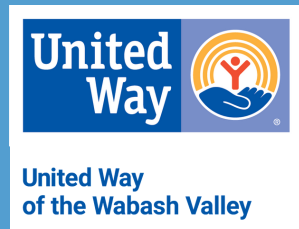


United Way of the Wabash Valley's Kindergarten Readiness Report 2019-2020



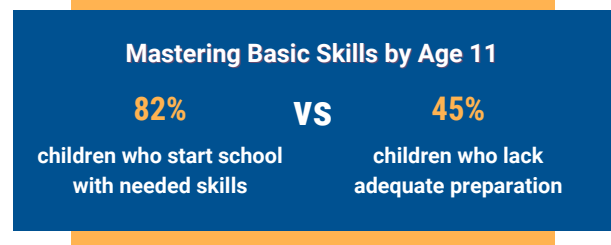
In Partnership With:
Clay Community Schools
Marshall Community Unit Schools
North Central Parke Community School Corporation
South Vermillion Community School Corporation
Southwest School Corporation
Vigo County School Corporation

Report Overview

Kindergarten readiness is based on so much more than age; children need to begin school with a set of skills that will provide a strong and lasting foundation. Ultimately, kindergarten readiness is about the whole community. It takes families, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and community resources working together to support the healthy development of our youngest members. As United Way of the Wabash Valley (UWWV) pursues our bold goal of *moving 10,000 families out of financial struggles and into stability*, we look forward to building collaborations to find lasting solutions that will improve the lives of our children and their families and help our community to thrive.



The UWWV Success By 6 Impact Council understands that educational programs beginning in early childhood develop essential literacy, math, and social/emotional skills that prepare children for success in kindergarten and overall achievement in school and life. Without these skills, children begin school already behind, and though they will improve, most may never catch up to their classmates. To illustrate, children who start school on firm footing have an 82% chance of mastering basic skills by age 11, compared to only 45% for children who lack adequate preparation.[1] For these reasons, UWWV supports initiatives to improve kindergarten readiness, in order to set each child—and our community as a whole—on a path toward success.



How do we know whether our initiatives are helping children acquire the skills to be ready for kindergarten? To evaluate the effectiveness of our community's work, in 2019 we set out to create and pilot a simple and consistent way to measure a broad set of proficiencies of incoming students, an assessment that could be repeated each year, using the same methods. In this way, we can report our progress to the community and to our donors. We can use the results to enhance early childhood education programs and generate greater support and resources for our work, which will further benefit every school corporation in our six-county service area.

We are pleased to share the results of our pilot assessment with the community.



[1] "Achieving Kindergarten Readiness for All Children." Bridgespan Group and Pritzker's Children's Initiative, 2015.

How We Collected the Data

Our UWWV Success By 6 (SB6) Council used Indiana Foundation Standards, DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), and the local expertise of experienced kindergarten and PreK educators to develop a 15-question Kindergarten Readiness Checklist (KRC). The KRC was sent to kindergarten teachers of all school corporations in our six-county service area—Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties in Indiana and Clark County in Illinois—along with a one-page guide to ensure consistent interpretation and use. Our intent was to devise a statistically sound process that would require minimal extra work for busy kindergarten teachers and that would be easy to coordinate and repeat each year.



Here's what we did:



Random sampling statistics indicated we could achieve a 4.5% error or less with 90% confidence by sampling 20% of the total kindergarten population. To achieve 20% of our average 20-student class meant that teachers assessed four students per class.



To ensure a random sampling, we asked the teachers to start with last names on their class roster beginning with the letter "L" and to select the next four students alphabetically. Teachers adhered to this process to avoid the potential for bias.



Before beginning the KRC assessment, teachers were asked to state whether they themselves thought each student was "kindergarten ready." The teachers' feedback helped us gauge whether the readiness scores derived from the KRC assessment corresponded to the perspective of a professional educator.



Teachers filled in the KRC forms by hand, typically completing the process for four students in less than twenty minutes. They did not include student names, but they did list whether the students had attended a PreK program.



We converted the teachers' assessments to numerical scores and compiled them in a database so that we could analyze and report the results. The kindergarten readiness scores were converted and presented in an easier-to-understand 100-point scale.



