

Parents' and Teachers' Beliefs About Children's School Readiness in a High-Need Community

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This study compared the beliefs of preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and parents in one mostly Hispanic and Black high-need urban school district to learn their views of what children should know and be able to do at kindergarten entry. Beliefs regarding the importance of 12 school readiness “resources” were assessed with the *CARES* survey designed for this study. Parents held remarkably similar beliefs, regardless of ethnicity or education. Parents and teachers also agreed that children must be healthy and socially competent, and be able to comply with teacher authority, although parents rated this latter resource higher. However, parents rated all classroom-related readiness resources as more important than teachers did. They believed it was necessary for a child to be able to communicate in English and to have basic knowledge and skills, which was more important than a child’s approach to learning. Preschool teachers also believed that knowledge was more important than kindergarten teachers did. Directions for further research and implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Children living in poverty are at heightened risk for school failure, which has serious and long-lasting consequences. There is mounting evidence that school problems begin as early as kindergarten and first grade (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Lewitt & Baker, 1995; Luster & McAdoo, 1996). To address this problem, Goal 1 of the Educate America Act of 1993 states that “by the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn” (US Department of Educa-

tion, 1993). In other words, to prevent school failure, communities need to facilitate children's school readiness.

Although universal school readiness has been embraced as a national education goal, the concept of children's "school readiness" remains highly controversial. It has been criticized for being thought of as a static attribute of children; for ignoring individual differences, inequities in children's experiences and opportunities, and the responsibility of schools to teach all children appropriately; for the downward shift of academic expectations to increasingly younger children; and for measurement-driven instruction, nonvalid testing, and an almost exclusive focus on cognitive/intellectual skills to the neglect of other competencies (e.g., May & Kundert, 1992; Meisels, 1992; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1990; Shepard & Smith, 1986; Willer & Bredekamp, 1990). Not surprisingly then, the National Education Goals Panel Technical Planning Group for Goal 1 has tried to avoid the term "readiness" altogether (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995).

While experts debate the concept of school readiness, day-to-day decisions about how to prepare children for school are being made at the local level, for conceptions of school readiness are—in part—locally constituted (Graue, 1992; Smith & Shepard, 1988). Whether or not the term "school readiness" is used, helping young children be prepared for initial success in school is an extraordinarily important challenge that is especially pressing in high-need communities. Parents and preschool teachers struggle with this difficult problem, with little or no input from kindergarten teachers (Love, 1992). Absent generally accepted and empirically documented criteria of what young children should know and be able to do when they are 4 or 5 years old (Bredekamp, 1992), parents and preschool teachers must rely on their explicit and implicit *beliefs* regarding readiness as they prepare children for school.

Beliefs about School Readiness

Parents, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers share responsibility for the education of young children. Yet few studies have systematically compared their beliefs about what children should know and be able to do at school entry (Gredler, 1992; Lewitt & Baker, 1995). Beliefs influence child rearing (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Segal, 1985; Stevenson et al., 1990) and educational practices (Bacon & Ichikawa, 1988; Fang, 1996; Farver, Kim, & Lee, 1995; Harvey, White, Rather, Alter, & Hoffmeister, 1966; Smith & Shepard, 1988; Vartuli, 1999). Without a shared vision of children's readiness, preschool teachers and parents may not encourage in children the skills, attitudes, and attributes that kindergarten teachers look for (Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, & Rosenkoetter, 1989; West, Hausken, & Collins, 1993). When readiness expectations differ substantially, kindergarten teachers might view some children as "unready" and treat them differently (West et al., 1993). Teachers' views are particularly important because their early assessments of young children's readiness play an important role in special education placement, ability grouping, grade retention (e.g., Entwisle, 1995; Gredler, 1992; Powell, 1995; Rist, 1970; Shepard & Smith, 1986)

and in shaping children's subsequent achievement trajectories (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988). Inconsistencies in what is expected also might confuse children, causing stress and maladaptive behaviors at kindergarten entry. Given the possible harms resulting from lack of clarity about what children are expected to know and do at kindergarten entry, it is important to learn more about the readiness beliefs of parents, preschool, and kindergarten teachers in high-need communities, where children are at increased risk of school failure.

The few studies examining parents' and teachers' readiness beliefs suggest that some substantial inconsistencies exist. Two studies comparing the readiness views of parents and kindergarten teachers found that parents emphasize academic-oriented skills more than teachers (Knudsen–Lindauer & Harris, 1989; West et al., 1993). Two studies compared the views of preschool and kindergarten teachers. One study found various differences in behavioral expectations (Foulks & Morrow, 1989), while the other study found that preschool teachers had greater expectations, both academic and behavioral (Hains et al., 1989). An important limitation of these two latter studies is that no statistical analyses of data were reported, leaving open questions of generalizability and reliability of findings. No studies have compared the beliefs of parents and preschool teachers, but Harrod and Clifford (1996) did compare childcare providers (including preschool teachers), parents of preschoolers, and kindergarten teachers. They found the groups had different concerns. For example, kindergarten teachers were more likely to emphasize a child's ability to not disrupt the class; families and providers emphasized school-like skills such as knowing English, knowing the letters of the alphabet, and counting; while childcare providers were most likely to emphasize problem-solving skills.

Current research is limited in helping us understand readiness beliefs in high-need communities, where children's school failure is a critical issue. Existing studies have aggregated data across socioeconomically diverse communities, so that we lack information regarding the readiness beliefs of parents and teachers *within* low-income communities (Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, & Eggers–Pierola, 1995). Studies have not systematically examined ethnic variations in parents' views of children's readiness (Farver et al., 1995; Heaviside & Farris, 1993; Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990). Moreover, few studies have systematically examined beliefs regarding the multiple dimensions of children's school readiness, relying instead on lists of readiness characteristics. Finally, some studies used forced rankings, which may under- or overestimate beliefs about the importance of readiness characteristics.

