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School readiness in urban communities

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SCHOOL READINESS IN URBAN COMMUNITIES

by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my family who I love.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Roberta Dihoff for her guidance

and help throughout this research. The skills and knowledge that I have gained will be

taken with me into my professional endeavor.

Abstract

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SCHOOL READINESS IN URBAN COMMUNITIES
2015-2016
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The purpose of this exploratory investigation were to (a) ascertain school readiness influences of young children ages birth to three in the New Jersey Early Intervention System, (b) to analyze race and ethnicity trends of the children within the program, (c) and to see if individual race/ethnicity played a role in children's school readiness. Publicly available data from the Department of Health/Division of Family Health Services / Early Intervention System was used to analyze two New Jersey counties, Camden County and Somerset County, and to identify amount of school readiness in early intervention results reported from 2013 to 2014. The results are from indicator 3A for individual social and emotional skills from the County Performance and Determination report.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Scholastics and introductions to educational settings can be troubling for many young students. According to the *Maryland Special Education/Early Intervention Services Census* in October of 2009, 31.8% of students between the ages of three and twenty-one had specific learning disabilities (Duttenhoffer, 2010). An article published on University of Michigan Health System by Kyla Boyse illustrates that 80% of students who have specific learning disorders have dyslexia or other reading related disabilities (2008). The article also mentions that unnoticed or untreated reading problems can cause literacy drawbacks throughout their academic and adult lives. Moreover, indicated by Raver (2003), development in emotional and social skills in early life too prepare children for academic achievement in school readiness (p. 3). Comparably a different article mentioned that not only do teachers view students "readiness to learn" and teachability" by student's ability to express positive emotions and regulate them appropriately with peers, but it proved that children entering kindergarten that have increased positive social–emotional competence are more successful in generating positive attitudes and relationships with others and about school (Denham, 2006, p. 59). Overall, academic preparedness along with social-emotional readiness is crucial for children entering into the school system.

This study is pivotal in regards to children and their future school successes because a column published by the National Association of Special Education Teachers (2006) tells us that effects of learning disorders such as reading disorders and social-

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emotional deficits, continue across an individual's lifespan and may escalate in adulthood. In 2002, a review by the Public Broadcasting Service, PBS, suggested that the earlier a child's reading problems are identified, they're more likely to learn strategies and techniques that can expand their reading level to the appropriate grade level. In looking at one's reading ability through assessment we can see if the student is ready or equipped to advance to first grade. Additionally an article shows that pre-k and enhancement programs are beneficial to children's cognitive and language development and areas regarding social-emotional behaviors, such as minimizing aggressive behaviors and improved parent-child relations (Gormley, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to look at learning factors that influence school readiness in young children. More specifically, this study will investigate an early intervention program, and its influences and effects on the preparation of school readiness for young children in urban communities prior to entering into kindergarten. A projection study was done by Hussar and Bailey (2014) stating that enrollment in pre-k, an early intervention service, was 2 percent higher in 2011 than in 1997 and is projected to increase 8 percent between 2011 and 2022 (p. 4). Furthermore, according to Bloomberg Business (2014), "full day preschool [pre-k] may prepare children better for learning and social development than part-time programs, new research showed," (Elmquist, para. 1). This early assessment of school readiness of young children can also assist in determining if any special services may be needed for particular students. Overall, this study is imperative to determine if enrichment-based services and programs prior to kindergarten positively effect a child's preparedness for school.

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I hypothesize that early intervention programs will positively effect a child's preparation to enter the school system. I predict that children who are exposed to these programs will be less susceptible to academic disabilities and failure. Secondly, I hypothesize that the socioeconomic factor of race and ethnicity will effect school readiness.

In this essay, we will be able to see the effects of early intervention programs offered to children prior to kindergarten and the effects the services have on their school readiness. The data will be obtained from a New Jersey early intervention program, and the responses will be formulated from publicly available data.

