health.

### *The Parent*

A child's family largely impacts experiences related to school readiness. It has been stated by the National Goals Panel (1995) that parents are their children's first teacher. The relationship between the child and their parent as well as the beliefs and practices of parents are key influential components in children's school readiness. Pianta (1997, p. 14) remarks that "parent-child relationships have a history, a memory; they are patterns of interactions, expectations, beliefs and affects organized at a level more abstract than observable behaviors."

### *Parent Expectations*

From the child-parent relationship, parental expectations influence a child's ability to be successful in school. An early study by Maxwell and Eller (1994) found that high parental expectations of school success, cognitive stimulation from parents at home, and positive parent-child interactions were the best predictors of school success.

If parental expectations play such a key role, it is important to discover what they believe and practice. A Head Start study indicated that when parents expect their children to do well, they will (Galper, Wigfield, & Seefeldt, 1997). As well, the study indicated the parents' positive belief in their child was correlated with their children's positive attitude toward school, performance on math and reading achievement testing, and the child's belief in him/herself. Undoubtedly the parent-child relationship and parent expectations have profound value for children's school readiness and adjustment. Diamond, Reagan, and Bandyk (2000) found that parents' concern for kindergarten readiness and the activities parents participated in with their children were unrelated. Report of what parents say is important for school readiness may differ from what they actually practice at home (West, 1993). More research is need regarding the relationship between the readiness activities parents engage in with their children and parents' perceptions of school readiness.

### *Parental Beliefs of Academic Readiness*

Diamond et al. (2000) found that parents' kindergarten readiness beliefs included both behavior and academic skills. The study concluded that parents do put more emphasis on a child's academic abilities when considering delaying their child's school entry. Some research (Welch & White, 1999; West, 1993) found that parents view

academic skills as important for school readiness. Academic skills may include counting, holding a pencil correctly, and knowing the alphabet. Kindergarten entry assessments, state-wide testing, new standards for No Child Left Behind criteria, or the media attention may be the reason for parents' concern for academic skills.

### *Parental Beliefs of Social Readiness*

Others find that parents view social skills as important in kindergarten readiness (Kim et al., 2005; McAllister, Wilson, Green, & Baldwin, 2005; McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGenaro, & Wildenger, 2007). Social skills may include communication, taking turns, paying attention and self-control. A Head Start study (McAllister et al., 2005) noted that the parents in their sample valued academic skills, yet tended to place more emphasis on social and emotional health or skills. The parents wanted their children to have self-respect and be able to stand up for themselves as they viewed school as a threatening or "foreign" environment. With children coming from diverse preschool, childcare, community and family experiences, social skills are a central aspect of kindergarten readiness.

### *Parental Education*

Parents' educational level has been found to affect their views on school readiness (Greenburg, Liuana, Cole, & Pinderhughes, 1999; West, 1993). In fact, West (1993) found that a majority of parents who were college completers believed academic skills were important for kindergarten readiness compared to the majority of parents who had less than a high school education, high school education, or some college, who placed more of an importance on social and emotional behaviors. On the contrary, Piotrkowski et al., (2001) found that of the 441 parents surveyed, parental educational attainment was

unrelated to views of readiness. Regardless, parental education level is often a variable considered in studies of children.

### *Family Culture*

Certainly culture influences parental values, expectations and practices. In a study on parental ethnotheories, Brooker (2003) found that more than maternal education, home culture and preparation have greater consequences for school experiences and achievements. As well, a Head Start study involving parents of White, Black, Hispanic, Asian and other cultural groups found that ethnic differences emerged regarding parents' beliefs about their children's abilities and futures (Galper et al., 1997). Their findings showed that White and Black parents were significantly more confident than Hispanic parents, believing that their children would receive a good education. Asian parents were significantly more confident than Hispanic parents that their children would obtain a job after schooling. Hispanic parents rated their children as significantly more positive in sports. It can be concluded that parental beliefs and expectations are influenced by ethnicity and culture.

### *Home Activities*

There is limited research on the topic of what parents do at home to help their children become ready for school. Diamond et al. (2000) researched the frequency of home learning activities parents report their children were engaged in the previous week. Parents reported providing their children with reading and watching educational television several times a week as learning opportunities. However, the home learning activities reported were unrelated to parents' concerns regarding their child's kindergarten readiness. In a more recent study, Kim et al. (2005) researched the

relationship between parents' beliefs about kindergarten readiness and parenting practices. The results also indicated no strong consistency between parents' beliefs and parenting activities. These studies address parental beliefs as they relate to school readiness. Further research needs to be developed in these areas to address the types of activities and frequency of activities as they relate to parents, perceptions and beliefs of school readiness.

In a large study of 551 parents of preschoolers and kindergarteners, Stipek, Milburn, Clements, and Daniels (1992) found a significant association between parents' beliefs about appropriate ways to teach basic skills to their children and the learning activities they engaged in with their children. Further, they found that parents who embraced didactic, teacher-directed approaches to learning engage in formal teaching activities like flashcards or workbooks. Also, parents who engage in informal activities such as reading to their child opposed didactic methods. As well, poorly educated parents were more closely associated with didactic methods compared to well-educated parents. The researchers do caution that the significant associations must be interpreted cautiously because parental practices were surveyed and not observed directly. More research is needed to explore the relationship between parents' beliefs in appropriate ways to teach basic skills, the learning activities they engage in, and school readiness.

Kessler (2002) explored the relationship between monthly and weekly parental activities and kindergarten readiness. The survey included eight weekly activities: story telling, teaching letters and numbers, singing, art, outdoor games, indoor games, running errands together like going to the bank, and involving a child in chores. The survey also included six monthly activities including: visiting the library, going to a play concert or

show, visiting an art gallery, museum, or historical site, visiting the zoo, talking with a child about heritage, and attending a community or religious event.