The Present Study

The study reported here addresses these limitations. It examines consistencies and inconsistencies in parents', preschool teachers', and kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the multiple dimensions of children's readiness in one high-need urban school district in New York State. This city is similar to other urban centers in having large numbers of young children who live in poverty and disturbingly high rates of school drop-out, grade retention, and special education placement.

This study reports the first phase of a larger study examining the transition to kindergarten.

CONCEPTUALIZING CHILDREN'S SCHOOL READINESS

Despite its negative connotations, the term "school readiness" can be a useful concept if (a) it is not treated as a static attribute of children; (b) it incorporates the multiple aspects of children's functioning that are important for school success; and (c) it takes into account the joint responsibilities that families, communities, and schools have in providing caring environments that promote children's learning (Piotrkowski, in press). Piotrkowski conceptualizes school readiness as the social, political, organizational, educational, and personal *re-sources* that support children's success at school entry. At the neighborhood level, school readiness resources include affordable, high quality child care and pre-school for all; well-stocked libraries that are welcoming to children and parents; safe playgrounds and streets, and so forth. Local school readiness resources include strong, accountable leadership; transition programming and parent involvement activities; on-going professional development and support for teachers; high quality, individualized instruction, and so forth (Shore, 1998). Family readiness resources include a rich literacy environment, nurturing parenting, financial resources, and social support for child rearing. Ideally, these resources are integrated to facilitate the optimal development of each child.

For the individual child, school readiness refers to the *personal readiness resources* (human capital) a child may bring to school to help him or her adapt successfully to the challenges of kindergarten. The Technical Planning Group for Goal 1 of the National Education Goals Panel identified five dimensions of children's readiness resources: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language use; and cognition and general knowledge (Kagan et al., 1995). Building on this view, Piotrkowski (in press) has conceptualized a child's personal readiness resources as potentially consisting of: health and the age-appropriate ability to care for self; the ability to regulate emotion and behavior, interact appropriately with adults and children, and communicate needs and feelings effectively; an interest and engagement in the world around him or her, to motivate learning; motor skills; cognitive knowledge; and the ability to adjust to the demands of the kindergarten classroom setting. Thus, readiness resources consist not only of motor and cognitive skills and knowledge, but also social competencies (Raver & Zigler, 1997). Children use these more or less malleable resources to profit from the kindergarten experience, and meet societal expectations of competence there.

Graue (1992) and others have noted that beliefs about school readiness are locally-determined. But such beliefs are not mere social constructions. Rather, Piotrkowski (in press) proposes that beliefs vary systematically with local community, school, and family readiness resources. In high-need communities, where family and school readiness resources are limited, children's readiness resources may be viewed as especially critical, in order to compensate for resource-poor

families and schools. Thus, children in these communities may be expected to have more extensive and concrete readiness resources at school entry than children in more affluent families and communities. Consistent with this view, kindergarten teachers in high-poverty and minority communities have higher expectations of children entering kindergarten than teachers in more affluent and majority communities (Heaviside & Farris, 1993). Ironically, those children who may be most in need of a wide array of personal readiness resources are also least likely to have them.

METHOD

Sampling

The community for the study was defined by the physical boundaries of a densely populated urban school district, covering about one square mile. The district was selected because almost 90% of elementary school students were eligible for federally funded free lunches, and it has large populations of Black and Hispanic families. Here, the term "Hispanic" is used for "those individuals. . . who were born in or trace the background of their families to one of the Spanish-speaking Latin American nations or to Spain" (Marin & Marin, 1991, p.1). Academically, the school district has significant problems, not unlike other school districts in low-income areas. Less than one year after data were collected, only 39% of children in Grade 3 scored at or above grade level on a city-wide reading test. The study population consisted of all parents¹ of children born in 1993 or 1994 attending community-based preschools in the district and their preschool teachers; all parents of preschoolers in two elementary schools in the district; and all kindergarten and preschool teachers in the district public schools.

Twenty-six out of 34 community-based preschool sites in the district agreed to distribute a parent survey from June through August of 1998. A "site" was defined as a physically distinct preschool setting serving 4-year-olds. Several sites could be under the auspices of a single agency. Directors or their designates distributed the surveys in English or Spanish to all parents of children who were in preschool classrooms with a substantial proportion of children eligible for kindergarten in the Fall of 1998. Directors and principals indicated that parents with limited literacy would be assisted to complete the surveys, but the extent to which this type of help was offered is unknown. To represent the views of preschool parents in the public schools, two public schools that had 50% of the prekindergarten classes in the district also were invited to distribute the surveys to parents. In June, the principal or assistant principal distributed parent surveys in Spanish or English to all 120 parents with enrolled children. Because data were gathered just one week before classes ended for the summer, we were unable to seek the participation of more public school prekindergartens or to do follow-up mailings with these parents. Parents returned surveys to school personnel in sealed envelopes; research staff picked up the sealed surveys.

Thirty-two preschool sites agreed to distribute surveys to preschool teachers of

classes with four-year-olds. (At the request of Directors, surveys also were distributed to assistant teachers and classroom aides.) In addition, surveys were distributed by principals or through a one-time summer mailing to all 12 prekindergarten teachers in the public schools. From mid-June through December of 1998, surveys were distributed by principals or through a summer mailing to all kindergarten teachers in the 22 elementary school programs in the school district. Teachers returned surveys by mail.

With the exception of the public school prekindergarten sites, intensive follow-up procedures were used that included repeated visits by research staff to community-based preschools, multiple mailings to kindergarten teachers, and incentives (cash raffle prizes and children's books for the classrooms). Surveys were returned by 461 parents² in the sampling frame, representing 25 community-based preschools and two public schools. Their estimated response rate was 49%. Forty-six preschool teachers in 26 community-based preschools in the district returned surveys, a response rate of 73%. In the public schools, 6 out of 12 prekindergarten teachers returned surveys, a response rate of 50%. Of the 64 kindergarten teachers in the sampling frame, 57 teachers in 21 schools returned surveys, a response rate of 89%.