A possible limitations for this study is the usage of only one socioeconomic factor, race/ethnicity, versus other factors including: family income, parental education, and parental occupation.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Children across America enter into the school system every year. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), in fall 2015, about 50.1 million students attended public elementary and secondary schools; reportedly of these, 35.2 million were in prekindergarten through grade 8 and 14.9 million were in grades 9 through 12. School readiness, is composed of infrastructures that make sure children encounter successful early school experiences and help them transition into the school system (Buysse, & Wesley, 2003). These infrastructures consist of individual development, experiences, and exposure in domains such as language and communication, cognition and general knowledge, physical health and well-being, social development, behavior, and emotional development prior to crossing the threshold into kindergarten (Bredekamp, 2004). The categories mentioned are measurements required when looking at a child's qualities in readiness for school. Therefore, it is imperative that children entering into the school system be "as ready to learn" as possible.

School Readiness

School readiness is about children, their families, their early experiences, and their communities that assist with child development and skills that effect a student's general knowledge of language, math, physical, cognition, social and emotional competence and their attitudes for learning (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). These areas are characterized by social intelligence or understanding and interpreting people and social interactions. It also includes

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metacognition skills such as communicative functions namely requesting, rejecting commenting, arguing, and reasoning with others. Illustrated by Veenman, H. A. M., Wolters and Afflerbach (2006) metacognition focuses on one's awareness, knowledge, feeling of knowing, judgement of learning, comprehension learning, learning strategies, self-regulation skills and other executive functioning skills like working memory, reasoning, problem solving and their ability to plan (p. 4). Furthermore metacognition focuses on one's ability and awareness of what strategies are needed to perform a task, the ability to plan, and the self-evaluation of how well the strategies used are working; it also refers to memory or comprehension and factors affecting one's individual cognitive processes or described as self-questioning abilities (Livingston, 2003). Equally, school readiness is a child's ability to provide foundational skills and behaviors in specific areas that arrange that child for curriculum-based learning in kindergarten through twelfth grade; those domains are language and literacy, mathematics, physical well-being and motor development, one's approaches to learning, and other social foundations (Grafwallner, 2015). It also includes skills and experiences with working memory and other psychological and behavioral traits that help measure one's school readiness (Hallahan, Kauffman, Pullen, 2012). Overall, school readiness possess a variety of elements that contribute to one's preparation for schooling at a young age.

So now to think why perhaps school readiness and a child's skills and experiences prior to school entry are significant. The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative conducted by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Kauffman Foundation and

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the Ford Foundation (2005), stated that this concept of school readiness is important due to the fact that,

> Young children's earliest experiences and environments set the stage for future
>
> development and success in school and life. Early experiences actually influence
>
> Brain-development, establishing the neural connections that provide the
>
> foundation for language, reasoning, problem solving, social skills, behavior and
>
> emotional health. (p.6)

This statement illustrates that early life experiences can influence child development and later academic abilities in education. In their findings, the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative erected data from 17 U.S. states where each state provided state-level reports of school readiness indicators and reported the issues affecting the young children in their state. Results concluded "children who are not performing proficiently in reading by the end of third grade are at very high risk for poor long-term outcomes, such as dropping out of school, teen pregnancy and juvenile crime", and that at least half of educational gaps among poor and non-poor children exist at kindergarten entry. Ergo, in order to bridge this gap in the youth's ability to be prepared for school and reading proficiency, school readiness indicators such as their social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development and other factors need to be addressed as early in life as possible (2005). Further research indicates that a child's first few years in schools can also be key indicators for their academic success (McBryde, Ziviani, & Cuskelly, 2004). The exposures a child has in life skills, social interactions and with their environments can affect classroom preparedness and future

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success. McBryde et al. (2004) stated that a child's transition into kindergarten and school "has been termed a 'critical period' for a child's academic and social development: a limited stage of a child's life in which certain environmental conditions or stimulation coupled with biological potential, will determine adaptation" (p. 194). Likewise since "children's experiences prior to kindergarten entry are correlated with degree of cognitive development and school readiness as measured by standardized assessments of cognitive and linguistic performance" it is key for a child to have the best exposure to experiences that will affect their academics, social, emotional, and behavior early on in life (Ramey, C., Ramey, S., 2004). Author Blair (2002) supports this idea with statistics stating that 46% of a representative sample of teachers indicated in a survey conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning that over half of the students in their class demonstrated a paucity of abilities that would enable them to function in the kindergarten classroom (p. 112). Blair's study (2002), delves into emotional development in relation between cognition and school readiness skills of self-regulation like working memory and problem solving skills. He finds that