In the study, Kessler (2002) reports that there was no significant relationship between monthly activities and school readiness. A positive relationship was found between weekly activities and school readiness. In fact, parents' involvement in weekly activities contributed more to kindergarten readiness than demographic variables including gender, ethnicity, highest grade parent completed, and age. Further, parents who participated more in weekly activities had children who scored higher on the MAS-R, language and literacy skills, and social development skills assessments. Kessler also notes that the results failed to differentiate between the type of activity, or the amount of activity and should be researched further.

Further research on parent and home activities and children's school success is needed. As well, more research is needed on differentiating between the types of parent-child activities and the frequency of the parent-child activities as it relates to school readiness. Little empirical research exists exploring the relationship among these variables.

### *The Teacher*

The teacher-student relationship, teachers' expectations, and beliefs regarding school readiness are vital to their students. Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) assert that teacher-child relationships are an influential component in children's ability to acquire the skills needed for success. As well, Welch and White (1999) remark how teachers' beliefs can influence early evaluations of students' abilities and teachers' expectations, which in turn affect student placement and promotion. Therefore, it is important to

discover what teachers believe and expect regarding school readiness. Several categories of beliefs emerge including academics, social skills, and age/gender/physical health.

#### *Teacher Beliefs of Academic Readiness*

In a longitudinal study including 3,305 teacher participants, Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) found that younger teachers compared to older teachers valued academic skills more highly in school readiness. Similarly, Piotrkowski et al. (2001) report preschool teachers more than kindergarten teachers rated basic knowledge and skills as more important readiness skills. Overall, academic skills have been reported by teachers as less necessary than social skills for school readiness (Johnson, Gallagher, Cook & Wong, 1995; Lin et al., 2003; McBryde et al., 2004; Welch & White, 1999).

#### *Teacher Beliefs of Social Readiness*

Teachers report social skills such as temperament, communication, compliance and the ability to interact with peers and authority as influential to school readiness. McBryde et al. (2004) report that well-developed social skills, adaptability, and persistence with an activity positively influenced teachers' decisions and beliefs of school readiness. As well, temperament related to withdrawn or shy behaviors negatively influenced teachers' decisions and beliefs of school readiness. Similarly, Piotrkowski et al., (2001) report teachers believe social competence is associated with school readiness. Welch and White (1999) also note teachers report communicating needs, wants and thoughts and being enthusiastic and curious as essential to school readiness. Finally, Johnson et al. (1995) surveyed 176 teachers in three school districts, one urban, another suburban and the other rural. These teachers identified independence, communication ability, social skills, and getting along with peers and adults critical for transitioning into



kindergarten. The previous studies suggest that teachers consider social skills critical for school readiness.

### *Teacher Beliefs about Age, Gender, and Health*

Age and gender tend to influence teachers' beliefs and practices related to school readiness. McBryde et al. (2004) find that teachers perceived girls as more ready for school than boys. Additionally, they find that chronological age influenced teachers' beliefs on school readiness. As well, health concerns emerged from teacher reports of school readiness. Numerous researchers have consistent data regarding teachers' report of the importance of physical health, being well rested and well nourished for school readiness (Meisels, 1999; Piotrkowski et al., 2001; Welch & White, 1999). It is agreeable that children who are healthy, well nourished and rested will excel in teachers' expectations and school readiness.

Finally, a teacher's expectations and beliefs impact children's ability to acquire the skills necessary for school success (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Academic and social adjustment as well as age, gender and health are factors that influence teachers' beliefs and practices (McBryde et al., 2004; Meisels, 1999; Piotrkowski et al., 2001). More research is needed on how teachers' beliefs about the diverse factors of school readiness relate to students' school adjustment and success.

### *Parents and Teachers*

Some similarities and some differences have emerged in the research regarding parents' and teachers' expectations, beliefs, and practices related to school readiness. West (1993) asserts that when parents and teachers hold similar beliefs, parents may encourage their children in the skills teachers look for as children begin kindergarten.

Welch and White (1999, p. 13) emphasize, “High levels of congruence between parent and teacher groups may be facilitating factors in the quality of education students receive.”

Similar factors emerged in a study investigating the factors that influence parents’ and teachers’ beliefs on school readiness of 215 preschool children. These factors include chronological age, task persistence, and adaptable behaviors (McBryde et al., 2004). In another study investigating parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about school readiness in a high needs community, Piotrkowski et al. (2001) found that parents and teachers agreed on health and social competence as necessary for children to be ready for the transition to school.

Social skills tend to be the common thread among teachers and parents, although there are some inconsistencies in the vast amount of literature on school readiness. The activities parents do with their children can facilitate social skills as well as academic skills to help promote school readiness. More research is needed to study the relationship between parent reports of frequency of activities and what types of activities parents are doing with their children to help them become ready for school. Research on these topics gives teachers and schools valuable information to become a “ready school” as well as providing information to community leaders and policymakers in their support of parents.

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY

*Participants*

The community needs assessment included parents, teachers and students in several communities in Oklahoma. Overall, 862 parents of Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and 1<sup>st</sup> grade children participated. For the purposes of the present study, data from parents (N=577) of Pre-K and Kindergarten children will be used. Table 1 shows parent response by grade level. Table 2 shows parent report of children's child care settings prior to school entry. The demographic information about the families in this study is represented in Table 3. Information about children's health was also gathered from parents. Parents answered "yes" or "no" to 14 questions indicating children's health. Table 4 shows parent report of the overall health of children.

Teachers from public schools as well as Pre-K teachers from Head Start, faith-based, private preschools, and family child care homes participated. Overall, 136 Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and first grade teachers participated. For the purposes of the present study, data from the 70 Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers who participated will be used. Teacher demographic information is represented in Table 5.