Measuring School Readiness Beliefs

When this study was conducted, no measure of school readiness beliefs was available that was appropriate for both teachers and parents with limited education and that tapped the range of school readiness resources children may bring to school. Therefore, the survey of *Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School (CARES)* was developed for the study. Beliefs about the importance of the following readiness resources were assessed: health; basic self-care; socioemotional maturity and self-regulation; interaction with peers; interest and engagement in the world; motor skills; cognitive knowledge; communication; and adjustment to the classroom setting, that is, complying with teacher directions and classroom routines. These were based on the five dimensions of school readiness identified by the National Education Goals Technical Planning Group for Goal 1 (Kagan et al., 1995), the conceptualization of school readiness as resources (Piotrkowski, in press), and a review of the literature.

Because specific indicators of these readiness resources have not been agreed upon (Bredenkamp, 1992), behaviorally-anchored items were adapted from existing surveys that tapped school readiness beliefs or parents' and teachers' educational goals for young children (Freeman & Hatch, 1989; Hains et al., 1989; Harradine & Clifford, 1996; Heaviside & Farris, 1993; Johnson, Gallagher, Cook, & Wong, 1995; Knudsen-Lindauer & Harris, 1989; Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Stevenson et al., 1990). Included were some items that might be considered "developmentally inappropriate" to capture a broad range of readiness expectations (Hains et al., 1989). Items were reworded and simplified so parents with limited education could understand them. To refine items and the survey format, three focus groups were conducted with English-speaking Hispanic and Black parents. Drafts of the survey also were reviewed by preschool directors and

teachers, Head Start education directors, special education staff, a reading specialist, and an administrator who had been a prekindergarten teacher in a public school in the district.

"Back-translation" was used with a draft version of the English instrument to create a Spanish version, followed by a "decentering" procedure (Marin & Marin, 1991) to make the English and Spanish versions comparable. In this latter approach, the English version is revised when the resulting translation results in confusing or awkward language. "Committees" composed of bicultural/bilingual staff and educators resolved differences of opinion.

The resulting CARES survey had 46 items on one page, grouped into seven sections with 4 to 8 items each. Respondents were asked: "Think about a child who will BEGIN kindergarten in the fall. For each item below, enter one number to indicate how IMPORTANT or NECESSARY it is for a child starting kindergarten." Respondents rated each item on a 4-point Likert-type scale as: not too important (1), somewhat important (2), very important, but not essential (3), and absolutely necessary (4). This response format was used to avoid the tendency of some parents in the focus groups to rate almost every item as "very important." The CARES also includes questions about respondent background characteristics. The survey takes less than 20 minutes to complete.

Assessing the Equivalence of the Spanish and English CARES Marin and Marin (1991) suggest that Hispanic survey respondents may give more extreme responses and socially desirable answers and have more missing data than Whites. Moreover, the internal structure of an instrument may change when translated into Spanish, so that item meanings are not equivalent. Therefore, analyses were conducted to determine whether the Spanish and English versions of the CARES were equivalent. For these analyses, the data from parents in the school district were augmented by data from parents with 3- and 5-year-old preschoolers and from parents with children at a preschool site just outside the district ($N = 515$).

Analyses indicated that the language of the CARES was not significantly related to number of missing items, but that language was significantly related to response style. Those completing the Spanish version of the CARES ($n = 110$) were significantly more likely to use check marks ($n = 15$) rather than the four-point Likert scale ($\chi^2 (1, N = 515) = 27.57, p = .0001$). Because those who used checks were more likely to have a ninth grade education or less ($\chi^2 (2, N = 502) = 15.83, p = .0001$), the use of checks probably reflected a lack of familiarity with the four-point response format. Excluding those who used check marks, parents completing the Spanish CARES also were significantly less likely to endorse "4" (absolutely necessary) as a response ($F (1,482) = 4.28, p = .04$) and were significantly more likely to endorse "1" (not very important) as a response ($F (1, 482) = 68.40, p = .0001$).

Unfortunately, the limited item-to-respondent ratio for the Spanish CARES (46 items to 110 respondents) was insufficient to conduct a reliable factor analysis to determine if items have "equivalent meaning across ethnic groups" (Marin & Marin, 1991). Therefore, hierarchical regression was used to determine the impact of language of CARES on average ratings across all 46 items, controlling for

background characteristics. The null hypothesis tested was that the language of the survey had no effect on parents' ratings, once background characteristics were controlled. Only Hispanic respondents were included in this analysis to allow us to focus on the language of the survey, while controlling for ethnicity. Those who used check marks as responses were excluded.

In step one of the regression model, age of respondent, educational attainment, acculturation as indicated by language used at home (Spanish/English/Spanish and English), income (indicated by a child's enrollment in Head Start), whether respondent was employed (yes/no), and whether respondent lived with a partner/spouse (yes/no) were entered as controls. In step two, language of the *CARES* (English or Spanish) was entered. The full regression model was statistically significant ($F(7, 205) = 49.70, p = .0001$), and the increment in R^2 when language of the *CARES* was entered was highly significant ($p = .0001$), accounting for an additional 18% of the variance in readiness beliefs, beyond the background variables. Therefore, the null hypothesis that the language of the *CARES* had no effect on responses could not be rejected, and those who used check marks or completed the Spanish version of the *CARES* were excluded from further analysis. Thus, only Hispanic parents who were able to read English were retained in the final sample. Excluded parents were poorer, less educated, less likely to be employed, and more likely to speak only Spanish at home than Hispanic respondents who completed the survey in English. This sample bias must be taken into account when interpreting findings.

Factor Analysis of the CARES Exploratory factor analyses of the *CARES* (principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation) were conducted separately for parents and teaching staff. To increase sample size, data from parents in the sample were augmented by data from parents with 3- and 5-year-old preschoolers, and from parents with preschoolers at a site just outside the district. Only parents who completed the English version of the *CARES* were included ($N = 397$). Data from 109 preschool and kindergarten teachers in the school district were augmented by data from teachers in two nearby public schools and the preschool outside the school district ($N = 152$). In the parent sample, 8 factors accounted for 57.3% of the variance. In the teaching sample, 10 factors accounted for 64.1% of the variance. This latter factor analysis must be treated cautiously because of the low respondent-to-item ratio (46 items to 152 respondents).