> infants and toddlers characterized by high levels of negative emotionality may be at high risk for poor school readiness… [and] that a home environment and preschool education specifically designed to reduce stress and foster emotional competence should promote the attention and cognitive self-regulation needed for both social and cognitive adaptation to the classroom. (p. 119)

Conclusively school readiness is key in helping young student's transition into school and adaptation and assists with future academic achievements.

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Subsequently, in addition to looking at the importance of school readiness in a child's success in school, it is crucial to know how to provide a child with school readiness within an educational setting. School readiness in young children requires access to opportunities. As claimed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009), school readiness can be created if all students are given opportunities for school success, recognizing and supporting student's individualized differences, and in establishing reasonable and appropriate expectations of children when they first enter the school system (p. 1). Here, is an example of how schools can give each child an equal playing field prior to entering school. The schools can offer equal opportunities to the students by recognizing and paying particular attention to individualized assets and problem areas. Accordingly, the schools can promote student abilities and provide service to any limitations. An author at Harvard Family Research Project, Heather Weiss, (2004) discussed how the School Readiness Indicators launched by David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, were created in order to provide schools and their students tools to be school ready. Schools included in the School Readiness Indicators program were then given the ability to "measure child well-being during early childhood years and the years of transition from early childhood to elementary school" and that 25-60% of children are not ready to be successful by time they enter kindergarten (para. 3). This public policy tool contributes a comprehensive set of school readiness indicators for schools to use to improve outcomes for children.

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Along with schools, it is pertinent if parents and communities help influence a child's school readiness as well. Not only do children create their school readiness throughout early life experiences, but their families, environments, schools and their communities play a role in building school readiness as well. Another research done by Harvard University Family Research Project (2006) demonstrates that "substantial research supports family involvement, and a growing body of intervention evaluations demonstrates that family involvement can be strengthened with positive results for young children and their school readiness" ("Family Involvement in", 2006, para. 4). Families can help their children by accessing resources that give their children experiences that promote school readiness. Communities can help by offering those resources: early education programs such as preschool, early interventions, and parental support within the environment. Supportively, Hill and Taylor (2004) demonstrate, "parental school involvement has a positive influence on school-related outcomes for children" (p. 161). Lareau (as cited in Hill et. al, 2004) also discussed parental collaboration and that it increases parents' skills and information about the school's expectations of their child regarding classwork and assignments, makes them better equipped to support their children in their school-related activities, and "they also learn how to help with homework and how to augment children's learning at home" (p. 162). Additionally, families can provide school readiness by reading to their children. A division of the U.S. Department of Education, National Educational Association [NES] (2015) found that 26 percent of children whose parents read to them three to four times a week were able to recognize all of the letters of the alphabet; those same children could count to 20 or

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higher rather than those who could not count to 20 or higher at a 60% to 44% ratio Also that 54% of children read to more frequently could write their own names and 75% of those read to three to four times a week could actually read versus 57% of those who were not read to three to four days a week who pretended they could read (NES, 2015). In sum, early parental involvement in reading to their children influenced higher aptness in future scholastics in reading, counting, and writing their names more accurately. Furthermore communities also provide school readiness opportunities to their youth. Broethel (2004) states, "early child care and education programs are by far the most widespread of such interventions….such programs increasingly serve children from all backgrounds and circumstances" (p. 14). Considering children learn and develop at different times, manners and rates, families and communities can help their children be better prepared for school by granting them access to resources and programs to help (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Undoubtedly, how to measure school readiness is pivotal. It can be measured by physical well-being and motor development, by social and emotional development, and even cognition (Emig, 2000, p. 3-4). The domains listed can be scrutinized by each child's growth and maturity in each category. An example for determining social and emotional development is to examine family, child care, and school levels (Raver, 2003). Even more measuring one's preparation for school can determine future successes in school. A national survey done by the National Center for Education Statistics (as cited by Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle & Calkins, 2006) of 1448 kindergarten teachers states that "being physically healthy, rested and well-nourished; being able to

communicate needs, wants and thoughts; and being enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities were the most essential qualities for children to be ready for kindergarten" (p. 431). So a child's development in physical well-being, social and emotional skills and cognition can help measure school readiness.

