

How do kindergarten readiness assessments help guide and support instruction in ABC Unified?

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RATIONALE

As a kindergarten teacher in ABC Unified School District, I was curious to learn more about the readiness assessments other teachers in the district use to assess incoming kindergarten students. I have been an elementary school teacher for 19 years, and have observed students and parents struggle with the rigor and expectations that have increased due to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). ABCUSD teachers are facing many challenges teaching incoming kindergarteners with no clear definition or guidelines of what kindergarten readiness means besides the school-board stating a kindergartener is ready for school at the age of 5 on September first.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The bar for today's kindergarten students and teachers has been raised. There has been a significant shift in the kindergarten curriculum from 'developmentally appropriate practice' to more academic since introducing CCSS (Santi, 217). "Teachers, 'parents, and the community have different perspectives about school readiness and the assessments used, which can lead to some heated discussions" (Maxwell, 46). The term "readiness" itself is complex since there are so many differing definitions (La Paro, 444). For instance, the term "readiness" does not explain when kindergarteners are to be assessed or when the data is to be collected. Teachers may assess students prior to kindergarten, the first day of kindergarten, or some other time (Ackerman, 2). "Research on the timing of kindergarten assessment is sparse" (Santi, 218). Likewise, kindergarten readiness assessment content and how they are used are not uniform on what students should know and be able to do (Ackerman, 1). For this reason, it is not surprising that there is confusion about what should actually be assessed and the best time to assess students (Kagan, 118). Different schools have different expectations about readiness. "The same child, with the same strengths and needs, can be considered ready in one school and not ready in another school" (Maxwell, 45).

Kindergarten readiness assessments (KRA) are a valuable tool to identify gaps in children's knowledge and skills to enhance teaching and learning. KRAs generally include two areas: 1. Cognition, language, and the development of academic skills and 2. Social-emotional development and behavior. Providing a teacher or parent rating-scale/checklist is a tool typically used for examining kindergarten students' behavioral-emotional characteristics (La Paro, 446). Data from KRAs help teachers differentiate and give specific students the help they need to progress. Teachers improve their ability to form successful groups within the classroom after testing incoming kindergarteners. KRAs help to identify interventions that might be beneficial to specific children. KRAs are effective tools to support early identification, prompting intervention and remediation (VanDerHeyden, 366). After testing students, teachers also have a better understanding of which kindergarten students need more time to think before contributing or answering. Assessments can also help teachers gain a better understanding of the social-emotional needs of children, such as if a student is overly shy. Sharing data from KRAs with parents, helps create strong teacher-parent partnerships, which supports learning needs at home (Regenstein, 40).

"Readiness for school success is a community responsibility." (Maxwell, 43) "Teachers need time and support, they can use the assessment results to create rich, engaging learning environments that are well matched to children's needs and interests" (Regenstein, 37). It is important to provide communities the opportunity to gather to discuss views on school readiness in order to develop a community-wide set of expectations. This should not only include kindergarten teachers and parents, but also local preschool

teachers (Maxwell, 45). “Stronger investments in preschool and infant-toddler programs can give more children the educational opportunities they need” when entering kindergarten.” Ideally, “the experiences of teachers with kindergarten readiness assessments should help inform policy choices that increase support for the education of young children, in kindergarten and earlier” (Regenstein, 42).

RESEARCH DESIGN

In early February 2020, all kindergarten teachers in ABCUSD were sent a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Survey through Google Forms to learn what areas are included on their kindergarten readiness assessments, and how they use the data. In addition, I wanted to know if any school sites in ABC tested students prior to school starting for the purpose of balancing classrooms since the rigor and expectations for kindergarten have increased due to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Of the nineteen elementary schools within the district, at least one teacher from each site participated in the survey. In total, 36 responses from the survey were collected. The survey included ten questions, but I focused on four questions for this paper (Note: I attached the ten question survey). Teachers were asked to check off content from a list that is included on their assessments, but they were also provided a space to write additional items that were not indicated on the list. The same response-format was also used when teachers were asked what they do with the assessment data. Teachers indicated when they completed their KRAs, “before classes are made” or “after classes are made”. They were also asked “yes” or “no” if they were willing to share their assessments. Figure 1 and 2 are the charts displaying the data of responses from 36 kindergarten teachers.

DATA & ANALYSIS

A total of 36 ABCUSD kindergarten teachers responded to the KEA survey, which included one to three teachers from every elementary school in the district. Out of the 19 schools surveyed, only one school carried out their KRAs prior to school last year (Bragg Elementary). All teachers surveyed, except one, indicated they are willing to share their kindergarten assessments.