Results of both factor analyses were used to create eight multi-item subscales reflecting beliefs about children's school readiness resources.³ These eight subscales approximated the *a priori* conceptualization and tapped beliefs regarding the importance of: Advanced Knowledge (10 items), Basic Knowledge (5 items), Compliance with Teacher Authority (3 items), Self-care (4 items), Emotional Maturity (5 items), Interest and Engagement to reflect approaches to learning (6 items), Compliance with Classroom Routines (5 items), and Motor Skills (3 items). No item was included in more than one subscale. For the parent sample, alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from 0.74 to 0.90. For the teaching sample, alpha coefficients ranged from 0.77 to 0.92.

Four single items did not meet the criteria for inclusion in any subscale, but

were retained because they tapped important readiness resources: Health ("Is rested and well-nourished. Health care needs are met"); Peer Relations ("Plays well with other children. Shares"); Communicates in Own Language ("Can Express feelings/needs in primary language"); Communicates in English (Can Express feelings/needs in English"). A fifth item ("Is interested in books and stories") was dropped from further analysis. Thus, the final CARES survey had 45 items that tapped beliefs about 12 school readiness resources children may have.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

The final sample of parents for data analysis consisted of the 355 parents of children born in 1994 or 1993 in the school district, who completed an English version of the CARES survey. (Children born in 1993 were eligible for kindergarten the coming fall.) Background characteristics of the parents are presented in Table 1. Most (91%) were parents; the others were guardians or foster parents. Only 8% were male. Over half (53%) were employed and 46% reported receiving government assistance. Most respondents spoke only English at home, but 10% spoke Spanish, 16% spoke both English and Spanish, and 2% spoke some other language.

Background characteristics of the teachers also are presented in Table 1. All kindergartens were full day classes. About 24% of the kindergarten teachers taught bilingual classes, 7% taught gifted and talented classes, and 7% taught special education or inclusion classes. Preschool teachers were significantly older, had more teaching experience, and were more likely to be members of ethnic minority groups than kindergarten teachers.

Beliefs about Children's School Readiness Resources

To simplify the analyses, an *a priori* conceptualization was used to divide the 12 beliefs about children's school readiness resources into two separate domains. Included in the first domain were beliefs regarding *General Readiness Resources* a child may have that pertain to a child's everyday life: Health, Peer Relations, Communicates in Own Language; Emotional Maturity; Self-care; Interest and Engagement; and Motor Skills. Table 2 presents the items within each subscale, as well as the percentage of respondents rating individual items in this domain as "absolutely necessary" for children starting kindergarten.

The second domain represents beliefs regarding the personal *Classroom-related Readiness Resources* a child may have that are especially pertinent to the classroom setting: Communicates in English; Compliance with Teacher Authority; Compliance with Classroom Routines; Basic Knowledge; and Advanced Knowledge. Table 3 presents the items within each subscale, as well as the percentage of respondents rating individual items in this domain as "absolutely necessary" for children starting kindergarten.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Parents, Preschool Teachers and Kindergarten Teachers

	Parents		Preschool Teachers		Kindergarten Teachers	
	<i>N</i>	(%)	<i>N</i>	(%)	<i>N</i>	(%)
Site						
Public elementary school	50	(14)	6	(12)	57	(100)
Head start	129	(36)	22	(42)	—	—
Head start collaboration	61	(17)	4	(8)	—	—
Religious-affiliated preschool	15	(4)	4	(8)	—	—
Other community-based preschool	100	(28)	16	(31)	—	—
Age (median)	29		40		35	
Sex						
Female	327	(92)	50	(96)	56	(98)
Male	28	(8)	2	(4)	1	(2)
Education						
Less than high school	96	(28)	0	(0)	0	(0)
High school diploma or GED	100	(29)	0	(0)	0	(0)
Some college, Assoc. Degree, or special training	137	(39)	5	(11)	0	(0)
4-year college degree	12	(3)	10	(21)	5	(9)
Some credits towards Masters	Not Asked		12	(26)	8	(14)
MA or MS degree	3	(1)	20	(43)	43	(77)
Ethnicity						
Hispanic (not Black)	152	(44)	14	(29)	20	(36)
Black (not Hispanic)	171	(49)	17	(35)	5	(9)
White	3	(1)	9	(19)	26	(47)
Other	20	(6)	8	(17)	4	(7)

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

Are There Differences among Parents?

We first determined if readiness beliefs varied by parental education (less than high school/high school diploma or equivalency/more than high school), ethnicity (Black/Hispanic), and age of preschool child (1993 vs. 1994 birth). Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were conducted separately for the General and the Classroom-related Readiness Resources. MANOVA accounts for the number of tests performed when assessing group differences across multiple dependent variables, so that the possibility of finding groups differences when none exist (Type I error) is reduced. Results of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) are reported where the MANOVA was significant ($\alpha = 0.05$), along with Cohen's *d* (Cohen, 1988) to estimate effect sizes, using the POWPAL program (Gorman, Primavera, & Allison, 1995).