Further these domains can be examined by assessments or the evaluation of the quality or ability of someone or something. School readiness assessment alludes to, "assessment of young children around school entry—right before kindergarten, at kindergarten entry, or very early in the kindergarten year" (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). For example, assessments can take place through observations. The observations are gathered on all of the children to determine strengths and needs of each individual child; these are typically done in an informal fashion where teachers watch classroom behaviors in connection to classroom curriculum. A more specific example of observations could be writing notes about students' social interactions or documenting photographic proof of a child's block structure they made earlier in the day (2004). Classroom observations help with assessing a child's social interactions, strengths and areas that need more assistance. Altogether professionals such as teachers, counselors and other educators typically tend to assess the above mentioned domains in order to determine one's school readiness and to help teachers adapt their teaching to fit their students' needs.

In addition to observational evaluations another form of school readiness assessment can be done by screenings. Screenings identify students who may be at risk of academic failure or have deviant development in any or a combination of the domains such as communication development or cognitive deficits (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen,

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2014, p. 24). The screening assessments look to see if children are progressing at normal rates alongside peers, and if they are not, these screenings can assist in sending children for further evaluations. Furthering the evaluations after initial screenings can assist individuals with school readiness or determine eligibility for special education or similar services. According to Saluja, Scott- Little and Clifford (2000), "a number of states mandated formal screenings for every child to meet the federal IDEA requirements for a plan whereby children with disabilities can be identified" (p. 6). The American Psychological Association defines Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, IDEA (2004), as ensuring that all children with exceptionalities are given a free and appropriate education that meets individual needs to improve one's education. Evaluating children in programs by observations and screenings can measure one's readiness to attend and progress in school.

In like manner, the identification of children who qualify for special education services is imperative. A federal law passed in 2004, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act or IDEA 2004, illustrate the basic requirements that the law ensures for all children and youths with disabilities to have the right to a free, appropriate education (American Psychological Association, 2004). Also this law indicates that there must be an extensive effort to screen and identify children with disabilities in any category of school and improves the academic achievement of students across the United States (Hallahan et al, 2014; Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). Ultimately, screenings and the recognition of students who may need special education services follows federal

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laws. Equally it measures school readiness, determines and provides an appropriate learning environment for the child to progress based off of their individual abilities.

Urban Families and School Readiness

Over the past few decades, policy makers and professionals within the educational field have been concerned about ongoing variances in school readiness between children from less economically advantaged families. Moreover that all children entering the school system ought to be equipped and ready to learn; to help meet this goal all children need "access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare them for school" (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004, p. 116). The preparedness of young children as they enter school and their academic success is a developmental and educational focus for school readiness, yet authors Ramey, C., and Ramey, S. (2004) explained that "children from economically poor and undereducated families are at elevated risk for lack of school readiness due to less knowledge and skill" (p. 471). A study was done where they sampled preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers and parents in a district of mostly Hispanic and Black high-need urban school districts. There were large populations of poverty and limited-educated families to see what young children should know and be able to do by the time they enter school. Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews (2000) found that children are more susceptible for school failure and lack of school readiness in low-income homes and have serious and longterm consequences (p. 537-541). Similarly authors Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman, and Nelson (2011) express that substantial achievement gaps exist between middle-income children and low-income children at the school entry level; this leads to disparities in learning

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problems and educational progress (p.1). As a result analysis shows that urban and low-income neighborhoods exhibit disparities in school readiness among children.