Table 1

*Parent Responses by Grade Level (N=577)*

Grade Level	Parents n (%)
Pre-Kindergarten	371 (64)
Kindergarten	206 (36)

Table 2

*Child Care Settings Prior to School Entry (N=577)*

Child Care Setting	Parents n (%)
Head Start	61 (11)
Faith-based	99 (17)
Private	190 (33)
Family Child Care	106 (18)
Relative Care	134 (23)

Table 3

*Family Demographics (N=577)*

Descriptor	Parents (N=577)
# of Children in the Home	
Mean	2.21
Range	1—8
# of Adults in the Home	
Mean	1.94
Marital Status	
Single	11%
Married	77%
Divorced	5%
Yearly Household Income	
Mean	\$36,000—\$40,999
Range	
Low	0
High	\$250,000+

Table 4

*Parent Report of Overall Health of Child (N=577)*

Health Status	Parents n (%)
Very Healthy	352 (61)
Healthy	218 (38)
Somewhat Unhealthy	2 (<1)
Very Unhealthy	4 (<1)

Table 5

*Teacher Demographic Information (N=70)*

Descriptor	
Mean Age	37.48 years
Ages 23—29	25%
Ages 30—35	29%
Ages 36—47	21%
Ages 48—60	25%
Sex	
Female	99%
Male	1%
Marital Status	
Single (never married)	11%
Single (separated, divorced, widowed)	9%
Married	79%
Ethnicity	
Native American	8%
Caucasian	91%
Other	1%
Education Level	
High school/GED	2%
Some College	12%
Two-year College Degree	3%
Four-year College Degree	36%
Some Graduate College	23%
Graduate Degree	24%
# years teaching experience	
Mean	11 years
Range	<1 year—34 years
# years living in community	
Mean	18 years
Range	<1 year—48 years
# years teaching in community	
Mean	9 years
Range	<1 year—30 years

### *Procedures*

The present study involves secondary data analysis. Data was gathered from parents, teachers, and child care providers in several communities in central Oklahoma in the fall of 2005. Participation in the project was voluntary. Questionnaires were distributed to parents and teachers via the schools.

### *Instruments*

A parent questionnaire was designed to gather information (see Appendix A). The questionnaire covered four general areas: Family Demographics (18 items), Child Health (15 items), Family & Children's Activities (14 items; 9 weekly and 5 monthly), and Parenting Programs (4 items). Approximately 2,000 questionnaires were distributed to parents via public schools, child care centers, Head Start programs, and family child care homes. Eight-hundred-sixty-two parents responded, for a response rate of 43%.

A teacher questionnaire was designed for Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and first grade teachers. Questions were asked about skills, abilities, and experiences of the children in their classrooms (15 items; see Appendix B). Teachers were also asked about school transition activities (19 items). Additionally, teachers were asked open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of the needs of the children and families in their communities (8 items). Approximately 128 questionnaires were distributed to public school teachers. As well, 65 questionnaires were distributed to Pre-Kindergarten teachers in child care centers in the community (Head Start, faith-based, private preschool, and family child care homes). Eighty-nine teachers responded, for a response rate of 46%.

### *Data Analyses*

The following analyses were used to explore the research questions.

- Research Question 1: What skills, abilities and experiences do teachers report are important for children's developmental success? Descriptive analyses were conducted, including means, standard deviations, ranges, frequencies, and percentages. Additionally, ANOVA's were conducted to determine if there were differences in teacher report of the importance of skills by years of teaching experience and by grade level (Pre-K vs. Kindergarten).
- Research Question 2: What skills, abilities and experiences do teachers report children demonstrate? Descriptive analyses were conducted, including means, standard deviations, ranges, frequencies, and percentages. Additionally, Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine if there were differences in teacher report of children's skills by years of teaching experience and by grade level (Pre-K vs. Kindergarten).
- Research Question 3: What school readiness activities do parents report that their children participate in? Descriptive analyses were conducted, including means, standard deviations, ranges, frequencies, and percentages. An exploratory factor analysis was run to determine how the items loaded together as factors. Additionally, ANOVA's were conducted to determine if there were differences in parent report of activities by grade level of the child (i.e., Pre-K vs. Kindergarten).
- Research Questions 4 & 5: What is the relationship between parent report of *type of activities* and teacher report of children's skills and abilities? What is



the relationship between parent report of *frequency of activities* and teacher report of children's skills and abilities? Analyses for these research questions were combined. Logistic regression analyses were conducted; predictor variables were each of the 3 activity factors identified via the factor analysis (see Research Question 3). Outcome variables were teacher report of each of the 15 skills/abilities/experiences. Thus, 45 separate logistic regression analyses were performed. Family income was controlled for in each of the analyses.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### *Teacher Report of Importance of Skills, Abilities, and Experiences*

Teachers reported on the importance of different skills, abilities, and experiences that children need for developmental success (see Tables 6 and 7). Of the teacher report, 77% of teachers reported “shows curiosity and interest in learning” as an *essential* skill. Other skills considered *essential* by many teachers included: “following directions and instructions” (70%), “good language & communication skills” (61%), and “listen & pay attention” (60%).

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there were differences in teacher report of importance of skills by grade level. No significant differences were found. As well, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were differences in teacher report of importance of skills by years of teaching experience (with years grouped by quartiles). Again, no significant differences were found.