Neither MANOVA for educational attainment was statistically significant, indicating that parental education was unrelated to views about readiness in this sample. In the comparisons of Hispanic and Black parents, only the MANOVA

Table 2. General Readiness Resources: Percentage of Respondents Endorsing an Item as Absolutely Necessary

General Readiness Resources	Parents <i>N</i> = 355	Preschool Teachers <i>N</i> = 52	Kindergarten Teachers <i>N</i> = 57
1. Health			
Is rested and well-nourished. Health care needs are met.	87	83	96
2. Peer Relations			
Plays well with other children. Shares.	76	58	68
3. Communicates in Own Language			
Can express feelings/needs in primary language.	74	65	65
4. Emotional Maturity			
Does not hit/bite. Has self-control.	84	67	89
Has sense of right and wrong.	77	51	68
Is self-confident. Proud of his/her work.	74	64	53
Takes turns.	62	56	53
Shows independence.	60	58	42
5. Self-Care			
Feeds self with fork.	74	67	86
Buttons own clothes.	64	39	35
Finds own belongings.	64	54	65
Zips own jacket.	55	35	35
6. Interest & Engagement			
Asks lots of questions about how and why.	59	39	33
Is curious.	55	41	49
Is interested in world around him/her.	55	49	46
Starts things on his/her own.	43	49	28
Is eager to learn.	77	67	73
Likes to solve puzzles.	29	37	20
7. Motor Skills			
Can hold pencil. Can use a scissors.	58	44	33
Throws ball, skips, runs, hops, walks up/down stairs.	51	42	25
Stacks 5–6 blocks by him/herself.	47	37	18

for General Readiness Resources was statistically significant (Wilks's lambda = 0.92, $F = 3.31$ (7, 280), $p = .002$). Hispanic parents placed slightly more importance on a child being able to communicate needs and feelings in his or her own language ($F(1, 286) = 7.69$, $p = .006$, $d = 0.33$) and being emotionally mature ($F(1, 286) = 5.97$, $p = .015$, $d = 0.29$) and somewhat stronger emphasis on children being interested and engaged ($F(1, 286) = 17.34$, $p = .0001$, $d = 0.49$). Similarly, when comparing parents by age of child, only the MANOVA for General Readiness was significant (Wilks's lambda = 0.93, $F(7, 284) = 2.92$, $p = .006$). Not surprisingly, parents of older children rated Motor Skills as slightly more important than parents of younger children ($F(1, 290) = 5.93$, $p = .015$, $d = 0.29$). Because there were few meaningful substantive differences in beliefs

Table 3. Classroom-related Readiness Resources: Percentage of Respondents Endorsing an Item as “Absolutely Necessary” for Kindergarten

Classroom-related Readiness Resources	Parents N = 355	Preschool Teachers N = 52	Kindergarten Teachers N = 57
1. Communicates in English			
Can express feelings/needs in English.	71	33	28
2. Compliance with Teacher Authority.			
Pays attention to teacher.	89	79	74
Follows the teacher’s directions.	87	59	70
Listens during group discussions/stories.	77	62	75
3. Basic Knowledge			
Knows names of body parts (eyes/nose/legs).	87	62	38
Knows ABCs.	82	33	19
Knows basic colors like “red, blue, yellow.”	81	58	40
Can count to 10 or 15.	76	48	25
Understands big/small. Sorts by color/size.	65	39	21
4. Compliance with Classroom Routines			
Uses classroom equipment correctly.	62	41	30
Cleans up work space and spills.	61	37	30
Lines up and stays in line. Waits quietly.	60	29	30
Moves from one activity to the next with no problems.	55	46	42
Completes tasks on time.	42	14	21
5. Advanced Knowledge			
Knows own address/telephone.	70	42	19
Writes first name, even if some letters are backwards.	59	29	28
Understands yesterday/today/tomorrow.	49	19	9
Knows days of week in correct order.	44	17	5
Cuts simple shapes with scissors.	46	31	19
Recognizes words that rhyme like “cat, hat.”	40	14	2
Can read a few simple words.	40	14	4
Can read simple stories.	30	8	4
Can count to 50 or more.	20	2	2
Can write on a line. Can color inside lines.	29	10	2

about children’s school readiness resources, parents were treated as a single group for subsequent analyses.

Parents and Teachers’ Beliefs about General Readiness Resources

Analyses were conducted separately for General and for School-related Readiness Resources. Within-group MANOVAs for the seven General Readiness Resources were statistically significant ($p < .05$), indicating that parents, preschool, and kindergarten teachers rated some resources as being relatively more important than others. Next, the parallelism procedure within profile analysis was

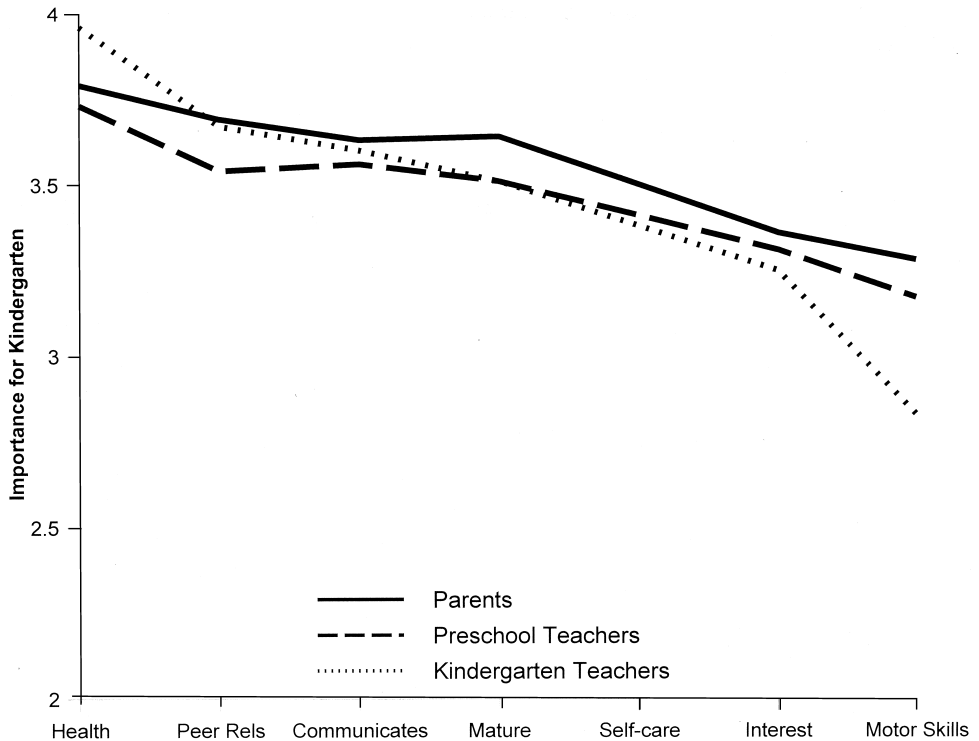


Figure 1. Profiles of parents' and teachers' ratings of the importance of children's General Readiness Resources, where 4 represents "absolutely necessary," 3 represents "very important, but not essential," and 2 represents "somewhat important."