In addition to low-income families resulting in decreased school readiness in young children, disparities among race and ethnicity and family educational background influence and represent high percentages of low-income families and how that affects child school readiness. Statistics show that young children under six years old consisted of 48 percent of them living in low-income families and 25 percent living in poor families, 70 percent of black children and 66 percent of Hispanic children under age 6 years living in low-income families whereas only 35 percent of white children under 6 years of age live in low-income families (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2014). As previously mentioned, low-income and impoverished neighborhoods prove that there are academic achievement gaps in school readiness among these children. Research also concludes that majority of the individuals living in these low-income areas are mostly minorities. The Kids Count Data Center (2010-2014) claim that between 2010 and 2014 that 31% of American Indian children lived in areas of concentrated poverty, 8% Asian and Pacific Islander, 32% African American, 24% Latino and 5% Caucasian Americans (Kids Count Data Ceter, 2010-2014). Overall, there is a significantly higher percentage of marginalized groups living in the more impoverished areas of the United States than there are White Americans.

Additionally, demographic information such as family educational background can impact a child's academic readiness. Connell and Prinz (2002) did an experiment looking at the impact of parent-child interactions on school readiness and social skill

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development for low-income minority children and measured maternal education via a scale ranging from attendance in elementary school through completion of a doctoral/professional degree program. The results illustrated that educational level positively correlated with child readiness outcomes namely teacher ratings of readiness and performance on overall cognitive and communication abilities (p. 182-86). Jiang et. al (2014) similarly mentions that 88 percent of children under age 6 have parents who have less than a high school degree and are unemployed (p.6). Ultimately, socioeconomic factors can influence school readiness in children. Low-income families, minorities, and undereducated caregivers are statistically correlated to disparities among children that fall within these demographics, scholastic regression, and experiences related to their school readiness and success.

In previously looking at parental involvement as a way to provide school readiness, surely, there may be variances in parental involvement and the roles of ethnic families and income. Parenting behaviors of attitudes, beliefs, values, practices, cohesion, parental discipline, parental expressions of warmth, and control may affect the way parents communicate with their children and the environments they supply to aid in school readiness (Raver, Gershoff, Aber, 2010). Besides, research shows children who are African American and from lower-income households tend to perform less well in school as the Euro-American and higher-income counterparts, and it shows that African American parents or those with lower-income are often less involved in their child's education (Hill, 2001, p. 686). Therefore, parenting inclusion behaviors can play a role in the ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness.

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Services Offered for School Readiness

There are a variety of services provided to families to benefit child school readiness. Preschool programs are offered that implement classroom instruction and curricula to guide children ages three to five in pre-school preparation (National Center for Education Research [NCER], 2008). The *National Center for Education Statistics* according to the U.S Department of Education states that "the percentages of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in preprimary programs in 2013 (42 and 68 percent, respectively) were higher than the percentages enrolled in 1990 (2015). An initiative done by Florida Legislation gives examples of school readiness services provided by the state. The 1999 Florida Legislation Act discussed by Early Learning Coalition of Brevard (2015) mandates that services include but are not limited to:

> developmental and growth screening, implementation of individual educational plans, coordination of referral services, education on life style factors, transition to kindergarten, parent education, community needs assessment, accessing community resources for health and nutrition, technical assistance to parents and providers, staff education, classroom education, and mentoring business partners. (para. 2)

Therefore, educational experiences such as preschool, Head Start, and other supportive organizations and classes provided are representation of services to help with school readiness.

Additionally, Head start is a service provided to assist with school readiness. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services explain that Head Start promotes school

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readiness for young children in low-income families by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. This act (Public Law 110-134) demonstrates "the purpose of this subchapter to promote the school readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development" which means it helps with the growth of language and emotional functioning of individual students, and nutritional and health-based services related to each family. Hence articulated by (NAEYC)

> Head Start Head Start approaches the needs of the whole child and the family by providing health, education, social services, and parent-community involvement in one program. Most Head Start programs serve children ages three to five years, but the program also supports Early Start for infants and toddlers, Parent/Child Centers, and programs that help children make the transition to elementary school. (n.d.)

A service like Head Start not only provides support to school readiness domains such as physical well-being, social and emotional development and cognition of children, yet it addresses the gap discrepancies between minorities and Euro-Americans and low-income families as they target these specific demographics in bridging the gap previously illustrated. Ultimately Head Start helps young children and infants along with parents of the children simultaneously.