Figure 1: Areas on Kindergarten Readiness Assessments in ABCUSD

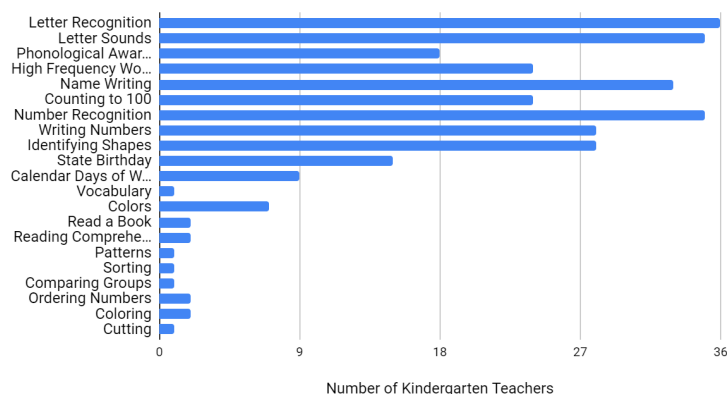


Figure 2: What do you do with the assessment data?

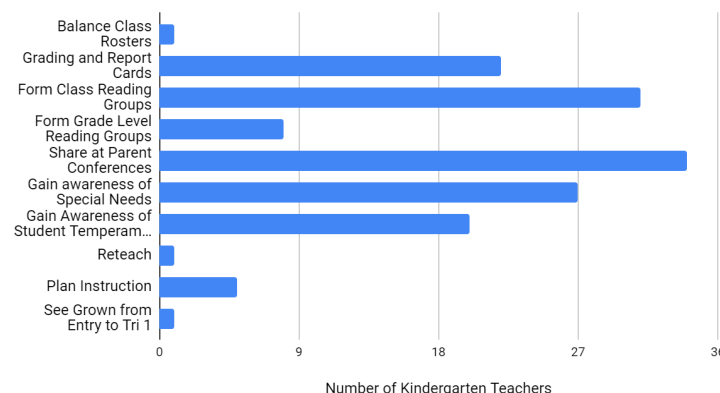


Figure 1 indicates the majority of the teachers include letter recognition (100%) , sounds (97%), high frequency words (67%), name writing (89%), counting to 100 (67%), number recognition (97%), writing numbers (78%), and identifying shapes (78%) on their KRAs. It was surprising that only 50% of kindergarten teachers assess phonological awareness since the Schatschneider study indicated substantial evidence indicating phonological skills are among the best predictors of future reading abilities (Santi, 218). However, only 42% of teachers ask students' birthdays, and 25% of teachers ask students to name the months and days on a calendar. The other items on the graph were written in responses from teachers, which is why there were only 6% or less in those areas.

Figure 2 illustrates that out of the 36 respondents, over 50% of teachers used the KRA data for grading and report cards (61%), forming class reading groups (86%), share at parent conferences (94%), gaining

awareness of special needs (75%) and student temperament (56%); however, less than 25% used the KRA data for balancing class rosters (3%) and forming grade level reading groups (22%). The other items on the graph (reteach, plan instruction, and see growth from entry to trimester one) were written in responses from teachers, which is why there were less teachers indicating these areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are four main recommendations I have about using KRAs in ABCUSD. First, I recommend that there needs to be a future study to gather input from local preschools and TK teachers regarding the definition and guidelines of kindergarten readiness in ABCUSD. The ultimate goal would to include ongoing conversations with kindergarten teachers to enable a community to reach consensus about school readiness (Maxwell, 45). Second, I recommend that ABCUSD provide workshops for kindergarten teachers in the district to share and discuss the kindergarten readiness assessments to promote collaboration on the wide range of skills assessed (Figure 1). The district can ask if teachers are willing to create the same KRAs districtwide with their input. Figure 1 showed a wide range of skills assessed. At these workshops, the district can provide ongoing training and support for teachers conducting kindergarten readiness assessments. Providing training can also allow teachers to discuss and create an intervention plan for their school to meet individual students' needs. I recommend that the district or school administrators protect the time necessary for kindergarten teachers to test students. In addition, teachers need time to go over the data to create leveled groups appropriate to each child's ELA levels. Third, I recommend continuing research on completing KRAs prior to balancing class rosters and further inquiry on other districts currently implementing this testing system. Fourth, I recommend that schools have parents complete a quick survey about their child's social-emotional and behavior skills when enrolling their kindergarten child. The parent surveys can be used to help balance classrooms prior to school starting, and can inform parents what they can begin working on to ease transitioning into kindergarten (Example: [KRA Parent Survey](#)). Kindergarten Readiness Assessments will help guide and support instruction in ABC Unified School District.

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