

FIVE THINGS | to Know about School Readiness

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This year, nearly 4 million kindergartners across the country are getting ready to start school for the first time. (Find a detailed profile of these students [here](#).) Over the last few decades, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners have talked a lot about "school readiness." When this term was first coined, the question was often, "Will children be ready to learn?" Today, we realize that children are born ready to learn, so the questions are really: "Will they be ready to succeed in school, and how best can we support their success?"



[Check out this video!](#)

Child Trends offers 5 things to know about school readiness, based on its work with state policymakers and a review of existing literature on the topic.

1

Children are only one piece of the puzzle

When we think about "school readiness," we often think about [children](#) - what they know and can do. School readiness, however, depends on much more than children. [Families](#) are important in providing the love and support for young children to thrive. They are a child's first teacher. [Communities](#) do their part by providing high-quality services - like health care and family support - for families with young children. [Schools](#) are important in supporting successful transitions, bridging to early childhood programs, and providing high-quality education that is appropriate for each child's age and development. [School readiness is a puzzle with multiple pieces](#) - and we all share responsibility in putting the pieces together to support children's success in school.

2

School readiness is more than knowing the ABCs and 123s

There are five areas of skills and development that will help young children be ready to succeed in school. These were described and widely disseminated through the [National Education Goals Panel](#) and are evident in many states' [early learning and development standards](#) for young children. They are 1) health and physical development; 2) social and emotional development; 3) language and communication; 4) approaches to learning (e.g., sticking with a task even when it's hard, curiosity about the world); and 5) cognitive development and general knowledge (e.g., math, science, problem-solving). Children's development in one area affects their development in another, so it's important to provide experiences and support in all five areas. For instance, children with untreated health problems may have difficulty focusing on a story, or they may

have difficulty making friends if their illness causes frequent absences.

3

Children from low-income families tend to start school less "ready"

The "[achievement gap](#)" starts long before children begin kindergarten: disparities in early learning and development, between children from at-risk background and their more-advantaged peers, may begin as early as infancy. So, it is especially important to think about high-quality early childhood experiences for children at risk of later difficulties in school. [Research](#) has shown that children from low-income families benefit from high-quality early care and education. This emphasis on ensuring that young children, particularly those from low-income families, have access to high-quality early childhood programs is evident in state-funded [pre-kindergarten programs](#) and the federal priority in the [Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge](#).

4

School readiness starts at birth

School readiness is not just something to think about the summer or year before children start kindergarten. Children's early experiences, particularly from birth to age five, are critical to their [brain development](#) and [lifelong health](#). Young children need strong relationships with their families as well as access to health care and high-quality early care and education programs. State pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds and high-quality programs and supports for children [birth to three](#) and their families are all important for ensuring children's success when they start school.

5

School readiness assessment should have a clear purpose and be comprehensive

School readiness or kindergarten entry assessments can serve [multiple purposes](#). It is important to clarify the purpose - or multiple purposes - for conducting a kindergarten entry assessment, and then select the appropriate assessment approach for that purpose. If policymakers are interested in [assessing school readiness](#), they should develop a comprehensive assessment that addresses the multiple pieces of the school readiness puzzle. This means gathering information about the five domains of development and learning to better understand children's skills - and it also means gathering information about the other components. Just as we can ask whether children are ready to succeed when they start school, we can - and should - also ask (and assess) whether schools are ready to support and educate each child, and whether communities are doing all they can to support young children and their families.

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