As mentioned, different organizations and communities may offer different services in order to positively impact school readiness. Some services that can help are academic related such as preschool and Head Start, Advocacy programs, Crisis Intervention, Parental Support, Family Counseling, Outreach and technological

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equipment (Center for Family Services, n.d.). An initiative was also created to identify young children in 17 states across the U.S. and it implemented services to certain communities to give school readiness opportunities to youth. The *National School Readiness Indicators Initiative* (2005) made of "17 state teams worked to increase their capacity to obtain and use data, to develop effective communications strategies and to inform a school readiness policy agenda" (p. 13). Other services that are not directly linked to academics can positively influence school readiness as well. Programs that identify children early on who need assistance in order to be equipped to learn in school are helpful. Looking at environmental, biological or health factors of children can too impact their learning abilities and school readiness; conclusively programs to assist with underlying health and medical programs are helpful as well. An article by Currie (2005) explains that "health problems can affect a child's school readiness both directly and indirectly…and that mental health conditions, chronic conditions, environmental threats, nutrition, and maternal health and behaviors" can affect readiness by intervening (p. 118). Poor health conditions can impact a child missing school or influence their cognitive and mental abilities to learn. Consequently, services that educate families about their child's exceptionality and resources given to help with medical expenses can help the overall health of a child, and a healthy child is a child ready to learn.

Thus an important question to ask is how effective are family support and early childhood development programs in school readiness? Supporting families with a multitude of services may aid with school readiness. In a study exemplified by Anderson et al., (2003) found

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Publicly funded, center-based, comprehensive early childhood development

programs are a community resource that promotes the well-being of young

children. Programs such as Head Start are designed to close the gap in readiness

to learn between poor children and their more economically advantaged peers. (p.

32)

Services for young children and their families prepare young individuals for school

readiness. The Center for Public Education [CPE] compiled data from school districts all

over the United States and one study done in North Carolina showed the effects of pre-

entry programs: 67 percent of children were ready for school by age five who were in a

pre-school program and 28 percent of the children were not ready for school by age five

(2007). A program offered to children before they enter into school can result in

achievement patterns and overall success. A study of 142 preschoolers looked at their

cognitive control skills (resisting habits, distractibility, adjusting to change, and working

memory) when they entered in comparison to when they left the program to enter

kindergarten. Results showed that preschool programs can improve executive functions

such as working memory and adaptation to change (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas &

Munro, 2007). In short, school readiness programs like Head Start and preschool are

beneficial attributes for school readiness in young children.

Summary of the Literature Review

There are many benefits of school readiness programs and interventions, which is

copiously recorded throughout literature. Early intervention services can positively

impact a child's preparation to enter the school system. Children's experiences prior to

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kindergarten entry are correlated with degree of cognitive development and school readiness as measured by standardized assessments (Ramey, Ramey, 2004). School readiness skills are well defined and there are recommendations to advocate how to prepare a child for future academic, social progressions. Socioeconomic factors of race and ethnicity can also effect school readiness and are well documented. Previous studies of school readiness have been done; however, this study looked at the New Jersey Early Intervention Program in comparison to how different counties perform on social-emotional skills specifically. Future studies are needed to help better understand the academic impact of school readiness on young children entering into the school system.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Participants

There was no recruitment of subjects. Information was gathered via publicly available data through the Department of Health/Division of Family Health Services / Early Intervention System Website. Individuals included were male and female who ranged in age from birth to three years old. The data was extracted from publicly available statistics from the New Jersey Early Intervention System throughout two New Jersey counties. The two counties included in the study were Camden County and Somerset County.

Materials

Publicly available data from the Department of Health/Division of Family Health Services / Early Intervention System website was used.

Design

One design of this study was a chi- square analysis. The chi-square results were dependent on the participants' ethnicity within Camden County and Somerset County in New Jersey. This statistical analysis examined categorical data. It scrutinized if there was a significant difference between expected ethnic representation of participants within the early intervention program in comparison to the actual ethnic make of each individual county. The second descriptive investigation was dependent on social-emotional skill growth in the program. The social-emotional skill growth measurement came from

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existing data provided by the Department of Health/Division of Family Health/Services of New Jersey.