Table 6

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Teacher Ratings of Importance of Skills, Abilities, and Experiences (N = 70)*

Skill / Ability/ Experience	Mean	$\pm$ SD	Range*
Listen & pay attention	4.43	0.93	1—5
Good language & communication skills	4.49	0.74	2—5
Positive prior reading experiences	4.54	0.74	1—5
Toilet trained	4.30	0.91	1—5
Follow directions and instructions	4.55	0.85	1—5
Good social skills	4.45	0.76	1—5
Sit still	3.81	0.88	1—5
Possess basic knowledge	3.58	1.06	1—5
Separate easily from parents or caregivers	3.96	0.79	2—5
Exhibit fine motor skills	3.96	0.96	2—5
Show curiosity and interest in learning	4.69	0.68	1—5
Care for/assist in caring for self	3.90	0.79	1—5
Physically healthy	4.26	0.83	2—5
Developmentally mature	4.00	0.93	1—5
Signs of previous experiences with other children	3.88	0.87	1—5

\*1=no importance; 2=little importance; 3=moderate importance; 4=very important; 5=essential

Table 7

*Frequencies for Teacher Ratings of Importance of Children's Skills, Abilities, and Experiences (N = 70)*

Skills/Ability/ Experience	No Importance n (%)	Little Importance n (%)	Moderate Importance n (%)	Very Important n (%)	Essential n (%)
Listen & pay attention	3 (4)	0 (0)	3 (4)	22 (31)	42 (60)
Good language & communication skills	0 (0)	2 (3)	4 (6)	21 (30)	42 (61)
Positive prior reading experiences	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	23 (33)	43 (62)
Toilet trained	1 (1)	1 (1)	11 (16)	18 (26)	36 (51)
Follow directions and instructions	2 (3)	0 (0)	4 (6)	15 (22)	48 (70)
Good social skills	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (3)	27 (39)	38 (55)
Sit still	1 (1)	2 (3)	22 (32)	28 (41)	16 (23)
Possess basic knowledge	3 (5)	6 (9)	21 (31)	23 (34)	14 (21)
Separate easily from parents or caregivers	0 (0)	1 (1)	20 (29)	30 (43)	19 (27)
Exhibit fine motor skills	0 (0)	6 (9)	15 (22)	24 (35)	24 (35)
Show curiosity and interest in learning	1 (2)	0 (0)	2 (3)	13 (19)	52 (77)
Care for/assist in caring for self	1 (2)	1 (2)	16 (24)	36 (53)	14 (21)
Physically healthy	3 (4)	0 (0)	8 (11)	27 (39)	32 (46)
Developmentally mature	1 (2)	4 (6)	11 (16)	30 (44)	22 (32)
Signs of previous experiences with other children	1 (1)	2 (3)	18 (26)	31 (45)	17 (25)

*Teacher Report of Students' Skills, Abilities, and Experiences*

Teachers reported whether or not the majority of children in their class possessed or demonstrated a variety of skills needed for developmental success (see Tables 8 and 9). Ninety-nine percent of teachers reported that the majority of children in their class “separate easily from parents or caregivers.” Other skills where a large percentage of teachers reported that the majority of children in their class possessed the skill included: “physically healthy” (97%), “toilet trained” (96%), and “shows curiosity and interest in learning” (96%). Interestingly, only 40% of teachers reported that the majority of children in their class “possess basic knowledge.”

Chi-square analyses indicated there were no significant differences in teacher report of children’s skills by years of teaching experience (using quartiles for teaching experience). Chi-square analyses indicated there were differences in teacher report of children’s skills by grade level (Pre-K vs. Kindergarten). Significant differences were found between Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers for three skills: social skills, exhibits fine motor skills, and cares for oneself (see Tables 10, 11, & 12). For each of these activities, Kindergarten teachers indicated their students demonstrated or possessed these skills more frequently than Pre-K teachers.

Table 8

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Teacher Ratings of Children's Skills, Abilities, and Experiences (N = 70)*

Skill / Ability / Experience	Mean	$\pm$ SD	Range*
Listen & pay attention	.67	0.47	0—1
Good language & communication skills	.87	0.34	0—1
Positive prior reading experiences	.84	0.37	0—1
Toilet trained	.96	0.21	0—1
Follow directions and instructions	.72	0.45	0—1
Good social skills	.67	0.48	0—1
Sit still	.57	0.50	0—1
Possess basic knowledge	.40	0.49	0—1
Separate easily from parents or caregivers	.99	0.12	0—1
Exhibit fine motor skills	.54	0.50	0—1
Show curiosity and interest in learning	.96	0.21	0—1
Care for/assist in caring for self	.88	0.33	0—1
Physically healthy	.97	0.17	0—1
Developmentally mature	.64	0.48	0—1
Signs of previous experiences with other children	.93	0.26	0—1

\*0=no; 1=yes

Table 9

*Frequencies for Teacher Ratings of Children's Skills, Abilities, and Experiences*  
(*N* = 70)

Skill / Ability / Experience	Teachers reporting majority of the skills/abilities/experiences	
	n	(%)
Listen & pay attention	47	(67)
Good language & communication skills	59	(87)
Positive prior reading experiences	58	(84)
Toilet trained	66	(96)
Follow directions and instructions	49	(72)
Good social skills	46	(67)
Sit still	40	(57)
Possess basic knowledge	26	(40)
Separate easily from parents or caregivers	69	(99)
Exhibit fine motor skills	38	(54)
Show curiosity and interest in learning	65	(96)
Care for/assist in caring for self	60	(88)
Physically healthy	67	(97)
Developmentally mature	44	(64)
Signs of previous experiences with other children	64	(93)

Table 10

*Chi-square Analysis for Percent of Teachers Reporting Majority of Children Demonstrate Social Skills (N=69)*

Skill	Pre-K Teachers (n=45)	Kindergarten Teachers (n=24)	$\chi^2(1)$	p
Social Skills	58%	83%	4.60	.032

Table 11

*Chi-square Analysis for Percent of Teachers Reporting Majority of Children Demonstrate Motor Skills (N=70)*

Skill	Pre-K Teachers (n=46)	Kindergarten Teachers (n=24)	$\chi^2(1)$	p
Motor Skills	37%	88%	12.24	.000

Table 12

*Chi-square Analysis for Percent of Teachers Reporting Majority of Children Care for Self (N=68)*

Skill	Pre-K Teachers (n=44)	Kindergarten Teachers (n=24)	$\chi^2(1)$	p
Caring for Self	82%	100%	4.96	.026



### *Parent Report of Activities*

Descriptive information about parent report of children's *weekly* activities can be seen in Tables 13 and 14. Descriptive information about parent report of children's *monthly* activities can be seen in Tables 15 and 16.

