

Maryland Model for School Readiness

Children who succeed in school do well in life. It is a shared responsibility of parents and providers to furnish optimal care for children so they will grow to be happy and healthy adults.

What is "school readiness"?

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) defines "school readiness" as the stage of human development that enables a child to engage in, and benefit from, early learning experiences. As a result of family support and relationships with friends and members of the community, a young child reaches certain levels of physical well-being and motor development, acquired social and personal capabilities, and attained language and comprehension skills coupled with general knowledge. School readiness acknowledges individual approaches toward learning as well as the unique experiences and background of each child that help children enter school ready to learn.

What skills do children need in order to succeed in school?

For those of us who are concerned about the school readiness of children, it is important they be:

- Socially adjusted, emotionally secure, and physically strong and coordinated.
- Able to communicate with adults and other children.
- Aware of print and letter-sound relationship, and have an understanding of stories and a love for books.
- Able to recognize and understand basic mathematical concepts including the ability to identify patterns and shapes and how to place items in a certain order.
- Aware of their environment, animal and plant life, as well as the roles of people in their families and communities.
- Comfortable with their creativity and appreciation for expressing themselves through the arts.

These skills, behaviors, and knowledge prepare children to become successful learners. However, too many children come to school lacking many of these skills and behaviors. For this reason, the Maryland General Assembly placed into law a requirement that all Maryland kindergarten children are evaluated each fall to determine their levels of school readiness.

How are Maryland's kindergartners evaluated?

An important component of the MMSR is the Work Sampling System[®] (WSS), which provides a way for teachers to assess and document children's skills, knowledge, behaviors, and academic accomplishments across a wide variety of curriculum areas. Teachers assess children on multiple occasions in order to enhance teaching and learning. Trained teachers and early childhood providers document children's learning and rate each child's growth and progress using developmental assessment guidelines (Exemplars), work samples, portfolios, and checklists. Typically, students' skills and abilities are evaluated two or three times per year. Assessment information is shared with families and reported to teachers of the next grade level.

By observing students, teachers gain a better understanding of children's strengths and challenges. The WSS is not a conventional readiness test and is not used to place students in particular programs. On the contrary, it is designed to support students' learning in seven domains:

1. social and personal development
2. language and literacy
3. mathematical thinking
4. scientific thinking
5. social studies
6. the arts
7. physical development and health

How do teachers provide school readiness information?

Kindergarten teachers must evaluate students during the first few months of the kindergarten year using selected WSS indicators and report their ratings by the end of November of each year to the state. The data is included in the report to the General Assembly on the level of school readiness statewide.

How have early childhood programs integrated the MMSR?

All 24 of Maryland's local school systems have integrated the use of the MMSR into their programs. All school systems have also included kindergarten teachers and early childhood special educators in MMSR professional development activities. Many local school systems also include prekindergarten teachers in the MMSR professional development activities. The MMSR has increasingly been applied in Head Start and child care programs, expanding the possibility that children will be better and more consistently prepared for kindergarten.

What are the benefits of using the Maryland Model for School Readiness?

The MMSR provides a framework for best practices in early care and education programs. Through the MMSR, teachers gain an in-depth understanding of children's learning styles and capabilities allowing them to probe more deeply into their students' learning potential. Children and their families as well as the early childhood community benefit from the clear communication about what children need to learn and be able to do to be successful in school.