Variables

One independent variable was ethnicity; its dependent variable was overall ethnicity trends and patterns based on the urban communities examined. A second independent variable was the New Jersey Early Intervention System [NJEIS] school readiness program itself, and its dependent variable was each county's social-emotional skills growth recorded in the publicly available data. The progress of each child was collected then measured together as a group by each county. Therefore, individual growth was not provided as a dependent variable; only progress by counties was measured.

Procedures

The overall objective of this study was to determine if an early intervention program prior to kindergarten positively influenced a child's preparedness for school. Aggregate information was used for this study; all statistics were used without exception. No consent procedures were applicable. County records and assessments were scrutinized. Data was collected referring to children who have attended program for at least 6 months to measure social-emotional skill growth by way of program exit performance. This was calculated by, of those children who entered the program below age expectancies in social-emotional skills, the percent who substantially increased their rate of growth by the time they exited the program. Furthermore, children's social-emotional growth was collected and examined by county. It looked at assessment results

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of children in counties prior to entering the program and post assessment results of the same children within the program.

Additionally, this analysis's purpose was to explore ethnicity trends within the program and how it may differentiate between counties, and to see if there was a significant difference between expected ethnic representation of participants within the early intervention program in comparison to the actual ethnic make of each individual county. Also the evaluation's target was to observe if ethnicity trends impacted school readiness.

Chapter 4

Results

Descriptive Analysis

This study analyzed the qualitative research of the New Jersey Early Intervention System [NJEIS]and its impact on social-emotional growth of children ages birth to three years old in Camden County and Somerset County New Jersey. The analysis scrutinized the early intervention system in Somerset County and Camden County. Publicly available data was utilized. The Department examined children in the program at the entrance of the program and then again upon exiting the program on their social-emotional skills such as social relationships.

Hypothesis 1. Early intervention programs will positively effect a child's preparation to enter the school system. Similarly children who are exposed to these programs will be less susceptible to academic disabilities and failure.

The result of this descriptive observation rejected the null hypothesis for Camden County. Of those children who entered the program for the indicator of children having positive social-emotional skills below age expectations, (47%) substantially improved by the time they exited the program. The New Jersey state target for growth was (38%); therefore, children in Camden County progressed their social-emotional skills of school readiness from the early intervention system.

Comparably for Somerset County, children who had social-emotional skills below age expectations (53%) improved by the time they exited the program. The New Jersey state target for growth was (38%). Additionally, children in the early intervention system

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in Somerset County were functioning within age expectations of social-emotional skill development at (87%) by time they egressed the program. The New Jersey state target was (77%).

Chi- Square Analysis

The chi- square analysis reviewed ethnicity trends of Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Multiracial in the New Jersey Early Intervention Program. The chi- square test inspected if ethnicity trends in the program significantly represented county ethnicity statistics.

Hypothesis 2. The socioeconomic factor of race and ethnicity will effect school readiness. To examine ethnicity relationships among African American (21.1%), Caucasian, (58.3%) Hispanic (15.6%), Asian (5.8%)and multi-racial children (2.3%)in the New Jersey state statistics for Camden County a chi-square was computed. Results were not significant indicating no relationship among the ethnic groups when compared to New Jersey Early Intervention System statistics of 48.7% for Caucasian, 12.8% for African American, 30.5% for Hispanic, 3.8% for Asian and 4.2% for mixed races.

To analyze ethnicity relationships among African American (7.3%), Caucasian, (49.0%) Hispanic (26.4%), Asian (11.7%)and multi-racial children (5.3%)in the New Jersey Early Intervention System in Somerset County a chi-square was computed. Results were not significant indicating no relationship among the ethnic groups when compared to New Jersey state statistics of 58.7% for Caucasian, 9.9% for African American, 14.2% for Hispanic, 16.6% for Asian and 1.9% for mixed races.

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All data is publicly available on the Department of Health New Jersey Early

Intervention System website.