To thank the teachers for their extra efforts, UWWV provided all participating kindergarten classes with a Scholastic ten-book pack for their classroom library.

Although we conducted this initial pilot assessment in January 2020, our aim is to conduct future annual assessments by September. This would give kindergarten teachers sufficient time to evaluate the child's incoming skillsets, but not so much time that it would influence those skillsets with learning that takes place in kindergarten.

What the Overall Data Tells Us

We were delighted by the willingness of principals and teachers to participate in this endeavor. Of the 42 elementary schools and 118 kindergarten classes in the six-county service area for the 2019-2020 school year, 33 schools and 105 classes took part. Teachers completed KRCs for 421 students, representing 20% of the kindergartners in those 105 classrooms.



105 Classes

The scores for each of the 15 skill categories were averaged, and then those results were compiled into a community-wide average. That number was normalized to a 100-point scale for an overall “Kindergarten Readiness” score of 75.

What does this number tell us—is 75 a “good” score?

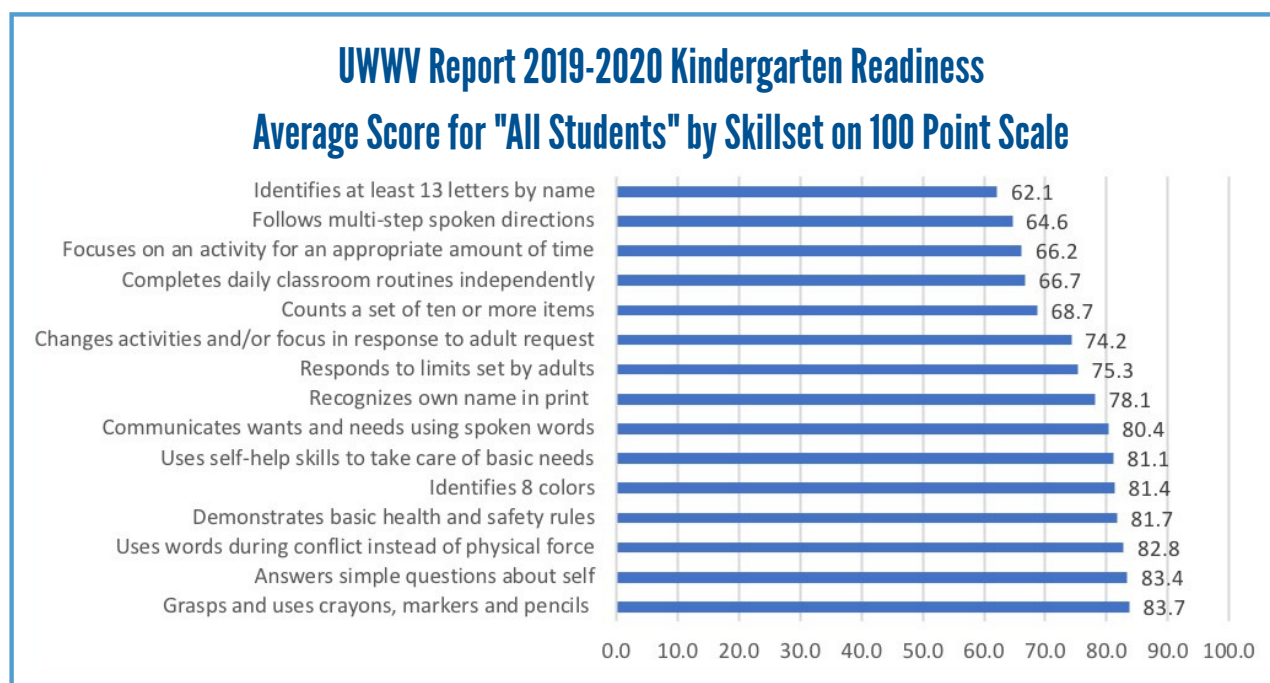
Since this is the first time we’ve collected this data, we don’t really know. The 75 represents our baseline, our starting point for comparing future scores. It is important to keep in mind that the value of this study is to track a trend from year to year—not to deliver a grade—so we can demonstrate that UWWV and other community support programs are better equipping our children to succeed in school right from the start.