#### *Factor Analysis and Scale Reliabilities.*

In order to determine whether the 13 items representing school readiness activities reported by parents could be reduced to a smaller number of activities, a principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed. Factors with an eigenvalue greater than or equal to 1.0 were included in the final solution. Items with factor loadings of .40 or higher were considered to comprise a factor and were interpreted in the solution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1998). The solution converged easily and could be readily interpreted. Four factors were extracted, accounting for 52% of the variance. Three of the factors were interpretable. The three factors were named: Hands-on Activities, Sports & Games, and Community-based Activities. One item was complex ("builds things with child"), loading on more than one factor. Because this item loaded on one interpretable and one non-interpretable factor, it was retained on the interpretable factor of Hands-on Activities. Table 17 shows the factor loadings for each of the items.

Scale reliabilities for the School Readiness Activity factors were calculated using coefficient alpha. Alpha coefficients for hands-on activities exceeded the .70 criterion (Nunnally, 1978). However, sports & games (.52) and community-based activities (.58) fell below this criterion. This is likely due to the few number of items that comprise each of these two factors (3 items for each factor). Therefore, results of

analyses using these factors must be interpreted with caution (see Table 18).

Table 13

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Parent Ratings of Weekly Activities (N = 577)*

Weekly Activity	Mean	$\pm$ SD	Range *
Read to child	2.12	0.77	1—4
Sing with child	1.93	0.83	1—4
Do art activities with child	1.43	0.78	1—4
Help child do chores	1.72	0.78	1—4
Play board/card games with child	1.11	0.63	1—4
Talk about nature with child	1.53	0.78	1—4
Build things with child	1.33	0.73	1—4
Play sports with child	1.38	0.75	1—4
Watch TV/Videos/DVD with child	1.77	0.81	1—4

\*1=never; 2=1-3 times/wk; 3=4-6 times/wk; 4=7 or more times/wk

Table 14

*Frequencies for Parent Ratings of Frequency of Weekly Activities (N = 577)*

Weekly Activity	Never n (%)	1-3 times/ Week n (%)	4—6 times/ Week n (%)	7+ times/ Week n (%)
Read to child	3 (<1)	132 (23)	234 (40)	209 (36)
Sing with child	9 (2)	194 (34)	202 (35)	169 (29)
Do art activities with child	44 (8)	301 (52)	169 (29)	62 (11)
Help child do chores	14 (3)	233 (41)	219 (38)	104 (18)
Play board/card games with child	73 (13)	378 (66)	106 (19)	14 (3)
Talk about nature with child	26 (5)	294 (51)	178 (31)	75 (13)
Build things with child	50 (9)	321 (56)	163 (29)	37 (7)
Play sports with child	53 (9)	285 (50)	193 (34)	39 (7)
Watch TV/Videos/DVD with child	5 (<1)	248 (43)	200 (35)	119 (21)

Table 15

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Parent Ratings of Monthly Activities (N = 577)*

Monthly Activity	Mean	$\pm$ SD	Range *
Attend a play/concert/live show	.35	0.54	1—4
Visit an art gallery/museum/ historical site	.31	0.49	1—4
Visit zoo/aquarium or petting farm	.55	0.58	1—4
Attend a sporting event	.86	0.86	1—4
Attend a church/religious event	1.46	1.07	1—4

\*1=never; 2=1-3 times/month; 3=4-6 times/month; 4=7 or more times/month

Table 16

*Frequencies for Parent Ratings of Frequency of Monthly Activities (N = 577)*

Monthly Activity	Never n (%)	1-3 times/ Month n (%)	4—6 times/ Month n (%)	7+ times/ Month n (%)
Attends a play, concert, or live show	384 (68)	170 (30)	11 (2)	2 (<1)
Visit an art gallery, museum or historical site	404 (71)	156 (27)	9 (2)	0
Visit a zoo/aquarium/ petting farm	277 (49)	274 (48)	13 (2)	4 (<1)
Attend a sporting event	244 (39)	236 (42)	74 (13)	34 (6)
Attend a church/religious event	128 (23)	174 (31)	142 (25)	125 (22)

Table 17

*Factor Analysis of School Readiness Activities (N=577)*

Factor	Factor Loadings			
	1	2	3	4
<b><i>Hands-On Activities</i></b>				
Read to child	<b>.71</b>	-.05	.04	-.11
Sing with child	<b>.72</b>	.01	.04	-.13
Do art activities with child	<b>.56</b>	.27	.22	.15
Help child do chores	<b>.51</b>	.08	.26	.18
Talk about nature with child	<b>.58</b>	.24	.08	.31
Build things with child	<b>.43</b>	.27	.35	.46
<b><i>Community Activities</i></b>				
Attend a play, concert, or live show	.07	<b>.63</b>	.05	-.22
Visit an art gallery, museum, or historical site	.06	<b>.76</b>	.06	-.01
Visit a zoo, aquarium, or petting farm	.09	<b>.73</b>	.13	.03
<b><i>Sports &amp; Games</i></b>				
Play games (board/card) with child	.32	.05	<b>.56</b>	.05
Play sports with child	.17	.10	<b>.78</b>	.18
Attend a sporting event	-.15	.19	<b>.69</b>	-.44

Table 18

*Alpha Coefficients for School Readiness Activity Factors (N = 577)*

Source	Alpha Coefficient
Hands-on Activities	.72
Sports & Games	.52
Community-based Activities	.58

An ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were differences in parent report of individual activities by grade level of the child. Significant differences between Pre-K and Kindergarten parent report were found for reading, singing, and building things with their child (See Tables 19, 20, & 21). Parents of Pre-K children were more likely to read with their child ( $M=2.18$ ,  $SD=0.79$ ) than Kindergarten parents ( $M=2.08$ ,  $SD=0.73$ ). Parents of Pre-K children were more likely to sing with their child ( $M=1.98$ ,  $SD=0.80$ ) than Kindergarten parents ( $M=1.82$ ,  $SD=0.87$ ). Parents of Pre-K children were more likely to build things with their child ( $M=1.40$ ,  $SD=0.75$ ) than Kindergarten parents ( $M=1.20$ ,  $SD=0.66$ ).

