

School Readiness Study Revision Pilot: Frequently Asked Questions

What is the *School Readiness Study* and why does it need revision?

With no systematic process in place to assess children's school readiness, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) in 2002 initiated a series of three yearly studies focused on obtaining a picture of the school readiness of Minnesota kindergartners. The studies were well-received by the public, and during the 2006 Minnesota state legislative session, funding was appropriated for the study to be continued on an annual basis (School Readiness Report, 2010).

Since 2006, the *School Readiness Study* has gathered data from a voluntary representative 10 percent sample of schools using the Minnesota adapted version of the Work Sampling System. Based on feedback from administrators and teachers, the study is being revised to include more assessment tools that are developmentally appropriate and align to the *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress* (ECIPs) and the *Minnesota Academic Standards* for kindergarten.

This additional data will allow districts to align one of a menu of kindergarten entrance assessment tools with other district-level efforts, instead of asking teachers to conduct additional assessments for the purpose of analyzing school readiness statewide. Alignment to the standards will also allow these tools to be used for the purpose of informing instruction by illustrating the linkages between the standards and assessment tools.

Why is MDE testing a menu of tools in the *School Readiness Study* revision, as opposed to the state mandating one tool for all children?

The Minnesota Department of Education is creating a process that gives districts a choice of assessments based on their needs and population, and allows for alignment between tools. Districts may choose to eliminate duplicate assessments at the beginning of kindergarten by choosing one assessment that informs instruction and reliably and validly measures cognitive, social emotional and language/literacy skills while also contributing data to the state *School Readiness Study*. The ultimate goal is to offer a menu of assessments that are aligned with the early learning and kindergarten standards to inform instruction and give us a state-level picture of how children are doing at kindergarten entrance.

How do we know that the tools can be compared to one another?

The revision process being used will allow tools to be compared to one another so the state can report the preparedness of children upon kindergarten entrance on an aggregate level. The first phase of the revision (occurring 2013-2014 school year) will provide MDE with results on how well each assessment tool aligns to the ECIPs and kindergarten standards.

The second phase of the revision (occurring 2014-2015 school year) will analyze how well each assessment tool in the menu relates to the others. This will allow for the comparison of apples to apples. The revised *School Readiness Study* will ensure that each tool is measuring comparable information based on the alignment of each assessment tool to the standards. The revised *School Readiness Study* report will change from identifying how many children are ready based on the Work Sampling System, to identifying how many children are ready based on the standards.

What tools are being piloted?

- Beginning Kindergarten Assessment (BKA; Minneapolis) with Social Skills Improvement System
- Brigance Inventory of Early Development¹
- Desired Results Developmental Profile-School Readiness
- Early Learning Scales-Kindergarten
- Teaching Strategies Gold
- Work Sampling System-Minnesota Version

Why were these tools chosen?

The tools were selected based on demand in the field, federal guidance in the Race-to-the-Top Early Learning Challenge, the National Research Council report, *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What and How*, and in consultation with a multi-sector comprehensive assessment system workgroup. Criteria for inclusion in the pilot required that the tool:

- Meet the purpose of informing instruction (i.e., must be formative and not a developmental screener).
- Be technically adequate for its intended purpose, including reliability and validity.
- Have item specificity.
- Align with the ECIPs across multiple areas: language and literacy; mathematics; physical development; arts; and, social-emotional.
- Have accommodations or adaptations for accessibility for culturally and linguistically diverse populations and early childhood special education children.
- Have reporting and use of data for families.

Why aren't other tools being piloted?

MDE is creating a process to test tools for alignment to the early learning and kindergarten standards as tools are made available, or as there is sufficient demand for them from the field. Tools must meet the required criteria above to be piloted.

How will the revised *School Readiness Study* impact early care and education programs?

The revised *School Readiness Study* will create a better understanding of kindergarten expectations for early care and education programs by aligning assessment tools to learning

¹ The Brigance IED-II listed above is the criterion-related tool, not the diagnostic section only or developmental screener.

standards. Additionally, the majority of tools being used in the pilot can be used across multiple age ranges and be adapted for a wide variety of populations. Early childhood programs can use the revised *School Readiness Study* results as an opportunity to increase their knowledge of best practice in early childhood assessment, and engage in dialog about assessment within kindergarten programs.

How will the pilot study predict the readiness of children receiving early learning scholarships?

Early learning scholarships are outside the scope of the revised *School Readiness Study*. While the *School Readiness Study*'s purpose is to provide a snapshot of children's preparedness at kindergarten entry, it does not track other initiatives that are being implemented in local areas. It is recommended that districts decide whether to track these children for their own purposes.

[Read more about Early Learning Scholarships.](#)

How will the pilot study determine the effectiveness of Parent Aware?

The revised *School Readiness Study* is not designed to evaluate existing programs, but rather provide a snapshot of children's knowledge and skills in the first weeks of kindergarten. Parent Aware is outside the scope of the revised study. Please [view Parent Aware's evaluation](#) for more information on the effectiveness of Parent Aware.

How will the pilot study determine the effectiveness of all-day kindergarten?

While the revised *School Readiness Study* will collect data in all-day settings, evaluating all-day kindergarten is outside the scope of the *School Readiness Study* revision pilot. The study and revision are not designed for evaluating initiatives or for accountability purposes.

Will the *School Readiness Study* eventually be mandated for all entering kindergarteners in Minnesota?

At this time, there are no plans to make the *School Readiness Study* mandatory.

How will MDE ensure the study sample is representative of the state's kindergarten population?

MDE will make intentional efforts to ensure that the sample is representative of the state's kindergarten population. By creating a process that allows for school choice of assessment tools, providing support for tools and training, and ensuring those tools can be used to reduce assessment duplication efforts in district, MDE expects that a larger proportion of invited schools will voluntarily participate in the study. Schools will be invited based on a number of factors, including geography and student demographics.

How much does the *School Readiness Study* cost?

Since 2006, the *School Readiness Study* has been allocated \$287,000 in state funds annually to complete the assessment of a 10-percent voluntary sample of kindergarten students. Funding goes to the purchase of assessment tools and online data collection systems; training for

teachers to ensure each assessment is completed with fidelity; state staff salary; modest teacher stipends; and data analysis.

When is data collected by teachers?

Data is collected according to the schedule given by the publisher of each individual tool. Most data collection is required within the first eight weeks of kindergarten.

What is the benefit to schools for participating in the *School Readiness Study*?

Schools and teachers receive support in implementing an assessment tool that can be used to inform instruction, individualize instruction for students, and inform professional development decisions. Schools who volunteer to be a part of the *School Readiness Study* receive free use of one of the piloted assessment tool's online system for the entirety of the school year.

Teachers receive training on the chosen assessment tool, a hard copy of the assessment materials, use of the online data system, a stipend for their work, and ongoing technical assistance. School and teacher feedback also helps us identify future modifications needed in the implementation of the *School Readiness Study*.

If I have a question, a comment, or want my school to be involved in the study, who should I contact?

Please contact either [Amanda Varley](#) or [Megan Cox](#) with your questions or comments about the revision to the *School Readiness Study*.