Discussion

Summary

Early intervention programs positively increased child rate of growth for social-emotional school readiness by the time they exited the program in both Somerset and Camden Counties in New Jersey. Results of the study demonstrated a higher percentage of strengthened social-emotional skills in young children for the two counties. This heightened growth exceeded state targets. Social-Emotional development is indispensable for a child's preparedness when entering the school system. Recent research has illustrated the need for children's emotional and behavioral adjustment for their chances of early school success, and that it will assist a child's capacity to build close personal relationships with peers and caregivers (Shrier, 2014).

Social-emotional skills consist of the ability to express and manage emotions, explore new environments, make and keep friends, and self-regulating like calming down when upset without harming others (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center [ECLK], 2013 & Shrier, 2014). Children with social-emotional skills and have positive relationships with peers and parents are secure and confident in exploring new situations, and equipped in mastering learning challenges (Klein, 2002). Altogether, social-emotional progression in the early intervention program provided young children with social-emotional school readiness.

The analyzed results of ethnicity in this particular study portrayed no ethnic representation of children in the New Jersey Early Intervention program with the ethnic

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percentages within Somerset and Camden Counties. Therefore, the ethnic percentages within the program were not a representative sample of the ethnicity distribution in Somerset County and Camden County. Insignificant findings yielded ethnicity trends did not impact school readiness. There are substantial achievement gaps between marginalized ethnicities, African Americans and Hispanics, and other ethnic groups at school entry that widen over time contributing to disparities in social-emotional development where early intervention programs are designed to intervene and reduce these disparities by enhancing school readiness (Welsh et al., 2011). However, with ethnic trends insignificant in this study, the early intervention program may not influence social-emotional school readiness.

Limitations

A major research limitation of this study is the usage of only one socioeconomic factor. The lack of other socioeconomic constituents in the study do not thoroughly reflect variables that may influence school readiness. Family income, occupation, and parental education level could possibly impact a child's social-emotional capabilities in school readiness.

A second limitation this particular study faced was the restricted amount of data publicly available via the Department of Health for the New Jersey Early Intervention System. Constraints included minimal or no information in regards to child gender percentages within the program, counties and those who progressed and those who did not in the social-emotional development for school readiness. Differentiating between

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genders may have shed light onto any trends as to social-emotional progression and its rates.

In correspondence to limited publicly available data provided by the New Jersey Early Intervention System, there was finite information and statistics available about the test scores for each child in regards to their social-emotional skills pre-entry into the program and when they exited the program. No information was supplied about the actual scores, or how pre and post scores correlated and at what significance they differed.

Ultimately, a boundary for this study could have been the sample used. This study only used children in the early intervention program from Camden and Somerset County. The two counties varied in size; Camden County is considered a large county where Somerset is a medium sized county in terms of population. Consequently, the sample size may not have been representative of the 21 total counties in New Jersey.

Future Direction

It would be a disservice to the community, children, parents, and professionals to not do further research on school readiness. Research should continue on how to better prepare young children social-emotionally and in future academic success. The research of this study is only an addendum for future studies to expand on already existing knowledge for school readiness while avoiding the limitations provided for future effective school readiness programs and services.

Points to consider for successful future studies would be to use other socioeconomic factors that may influence school readiness such as parental education level, utilize more thorough data about individuals within the study such as gender, and

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use sample sizes representative of the area in which one is testing and researching. Analyzing publicly available data in a larger sample size representative of the area to be examined will increase validity of the findings. When examining a more representative sample, one conducting the study can too consider variables such as gender, age, and other familial information to determine if other features influence school readiness development and trends.

Similarly, another study suggestion would be to evaluate school readiness programs outside of the New Jersey Early Intervention Program. Other program and services such as Head Start may have other evidence and outcomes regarding school readiness. One could look at aggregate data available about specific school readiness programs and look similar variables previously mentioned. Furthermore, for a future study, one could take the same exact study and replicate it in another state to see if trends relate or differ throughout the United States. The usage of analyzing aggregate data has the potential to eliminate self-report biases since the data already exists.

Future studies related to this analysis should be conducted. Further support about the findings should continue in order to expand the knowledge of school readiness in urban communities.

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