used to determine if parents and teachers agreed on the *relative* rankings of the seven General Readiness Resources (Bray & Maxwell, 1985). Profile analysis refers to a series of multivariate tests to determine whether groups have the same pattern of response within and across all dependent variables. The parallelism procedure tests the null hypothesis that the mean distances between any dependent variables are equivalent for all groups.

Group profiles are presented in Figure 1. Without Motor Skills, the profiles are parallel (nonsignificant MANOVA), indicating the groups gave similar rankings to six of the General Readiness Resources. When Motor Skills was added to the model, the MANOVA achieved significance (Wilks's lambda = 0.92, $F(12, 834) = 2.88, p = .001$), indicating that the profiles diverge when that resource is entered into the model. Even when profiles are parallel, groups may differ in their absolute ratings of readiness resources. The MANOVA to test for such group differences was statistically significant (Wilks's lambda = 0.92, $F(14, 832) = 2.63, p = .001$).

Results of the follow-up ANOVAs (presented in Table 4, along with group means, standard deviations, and Cohen's d) and post hoc comparisons (Tukey's

Table 4. Analysis of Variance for Beliefs Regarding Children's General Readiness Resources

General Readiness Resources	Parents		Preschool Teachers		Kindergarten Teachers	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. Health (1 item) <i>F</i> (2, 449) = 2.64 (<i>d</i> = .22)	3.79	.62	3.73	.66	3.96	.19
2. Peer Relations (1 item) <i>F</i> (2, 453) = 1.45 (<i>d</i> = .16)	3.69	.61	3.54	.58	3.67	.51
3. Communicates in Own Language (1 item) <i>F</i> (2, 449) = .30 (<i>d</i> = .07)	3.63	.71	3.56	.70	3.60	.59
4. Emotional Maturity (5 items) <i>F</i> (2, 444) = 2.87 (<i>d</i> = .23)	3.64	.49	3.51	.46	3.51	.47
Self-care (4 items) <i>F</i> (2, 453) = 1.37 (<i>d</i> = .16)	3.50	.63	3.41	.49	3.38	.58
6. Interest and Engagement (6 items) <i>F</i> (2, 450) = .96 (<i>d</i> = .13)	3.36	.58	3.31	.62	3.25	.53
7. Motor Skills (3 items) <i>F</i> (2, 447) = 10.28*** (<i>d</i> = .43)	3.28 _a	.70	3.17 _a	.70	2.83	.71

Notes: Means in the same row having the same subscript are not significantly different at $p < .05$ in the Tukey honestly significant difference comparison.

*** $p < .001$

HSD, $p < .05$) revealed only one moderate group difference: kindergarten teachers rated Motor Skills as less important than parents and preschool teachers did. Otherwise, parents and teachers agreed that health and social competencies such as playing well with other children, communicating needs and feelings in their own language, and emotional maturity, were “absolutely necessary” (mean ratings of 3.5 or higher). They assigned lesser importance to self-care, being interested and engaged, and motor skills. These findings are consistent with the results presented in Figure 1.

Parents and Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom-related Readiness Resources

The same analyses were conducted for beliefs regarding the five personal Classroom-related Readiness Resources. Again, the within-group MANOVAs were statistically significant ($p < .05$), indicating that parents and teachers differentiated among the readiness resources. The parallelism test for the Classroom-related Readiness Resources was statistically significant (Wilks's lambda = 0.70, $F(8, 870) = 20.93$, $p = .0001$), indicating that the groups' relative ratings were different, as can be seen in the group profiles presented Figure 2. Further profile analyses indicated that the relative rankings of parents, preschool and kindergarten teachers all differed significantly from each other. The MANOVA to assess differences in absolute importance ratings also was statistically significant