Drilling Down for Additional Observations

In addition to an overall trend in school readiness, there’s a lot more this data can tell us. As shown below, the KRC feedback revealed relative strengths and weaknesses of the children’s skillsets as they entered kindergarten. For example, the children showed a relatively strong ability to use writing tools to make shapes and drawings (score of 84) and to answer simple questions about themselves, such as “How old are you?” or “What do you like to do?” (83). However, the new kindergartners scored much lower on identifying 13 letters by name (62) and following multi-step spoken directions, such as “Put away your book, get your lunchbox, and line up.” (65)

As you look at the chart below, please keep in mind that a score of 100 indicates that the student frequently demonstrated a particular skill or knowledge set; a score of 50 indicates that the student only sometimes demonstrated the skill; and a score of 0 means that the student rarely displayed it, if at all.



Teachers' Initial Assessments

Before the teachers completed the 15-question KRC, we asked them to offer their own assessment of their students' preparation for school based on their teaching experience and the curriculum standards on which they focus during kindergarten. The chart below shows that teachers deemed 66% of their students as ready and 34% not. How do these personal assessments compare to the results of the KRCs? In both measurements, about one third of the students lacked adequate preparation to make an easy and successful transition to kindergarten. Specifically, the data from the KRCs revealed that 38% of the students scored below a readiness cut-off score of 75, not far off from the 34% considered not ready by the teachers' own assessments. This comparability provided confidence that an overall score of 75 made sense as a cut-off for "kindergarten readiness" in this assessment.

Moreover, when we calculated the average KRC scores of those students whom the teachers had initially evaluated as "ready" and "not ready," we found significant differences between the two groups: the "ready" students had an average score of 90, and the "not ready" students, 47. The chart further shows a stark contrast in the scoring ranges between the two groups, with 87% of the "ready" students receiving scores of 75 or higher and only 1% with scores below 50; conversely, only 16% of the "not ready" students scored 75 or higher and 56% clustered at the bottom with scores below 50.

Teacher Initial Assessment Compared to Checklist Scores

	Teacher Assessed "Ready" Before Completing Checklist	Teacher Assessed "Not Ready" Before Completing Checklist
Initial Teacher Assessment:	66%	34%
Checklist Average Score:	90	47
Percent in Scoring Ranges:		
Scored 75+	87%	16%
Scored 50 - 75	12%	28%
Scored below 50	1%	56%