#### *Relationships between Parent Report and Teacher Report*

Logistic regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between parent report of activities and teacher report of children's skills and abilities. Parent and teacher data were matched by classroom ( $N=367$ ). Due to the nature of the data, only data from parents and teachers of children attending Pre-K and Kindergarten in the public schools were used.

The three activity factors identified in the factor analysis were the predictor variables (hands-on activities; sports/games; community activities). The outcome variables were the 15 different skills/abilities/experiences that teachers reported on (i.e., whether or not the majority of children in their classroom possessed the skill). The three different activity factors were entered as predictors separately with each of

Table 19

*One-way Analysis of Variance Summary for Parent Report of Reading with their Child: Differences by Grade Level (N=577)*

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Between groups	1	2.84	2.84	4.78*
Within group	574	341.41	0.60	
Total	575	344.25		

\*p<.01

Table 20

*One-way Analysis of Variance Summary for Parent Report of Singing with their Child: Differences by Grade Level (N=577)*

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Between groups	1	3.55	3.55	5.18*
Within group	572	392.22	0.69	
Total	573	395.78		

\*p<.01

Table 21

*One-way Analysis of Variance Summary for Parent Report of Building Things with their Child: Differences by Grade Level (N=577)*

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Between groups	1	5.20	5.20	10.04*
Within group	569	294.56	0.52	
Total	570	299.76		

\*p<.01

the 15 different skills as outcomes. Thus 45 different logistic regression analyses were conducted. Each analysis controlled for family income.

The Community Activities factor showed a significant relationship with two skills. “Sitting still” yielded an odds ratio of .82 and “cares for self” yielded an odds ratio of 1.48 (See Tables 22 & 23). In other words, for each one unit of increase in number of community activities children engaged in, teachers were .82 times less likely to report that the majority of children in their class were able to sit still and 1.48 times more likely to report that the majority of children in their class were able to care for themselves. The Hands-On Activities factor showed a significant relationship with “developmental maturity”, yielding an odds ratio of 1.08 (See Table 24). Thus, for each one unit increase in number of hands-on activities children engaged in, teachers were 1.08 times more likely to report that the majority of children in their class were developmentally mature.

Table 22

*Logistic Regression Predicting Sitting Still (N=367)*

Predictor	$\beta$	SE	Odds Ratio
Community Activities	-.198**	.099	0.821

\*\*p<.05

Table 23

*Logistic Regression Predicting Cares for Self (N=367)*

Predictor	$\beta$	SE	Odds Ratio
Community Activities	0.393**	0.167	1.48

\*\*p<.05

Table 24

*Logistic Regression Predicting Developmental Maturity (N=367)*

Predictor	$\beta$	SE	Odds Ratio
Hands-on Activities	.074**	0.038	1.08

\*\*p<.05



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### *Teacher Report of Importance of Skills, Abilities, and Experiences*

Teacher report on the importance of different skills, abilities, and experiences that children need for developmental success showed minimal variability. Teachers predominately reported all skills to be moderately important to essential. The skills reported on varied from social skills, health, previous school experience, and basic knowledge. Previous research on teachers' beliefs of importance of skills needed for developmental success also find these skills necessary for school success (Johnson et al., 1995; McBryde et al., 2004; Piotrkowski et al., 2001). Thus findings in the present study support existing research.

Analyses of teacher report of importance of skills necessary for developmental success by grade level (i.e., Pre-Kindergarten vs. Kindergarten) and teacher report of importance of skills necessary for developmental success by years of teaching experience indicated no significant differences. The lack of differences may be due to limited variability in teacher report, as most teachers reported most skills were either "very important" or "essential".

These findings differ from previous research. Piotrkowski et al. (2001) found that preschool teachers rated basic knowledge and skills more important than kindergarten teachers. These differences may be due to the sample population. The sample population in Piotrkowski et al. (2001) was mostly Hispanic and African-

American in an urban high-needs school district compared to the sample in this study, which was predominately Caucasian and in a rural school district. Even so, one might assume some variability in perception of the importance of skills by years teaching experience or grade level.

#### *Teacher Report of Students' Skills, Abilities, and Experiences*

Teachers reported on the skills, abilities, and experiences children in their class predominately possessed or demonstrated. Of the skills teachers reported that their students possessed, separating easily from parents, physically healthy, toilet trained, and show curiosity and interest in learning were the highest percentage reported. Possesses basic knowledge, exhibits fine motor skills and sits still were the skills where lower percentages of teachers reported that the majority of children in their class possessed that skill.

Analyses of teacher report of skills, abilities, and experiences by years of teaching experience showed significant differences. Analyses for teacher report of skills, abilities, and experiences by grade level found that kindergarten teachers reported students possessing or demonstrating good social skills, exhibits fine motor skills, and cares for oneself more frequently than preschool teachers. These differences may be due to the maturity and experience kindergarten students have compared to preschool students.

#### *Parent Report of Activities*

The results of parent report on activities they engage in with their children yielded interesting findings. Analyses indicated significant differences between preschool and kindergarten parents' report of individual activities. Preschool parents

reported reading to their child, singing with their child, and building things with their child more often than parents of kindergartners. It could be speculated that these results could be due to preschool parents engaging in more playful school readiness activities with their children compared to kindergarten parents possibly engaging in more formal activities. Singing, building things, and reading self-selected materials may be seen as more age-appropriate activities by preschool teachers and parents of preschoolers. Some formal activities kindergartners and their parents may engage in include school homework or teacher-assigned reading selections. No existing literature researching the relationship between parent school readiness activities and grade level has been found to support or confirm the present findings.