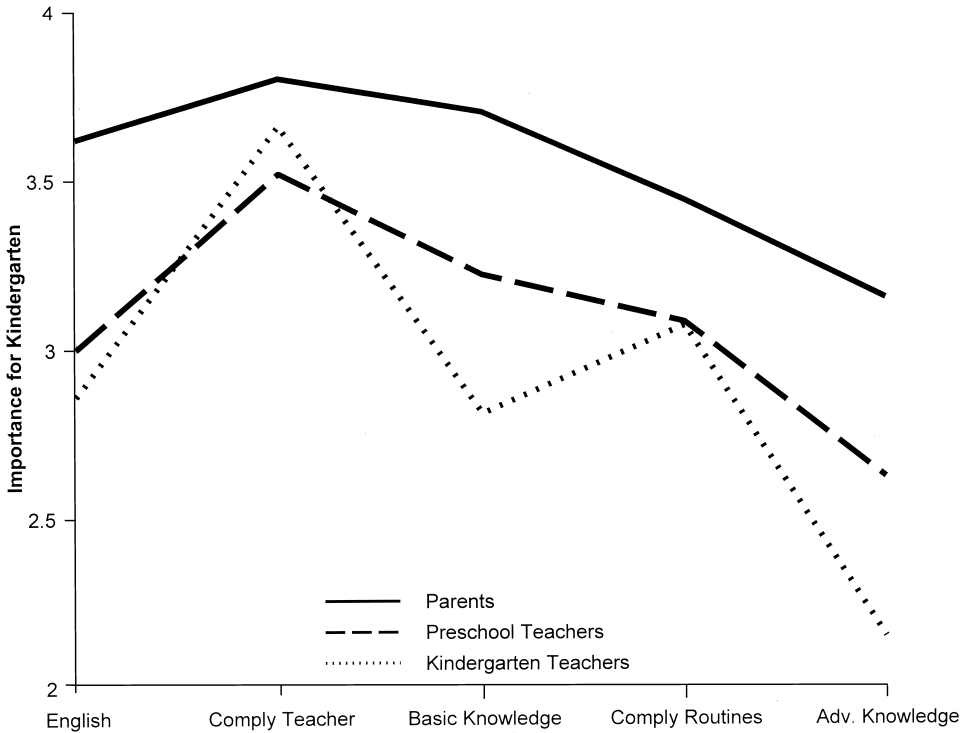


Figure 2. Profiles of parents’ and teachers’ ratings of the importance of children’s Classroom-related Readiness Resources, where 4 represents “absolutely necessary,” 3 represents “very important, but not essential,” and 2 represents “somewhat important.”

(Wilks’s lambda = 0.64, $F(10, 868) = 21.58, p = .0001$). Results of the one-way ANOVAs (presented in Table 5, along with group means, standard deviations, and Cohen’s d) indicate there were significant group differences for *all* five Classroom-related Readiness Resources.

All groups rated Compliance with Teacher Authority as “absolutely necessary” (mean ratings of 3.5 or higher), but the post hoc comparison (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$) revealed that parents tended to assign more importance than teachers to this resource. No group rated Compliance with Classroom Routines as “absolutely necessary,” but post hoc comparisons revealed that parents rated this resource as somewhat more important than preschool and kindergarten teachers.

Three particularly large group differences, however, were identified ($d > 0.80$, Cohen, 1988). Seven out of 10 parents—Hispanic and Black alike—believed it was “absolutely necessary” for children to be able to express their feelings and needs in English. Further, a within-group ANOVA revealed no significant differences among Hispanic parents by language spoken at home (English/English and Spanish/Spanish). Post hoc comparisons indicated that teachers did not agree with

Table 5. Analysis of Variance for Beliefs Regarding Children's Classroom-related Readiness Resources

Classroom-related Readiness Resources	Parents		Preschool Teachers		Kindergarten Teachers	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. Communicates in English (1 item) <i>F</i> (2, 451) = 37.97*** (<i>d</i> = .82)	3.62	.65	3.00 _a	.91	2.86 _a	.97
2. Compliance with Teacher Authority (3 items) <i>F</i> (2, 448) = 8.55*** (<i>d</i> = .39)	3.80 _b	.46	3.52 _a	.64	3.66 _{a,b}	.54
3. Basic Knowledge (5 items) <i>F</i> (2, 448) = 64.85*** (<i>d</i> = 1.08)	3.70	.51	3.22	.70	2.81	.84
4. Compliance with Classroom Routines (5 items) <i>F</i> (2, 443) = 16.87*** (<i>d</i> = .55)	3.44	.55	3.08 _a	.66	3.07 _a	.62
5. Advanced Knowledge (10 items) <i>F</i> (2, 437) = 71.14*** (<i>d</i> = 1.14)	3.15	.61	2.62	.70	2.15	.67

Notes: Means in the same row having the same subscript are not significantly different at $p < .05$ in the Tukey honestly significant difference comparison.

*** $p < .001$.

parents; only about 3 out of 10 preschool and kindergarten teachers thought this resource was “absolutely necessary” (see Table 3).

Second, parents also believed that Basic Knowledge, such as knowing basic body parts, some colors, and the alphabet, was “absolutely necessary” at kindergarten entry. Again, post hoc comparisons revealed that teachers gave significantly lower ratings to this resource. Teachers disagreed with each other as well, with preschool teachers rating Basic Knowledge as significantly more important than kindergarten teachers did. For example, 76% of parents, 48% of preschool teachers, and only 25% of kindergarten teachers believed it was absolutely necessary that children be able to count to 10 or 15 when they entered kindergarten (see Table 3).

Finally, post hoc comparisons revealed similar differences with regard to Advanced Knowledge. Although this resource received the lowest mean ratings from all three groups, they disagreed on how important it was. Parents placed greater importance on children having Advanced Knowledge than teachers did, and preschool teachers believed that Advanced Knowledge was more important than kindergarten teachers did. For example, 70% of parents believed it was “absolutely necessary” for children to know their own address and telephone number, compared to 42% of preschool teachers, and 19% of kindergarten teachers (see Table 3).

Knowledge Versus Approaches to Learning

Many educators believe that curiosity and similar “approaches to learning” are especially important for learning (National Task Force on School Readiness,

1991). Therefore, paired t tests were used to compare each group's rating of Interest and Engagement to their ratings of Basic and Advanced Knowledge. All groups viewed Interest and Engagement as substantially more important than Advanced Knowledge ($p = .001, d > 0.80$). However, only kindergarten teachers believed Interest and Engagement to be substantially more important than Basic Knowledge ($t(55) = -4.44, p = .001, d = 1.97$). Parents rated Basic Knowledge as substantially more important than Interest and Engagement ($t(338) = 11.93, p = .0001, d = 1.30$), while preschool teachers believed they were of equal importance ($t(50) = -0.68, p = .50$).

DISCUSSION

This study has important limitations. Findings cannot be generalized to parents who stay home with their preschoolers or to Hispanic parents who speak only Spanish. Because survey items were behaviorally anchored to make them appropriate for parents with limited education, we were unable to ask directly about complex constructs such as phonemic and numeracy awareness. Furthermore, the study was conducted in only one school district. Despite these limitations and differences in samples and measures, the findings showed some consistencies with previous research in that parents and teachers agreed on the importance of children being healthy and socially competent; parents placed a greater emphasis on academically-oriented skills than teachers did; and preschool teachers had some higher expectations than kindergarten teachers (cf. Hains et al., 1989; Knudsen-Lindauer & Harris, 1989; Harradine & Clifford, 1996; West et al., 1993).

