

Ensuring that children are ready for successful school experiences is one of the most pressing issues in early childhood policy and practice. As national, state, and local efforts focus on school readiness, the National Association for the Education of Young Children reaffirms its position.

A commitment to promoting universal school readiness requires

1. giving all children access to the opportunities that promote school success,
2. recognizing and supporting children's individual differences, and
3. establishing reasonable and appropriate expectations for what children should be able to do when they enter school.

NAEYC believes it is the responsibility of schools to meet the needs of children as they enter school and to provide whatever services are needed to help each child reach his or her fullest potential.

The following points are discussed in depth in NAEYC's position statement on school readiness. Briefly, the position statement emphasizes that

School readiness requires access to opportunities

All families of young children need access to resources that will allow them to give their children the nurturing relationships and experiences that promote school readiness.

High-quality early education programs provide the foundation for school readiness and must be available to all young children and families.

Early intervention efforts support children who may be at risk for later school failure. These efforts are most effective when they offer comprehensive services, rather than simply addressing isolated skills.

School readiness must be flexibly and broadly defined

Young children develop in different ways and at different rates. Readiness does not happen at the same time or in the same way for all children. For example, one child may develop language skills rapidly while being slower to gain social competence. Definitions of readiness must consider these variations.

All areas of children's development and learning must be included in definitions of readiness. Readiness is more than basic knowledge of language and math, important as these are. Readiness expectations should include all areas: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional competence as well as positive attitudes toward learning.

The concept of readiness includes much more than children's readiness. As defined by the National Education Goals Panel, the School Readiness Indicators Initiative, and others, readiness includes *ready children, ready families, ready communities, ready early care and education, and ready schools*. All are necessary so that all children will experience success.

What is school readiness?

School readiness involves more than just children. School readiness, in the broadest sense, is about children, families, early environments, schools, and communities. Children are not innately *ready* or *not ready* for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before coming to school.

(Maxwell & Clifford 2004, 42)

Kindergarten entry should be based on chronological age, not on mastery of skills

Children are ready to enter kindergarten when they reach the legal chronological age of entry. The use of readiness tests to exclude children from school or to make other high-stakes decisions is indefensible.

Raising the legal entry age or voluntarily holding children back from kindergarten will not ensure that more children are ready for kindergarten. Little evidence exists that older children are more successful in kindergarten. Raising the entry age also leaves many children with no access to high-quality early education in the year before kindergarten. Hoping to promote kindergarten readiness, families may decide to hold a child out of school for a year; in general, holding children out of school has not been found to predict better social or academic outcomes.

Schools must be ready to help children learn

A school is ready if the curriculum in kindergarten and the early grades builds on prior learning. In early childhood and beyond, skills are most effectively learned and practiced when embedded in meaningful experiences. Even for children who enter school without having mastered specific skills, curriculum should include child-initiated as well as teacher-supported activities, and should emphasize hands-on, integrated learning,

The school must take into account individual differences in language, culture, and prior experience. Children whose experiences differ from those of the school they enter may be viewed as less ready. Effective kindergarten-primary programs meet children where they are and take extra care to help make meaningful connections with each child's home, culture, and community.

Teachers must know how to teach young children and have the resources to do so. Ready schools need kindergarten and primary grade teachers who have professional preparation in child development and early education. Class sizes are small enough to meet children's individual learning needs. Classroom equipment and materials support children's active, thoughtful engagement with learning.

Making a commitment to readiness for all

The investment and commitment needed to ensure that every child enters school ready to succeed and that schools are effective in educating every child will not be small. But it is essential. We must provide every child with the firm foundation so critical to learning in school and we must ensure that schools are prepared to meet the needs of individual children as they arrive at the school door.

The full NAEYC position statement "School Readiness" was revised in 1995 and is available online at

www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/psready98.pdf

NAEYC online position statements on readiness and related issues

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8: www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/psdap98.pdf
Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/pscscope.pdf
Early Learning Standards: Creating the Conditions for Success: www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/position_statement.pdf
STILL Unacceptable Trends in Kindergarten Entry and Placement (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education [NAECS/SDE] position statement, endorsed by NAEYC): www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/psunacc.pdf

Other print and online resources

Espinosa, L. 2002. High-quality preschool: Why we need it and what it looks like. *Preschool Policy Matters* 1 November. Online: <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/1.pdf>.
Maxwell, K., & R.M. Clifford. 2004. Research in review: School readiness assessment. *Young Children* 59 (1): 42–46.
National Education Goals Panel (NEGP). 1997. *Getting a good start in school*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Online: www.negp.gov/reports/good-sta.htm.
School Readiness Indicators Initiative. 2004. Getting ready—School Readiness Indicators Initiative: A 17-state partnership. Online: www.gettingready.org/gettingready/matriarch.
Shore, R. 1998. *Ready schools: A report of the Goal 1 Ready Schools Resource Group*. Washington, DC: NEGP. Online: www.negp.gov/Reports/readysch.pdf.
Stipek, D. 2002. At what age should children enter kindergarten? A question for policy makers and parents. *Social Policy Report* 16 (2): 3–17. Online: www.srcd.org/sprv16n2.pdf.