#### *Relationships between Parent Report and Teacher Report*

The three activity factors were used to answer the final two research questions exploring the relationship between parent report of activities and teacher report of children's skills and abilities. The "Hands-on Activities" factor included reading to child, singing with child, doing art activities with child, helping child with chores, talking about nature with child, and building with child. These activities involve communication skills, pre-literacy skills, pre-math skills, pre-science skills, and creativity. All of these activities facilitate the relationship between a parent and a child while developing school readiness skills.

The "Community Activities" factor included attend a play, concert or live show, visit an art gallery, museum or historical site, and visit a zoo, aquarium, or petting farm. All of these activities involve parent-child activities outside of the home which can facilitate social skills and an appreciation for learning and discovery. The

final factor was “Sports and Games,” including playing games (board/card) with child, playing sports with child. and attending sporting events. Each of these activities also facilitates social skills, communication skills, and motor skills. All three of the factors can facilitate social skills. Additionally, they all involve play or are exploratory in nature, which may foster children’s curiosity and interest in learning.

It was hypothesized that parents who report engaging in school readiness activities more frequently would have higher teacher report of children’s skills and abilities. The logistic regression analyses using the three factors found two relationships supporting the hypothesis and one rejecting the hypothesis. The logistic regression only used the public school Pre K and Kindergarten data. It is possible that data from the other child care settings may have yielded differing results.

The “Hands-on Activities” factor was related to developmental maturity. The more parents and children engage in hands on activities together (reading, singing, art, chores, talking about nature and building), the more likely teachers were to report that the majority of children in their class were developmentally mature. This relationship supports the hypothesis that parents who report reading with their child, helping their child do chores, and build things with their child will have higher teacher report of children’s skills and abilities.

Again these activities involve positive parent-child interaction while developing school readiness skills including: communication skills, pre-literacy skills, pre-math skills, pre-science skills and creativity. Engaging in these activities may also develop children’s interest and curiosity for learning.

The “Community Activities” factor was related to higher teacher report of students’ ability to care for himself/herself. One might speculate that parents who engage in community activities such as attending a play, concert or live show, visiting an art gallery, museum or historical site, and visiting a zoo, aquarium, or petting farm are more likely to take children who possess skills to care for themselves. Or possibly, children who engage in community events have more experience in having to care for themselves in public.

The “Community Activities” factor was also negatively related to teacher report of sitting still. The nature of some community events such as petting farms, zoos, aquariums museums, or historical sites is interactive. It could be speculated that the negative relationship between community events and sitting still may be due to the nature of community activities. These events tend to be interactive as well as engaging multiple senses; this contrasts with compared to more formal types of school learning activities that require children to sit still. This negative relationship needs to be explored further.

Findings from the current study are partially supported by previous research. Kessler (2002) found a positive relationship between weekly activities and school readiness but no relationship between monthly activities and school readiness. The current study was limited to teacher report on the majority of the students in the class possessing skills compared to Kessler’s study reporting on individual students. More research is needed relating the types of activities parents and children engage as it relates to school individual student readiness and success.

### *Limitations*

As mentioned above, the nature of the data provided by teachers has some limitations. Teachers reported on the skills of “the majority of children in the classroom,” not on the skills possessed by each individual child in the classroom. In contrast, parent report of school readiness activities was at the individual level. Although parent and teacher report were matched at the classroom level, findings must be interpreted with caution. The present data is indirectly related and is specific to individual classrooms as opposed to individual students. Therefore, generalizability of the findings is limited.

### *Implications*

As teachers begin the school year with initially meeting children, curriculum nights, open houses and other school activities, they can advocate hands-on activities and community events. As well, teachers can promote community events in their parent newsletters. Teachers can communicate with parents about the types of hands-on activities and community events they may feel benefit children’s school adjustment.

The parent-teacher-child relationship is important to children’s school success. Parents can benefit from this study by exploring the types of activities they engage in with their children and exploring other school readiness activities. Schools and teachers can promote school readiness by advocating parent-child activities that facilitate school readiness skills such as the hands-on activities, community activities, and sports and games. Community events that facilitate child development should be available to young families. Summer library programs and library story times can

incorporate activities that facilitate reading, singing and pre-literacy activities while promoting school readiness.

Classroom practices and curriculum should be guided by children's interest and curiosity. Preschool and childcare centers can benefit from this research by providing environments that stimulate children's curiosity and interest in learning in preparation for formal schooling. As well, teacher preparation and professional development could focus on exploring what engages children's natural interests and curiosity.

Finally, school readiness assessments need to be reassessed with caution. As teachers have reported numerous skills as *essential* for school success, entrance assessments should reflect the skills teachers believe are essential. Schools and teachers need to re-evaluate the validity and reliability of their school entrance assessments and how they use these tools.

#### *Future Research Directions*

The current study focuses on the relationship between parent report of parent-child activities, teacher report of skills students possess, and teacher report of skills essential for school success. Future research with longitudinal data would give more insight to the long-term effects of parent-child school readiness activities on children's school success. Further research is needed to determine which skills are most necessary for children's developmental success in transitioning into school.

The skill "shows curiosity and interest in learning" was reported by a large percentage of teachers as being an essential skill for school success. Teachers also reported the majority of their students possessed this skill. More research is needed

exploring school readiness and the relationship between students' interest and curiosity in learning and teachers' beliefs and reports on students' interest and learning.

This study also illuminates the effects community events may have on school readiness. Studies could be conducted further exploring the relationship between community events and school readiness skills. Some variables to further research as they relate to community events include social skills, sitting still, and stimulating curiosity and interest in learning.