In this broad overall context, several findings from this study are particularly noteworthy. First, regardless of parental ethnicity, parents showed remarkable consensus about what children should know and be able to do at kindergarten entry, particularly with regard to Classroom-related Readiness Resources. In particular, Black and Hispanic parents believed that children should be able to communicate in English by the time they enter kindergarten, in marked contrast to the views of preschool and kindergarten teachers. This finding must be viewed cautiously, as non-English speaking parents were excluded from this analysis and only one item tapped this belief. Still, the idea that parents in this largely Hispanic community may lack confidence in the ability of schools to educate Spanish-speaking children adequately requires further research, especially in light of the public debate about the efficacy of bilingual education.

Second, in this community, parents at all educational levels agreed on how important the 12 children's readiness resources were and believed that basic knowledge is more important than how children approach learning. These results contrast with other studies that have found that parents with less education held higher expectations than more educated parents regarding academically-oriented skills (West et al., 1993), and that parents emphasized interest and curiosity over academic skills (Harradine & Clifford, 1996; West et al., 1993). It is possible that these inconsistencies result from differences in measurement and sampling. For

example, in this study advanced and basic knowledge were measured separately whereas other studies combined them. In this study, school and community resources were controlled, whereas other studies aggregated data across communities with widely different school readiness resources.

One interpretation of low-income parents' heightened expectations regarding concrete classroom-related readiness resources is that education increases parents' knowledge of development (West et al., 1993), so that parents with limited education have developmentally inappropriate expectations. In this case, however, we also would expect parents to have significantly higher expectations with regard to self-care, emotional maturity, and peer relations, which they did not. Instead, the differences between parents and teachers centered on children's classroom-related readiness resources, particularly the importance of knowledge.

An alternative explanation is offered by Piotrkowski's resource model (Piotrkowski, in press). She has proposed that local school and family readiness resources influence beliefs about what children should know and be able to do at kindergarten entry. In economically depressed communities, like the one studied here, parents' elevated readiness beliefs regarding the resources children need for kindergarten may be a function not of developmentally inappropriate expectations but of realistic concerns that their children might not succeed in resource-poor local schools. Because of these concerns, parents might develop a compensatory strategy that de-emphasizes interest and curiosity and, instead, emphasizes the acquisition of concrete skills to help children adjust quickly and successfully to classroom demands. This resource model of school readiness beliefs needs to be systematically tested in future research.

Finally, several research questions are raised by the finding that the preschool teachers in the school district believed knowledge was more important for children entering kindergarten than the kindergarten teachers did. Does this disparity reflect the widespread lack of communication between preschools and kindergartens about curricula (Love, 1992), a perception by preschool teachers that kindergartens are becoming increasingly academic (Hains et al., 1989), pressures from parents, or preschool teachers' lack of confidence in local schools? Do kindergarten teachers' stated beliefs that basic knowledge and skills are not very important reflect their expectations that they will teach these academic skills (Hains et al., 1989), or are their stated beliefs more a reflection of their educational philosophy than their actual practices (Vartuli, 1999; West et al., 1993)? For example, Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox (2000) found that kindergarten teachers identified lack of academic skills as one of the most frequent transition problems children had. Finally, we must ask how children fare who move from preschool to kindergarten settings with strikingly divergent expectations. Further research is needed to answer these questions.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Ensuring early school success requires that resources be committed to help low-income communities support children, rather than placing the burden on

children themselves. Families and schools must be ready if children are to be ready. Part of becoming ready involves a meaningful commitment to the goal of early school success and a common vision of children's school readiness at the local level, especially in communities where children are at heightened risk of school failure.

The expansion of state-funded preschool initiatives offers important opportunities to bridge the gaps between preschool and kindergarten teachers regarding school readiness expectations. Providing funds for joint professional development and curriculum planning for preschool and kindergarten teachers within communities could result in a unified vision of what children should know and be able to do at school entry and articulated curricula between preschool and kindergarten, while improving teacher training. Also useful would be funding for local transition coordinators to institutionalize regular communication about children making the transition to kindergarten, visits by preschool and kindergarten teachers to each others' classrooms, and meetings between elementary school principals and directors of community-based preschools to engage in dialogue about school readiness, common problems, and solutions.

In all this, it is critical that the voices of parents in high-need communities be heard because it is their children who are at increased risk for failing in school. Involving parents in the community dialogue means that their emphasis on concrete academic skills should not be dismissed as developmentally inappropriate, but as an indicator of their legitimate concerns about failing schools and failing children. Educators have the responsibility of addressing parents' concerns by offering them empirically tested, developmentally appropriate pathways to literacy and numeracy education for preschoolers. Parents' high readiness expectations also offer an entree for intervention. Despite their high expectations, parents with limited education and those living in poverty are less likely than more affluent, educated parents to read to their children daily or take their children to the library (Zill, 1998). Instead, these parents may expect preschool teachers to take primary or even sole responsibility for arming their children with necessary school readiness resources (Holloway et al., 1995). Knowing that parents in high-need communities have high readiness expectations may provide a useful strategy in helping educate parents about the role they can play at home to help children develop the readiness resources parents themselves identify as essential.

As states become more involved in early childhood education, there is the danger that the negative aspects of the standards movement—particularly “high stakes testing”—will move downward to preschool to increase barriers to school entry. After all, asking what children should know and be able to do when they enter kindergarten is implicitly a way of asking about standards for preschool education. To avoid the pitfalls, while developing appropriate curricula and educational goals for preschool, it is important that local communities establish processes for consensus-building around common readiness goals for young children, develop continuity between preschool and kindergarten—including but not limited to integrated curricula—and assume joint responsibility for ensuring that all children be ready for success when they enter kindergarten.

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NOTES

1. As used here, "parent" includes other caregivers, such as guardians and foster parents.
2. A few surveys were returned by both parents, but decision rules were used to select one parent survey per child for inclusion in the sample.
3. For the results of the factor analyses and the decision rules used to create the multi-items subscales, please contact the first author.

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