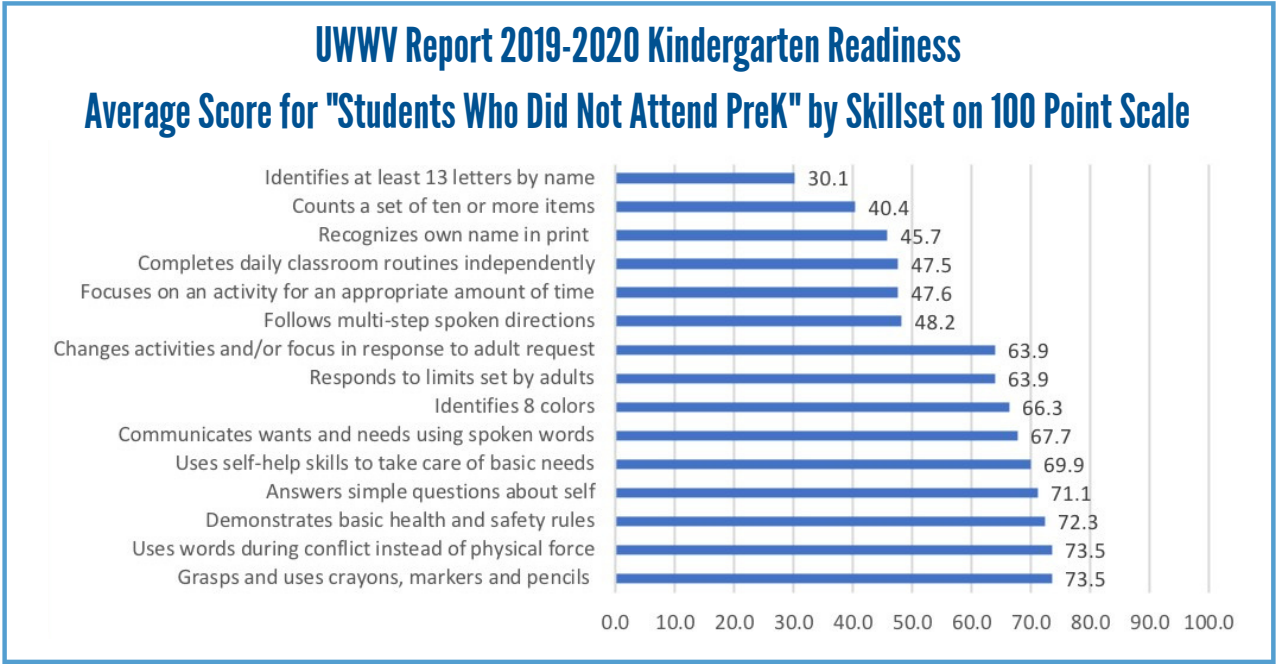
The Positive Impact of Pre-Kindergarten

The study also provided data on kindergartners who attended a preschool program and those who did not. Of the 421 students surveyed, teachers confirmed that at least 83 arrived at kindergarten without having first attended PreK (20% or more since some teachers could not confirm). For those 83 students, the average overall score was 59—16 points lower than the overall community score of 75. Again using 75 as the readiness cut-off score, we found that only 34% of the children who did not attend PreK scored above that number (and were therefore ready for kindergarten), while 66% scored below (and were considered not ready).

Of those 66% who scored below the threshold score, 42% scored below 50, suggesting a significant gap in the literacy, math, and social/emotional skills that the children need in order to give them the strongest opportunity to succeed in school.



The chart below lists the average scores for each of the 15 skill categories on the Kindergarten Readiness Checklist, for children who did not attend a PreK program.



These scores contrast sharply with those of the children who did attend preschool programs, as indicated by their teachers, before entering kindergarten. For this group, the only skill category that did not score 75 or higher overall was “follows multi-step spoken directions,” which scored 70. Moreover, 100 of the 277 students who attended PreK scored 100 in all skill categories.

Potential for Further Observations

With existing resources, UWWV was able to conduct a statistically valid pilot assessment that yielded revealing, useful data on overall kindergarten readiness in our six-county service area. The survey marked a solid starting point for an annual collection and study of data to evaluate the effectiveness of our community’s work to prepare our children for school.



A significantly larger sample of students would need to be assessed in order to expand the study to look at kindergarten readiness by individual school corporation or by classroom. A more robust sample size might even allow us to break down the data by the PreK programs the students attended. However, additional donor support and council resources will be necessary to further advance the scope of these analyses.

How Does This Data Help Our Community?

The early years of a child’s life are a critical time for learning, and all children should enter kindergarten with the skills needed to unlock their potential. By measuring how well young students in our community are prepared for kindergarten, the UWWV can evaluate and report on the effectiveness of our community’s work over time. Moreover, we can promote new initiatives that target specific weaknesses made evident by the Kindergarten Readiness Checklist results.

Collecting KRC data in a consistent way year after year can provide UWWV, parents, school corporations, and child care providers with a wealth of feedback on children's areas of strength and those that need extra attention. The information can also open up opportunities for collaboration among many sectors of the community and a creative search for solutions.

Preparing our children for kindergarten is a smart investment in our community's future, resulting in more educated and skilled workers, higher wages in life, increased tax revenue, more effective public schools, improved public and personal health, and less crime[2]. Studies indicate that public returns on the investment in early childhood education for our communities can be as high as \$16 for every one dollar spent[3]. Kindergarten readiness today strengthens our workforce of tomorrow, impacting economic growth, competitiveness, and overall quality of life in our community.

As United Way of the Wabash Valley pursues our bold goal of *moving 10,000 families out of financial struggles and into stability*, we look forward to bringing the community together to find lasting solutions that will improve the lives of our children and their families. Every child who is "kindergarten ready" builds hope to break our cycle of poverty and aid our struggling working families.



United Way
of the Wabash Valley



[2] Katharine B. Stevens "Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Childcare," U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, June 2017. <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/workforce-todayworkforce-tomorrow>

[3] Timothy Bartik "Early Childhood Programs as an Economic Development Tool: Investing Early to Prepare the Future Workforce," W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/s_wifis31c03.pdf