Finally, the differences between parent report of activities and the teacher report of children's skills needs to be explored further. Research is needed to explore the possible reasons for why preschool parents report that they engage more frequently in hands-on activities than kindergarten parents. Importantly, data that allows for a match between teacher report and parent report for each individual child is warranted.

### *Conclusion*

School readiness continues to be a complex concept. The information gathered from this study can benefit parents and teachers as they continue to mold their beliefs, ideas, and practices about school readiness and preparing children for school. This research can help give parents insight on teachers' views as well as give teachers insight on the activities parents engage in with their children. Community organizations can use the information gathered from this research to guide further efforts to promote school readiness. Children benefit when parents, teachers, and the community have a common understanding and definition of school readiness. These



findings can facilitate the ability to work together in helping children transition and adjust to the social, emotional and academic demands of beginning school.

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## APPENDIX A



## School Readiness Questionnaire: Parents

*Please circle the best answer to the following questions about your Pre-Kindergarten / Kindergarten / 1<sup>st</sup> grade child (i.e., the child whose teacher sent home this questionnaire).*

### A. Child Health and Activities

- |   |         |                    |                |
|---|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. Does your child have a regular physician?                      | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 2. Does your child see his or her dentist every six months?       | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 3. Is your child covered by a health insurance plan?              | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 4. Is your child's immunization up to date?                       | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 5. Does your child get annual eye check ups?                      | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 6. Has your child's hearing been examined?                        | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 7. Does your child have impaired hearing?                         | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 8. Does your child have difficulty speaking or being understood?  | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 9. Does your child get physical activity regularly?               | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 10. Does your child get enough sleep at night?                    | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 11. Is your child often tired?                                    | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 12. Does your child have a nutritious breakfast most of the time? | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 13. Does your child have a nutritious dinner most of the time?    | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 14. Does your child have all the proper school supplies?          | Yes     | No                 |                |
| 15. Overall, how healthy is your child? ( <i>circle one</i> )     |         |                    |                |
| Very healthy  | Healthy | Somewhat Unhealthy | Very Unhealthy |

*During a typical week, how often does someone in your home do each of the following? (circle one)*

- |                          |       |           |           |                 |
|--------------------------|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| 16. Read to your child   | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 17. Sing with your child | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |

- |  |       |           |           |                 |
|--|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| 18. Do art activities with your child                  | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 19. Help your child do chores                          | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 20. Play board games or card games with your child     |       |           |           |                 |
|  | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 21. Talk about nature with your child                  | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 22. Build things with your child                       | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 23. Play sports with your child                        | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 24. Watch television, videos, or DVD's with your child |       |           |           |                 |
|  | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |

*During the last month, how often has your child done each of the following?(circle one)*

- |  |       |           |           |                 |
|--|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| 25. Attended a play, concert, or other live show       |       |           |           |                 |
|  | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 26. Visited an art gallery, museum, or historical site |       |           |           |                 |
|  | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 27. Gone to a zoo, aquarium, or petting farm           |       |           |           |                 |
|  | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 28. Attended a sporting event                          | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 29. Attended a church or religious event               |       |           |           |                 |
|  | Never | 1-3 times | 4-6 times | 7 or more times |

**B. Household Information**

30. How many children live in your home? \_\_\_\_\_

31. What are the ages of the children living in your home?

\_\_\_\_\_

32. How many adults live in your home? \_\_\_\_\_



**C. Parenting Programs**

48. Have you ever been or are you now involved in a parenting program?

Yes            No

49. If you answered yes to Question 48, how helpful was/is the parenting program?

Not very helpful            Somewhat helpful            Very helpful

50. What kinds of parenting programs have you participated in? (*circle all that apply*)

Oklahoma Parents as Teachers            Even Start            Raising a Reader

Healthy Families    Parenting classes at churches    Family Resource Center

51. If you could be part of a parenting support group, what would you hope to gain from participation in that group? What questions might you ask?

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## APPENDIX B

## Student Readiness Questionnaire: Teacher

### Children's Skills, Abilities, & Experiences

*Please answer the following questions by circling the corresponding Yes or No. Then, rate the importance of the named skill, ability, or experience on the scale from 1 to 5 according to the following definitions:*

- 1 = The skill has no importance for children's developmental success.
- 2 = The skill has little importance for children's developmental success.
- 3 = The skill is moderately important for children's developmental success.
- 4 = The skill is very important for children's developmental success.
- 5 = The skill is essential for children's developmental success.

1. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom listen and pay attention?  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
2. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom have good language and communication skills?  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
3. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom show positive prior reading experiences? (i.e., has been read to, likes books)  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
4. Are the majority of the children entering your classroom toilet trained?  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
5. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom follow directions and instructions?  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
6. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom have good social skills? (i.e., shares, takes turns)  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
7. Can the majority of the children entering your classroom sit still?  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
8. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom possess basic knowledge? (i.e., knows colors, address, phone number)  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
9. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom separate easily from their parents or caregivers?  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
10. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom exhibit fine motor skills? (i.e., cutting, writing)  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5
11. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom show curiosity and an interest in learning?  
Yes / No                      Importance:    1      2      3      4      5

12. Can the majority of the children entering your classroom care for, or assist in caring for, themselves?  
(i.e., dress self, take care of own belongings)

Yes / No Importance: 1 2 3 4 5

13. Are the majority of the children entering your classroom physically healthy?

Yes / No Importance: 1 2 3 4 5

14. Are the majority of the children entering your classroom developmentally mature?

Yes / No Importance: 1 2 3 4 5

15. Do the majority of the children entering your classroom show signs of previous experiences with other children?

Yes / No Importance: 1 2 3 4 5

VITA

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Thesis: SCHOOL READINESS: PARENT-CHILD ACTIVITIES, TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS, AND STUDENTS' SKILLS

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