

**FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER DECISIONS
REGARDING PREKINDERGARTEN ALTERNATIVES
FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE ELIGIBLE BUT NOT YET
READY FOR KINDERGARTEN**

MASTER'S THESIS

**Submitted to the School of Education, University of Dayton,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education**

by

Teresa A. Hatton

School of Education

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

December 1998

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON ROESCH LIBRARY

Approved by:

Official Advisor

Reader

Reader

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
DEDICATION.....	vii
Chapter:	
I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM.....	1
Purpose for the Study.....	1
Problem Statement.....	3
Assumptions.....	3
Limitations.....	3
Definition of Terms.....	4
II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE.....	6
Alternatives for the Child Who is Legally Eligible for School Entry, But is Deemed Not Ready.....	6
Extra-Year Programs.....	6
Delayed Entry.....	9
Factors Influencing a Teacher's Decision to Choose an Extra-Year Program or Delayed Entry for a Child Deemed Not Ready for Kindergarten.....	12
Preschool Attendance.....	12
Components of Readiness.....	14
Problems with Kindergarten Screening.....	15
The Birthdate Issue.....	18
Pressure from Sources Outside the Classroom.....	21
III. PROCEDURE.....	23
Subjects.....	23
Setting.....	23
Data Collection.....	23
IV. RESULTS.....	25

V. SUMMARY, TRENDS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....36

 Summary.....36

 Trends.....38

 Implications for Practice.....40

 Recommendations.....43

REFERENCES.....45

APPENDICES.....50

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1	
Percent Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers.....	29
TABLE 2	
Mean Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers.....	30
TABLE 3	
Percent Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers According to Type of School District.....	31
TABLE 4	
Mean Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers According to Type of School District.....	32
TABLE 5	
Percent Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers According to Level of Education.....	33
TABLE 6	
Mean Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers According to Level of Education.....	34

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my husband Tom for his understanding and encouragement, and my nephew Mark for his willingness to share his computer expertise.

I also want to thank my advisor, Dr. Mary Ellen Seery, for her suggestions and guidance during the course of this study.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my son Nicholas,
my September baby.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose for the Study

How vivid are kindergarten memories amidst other recollections of one's childhood. Uphoff (1990) offers the following description in *Real Facts from Real Schools*:

(The children) still need a mid-morning snack and frequent changes of activity, periods of quiet work between periods of active work and play. . . They still need time to play alone or in groups of two or three children. . . The children need a relaxed . . . atmosphere, free from tensions. They are not yet old enough to hurry. They should not be asked to work under pressure. . . If required to perform mental or physical tasks beyond their maturity, these children become discouraged and may exhibit regressive behavior.

The children learn to write their names in large manuscript. . . By the end of the year they have been taught the names of the letters of the alphabet which they will learn in sequence in later grades. . . Each number up to ten is taught in varied concrete settings.

Children select their own activities and move about freely. Many different kinds of work are in progress at the same time. Some children are painting a barn; some are working at the carpentry bench; some are modeling animals for a circus. . . Three are working out a dramatization of a story in dress-up clothes. Housekeeping and transportation toys are evident. . . Large crayons, paints and brushes encourage work at the easel. One child is looking for animal pictures in the picture books on a table. (p. 3)

Uphoff found the above excerpt in a 1954 New York State Education Department guide called *The Elementary School Curriculum: An Overview* (as cited in

Uphoff, 1990). But this quotation describes a *first grade* classroom circa 1950. Although some kindergartens today may fit this description, the setting is more likely to be found in a preschool class of the 1990's. What has happened to kindergarten?

According to Charlesworth (1989), kindergarten was originally intended as a "bridge" between home and school, a way to socialize children and ready them for school in general. Kindergarten retained this character through the 1970s, and school readiness "was defined in terms of attitude and motivation rather than specific academic achievements" (Charlesworth, 1989, p. 5). Shepard and Smith (1987) describe the 1980s as the time when kindergarten lost its readiness focus and became instead a very deliberate academic prep program for first grade.

Nall (1982) surveyed 387 kindergarten teachers and found that because a majority of children now have preschool experience, kindergarten's focus has changed from promoting socialization and play to teaching knowledge and skills. Indeed, *U.S. News and World Report* (1989) described kindergarten as a "high-stress boot camp for first grade" (p. 53).

Unfortunately, the first grade curriculum has invaded kindergarten. Certainly, some children can handle a more academic curriculum. However, many children cannot. If even the more privileged children find a developmentally inappropriate curriculum difficult to handle, what will happen to the children who are developmentally and/or chronologically young at the onset of kindergarten? Teachers are pursuing ways to protect these children, ways to remove them from the struggle between what their needs demand and what the curriculum demands.

The investigator is a kindergarten teacher who has witnessed many such struggles, who wanted to know what factors other kindergarten teachers

consider when recommending an alternative for the children who are just not ready. This study focused on these factors as they relate to two strategies which attempt to address the problem before it occurs: delayed entry and prekindergarten extra-year programs.

Problem Statement

The purpose of the study was to identify factors kindergarten teachers consider when determining whether to recommend a prekindergarten alternative for a child deemed not ready for kindergarten.

Assumptions

The investigator used a field-tested questionnaire that included both forced choice and open-ended responses. The questionnaire was developed after a review of the related literature, and the investigator assumes that the questionnaire has content validity and is reliable. The investigator assumes that each teacher completed the questionnaire honestly.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. Since the questionnaire was distributed during the month of May, when kindergarten teachers are very busy with end-of-the-year concerns, the subjects may have given less thought to their responses, and potential subjects may have chosen not to participate simply because of time constraints. Sample size is small. Because the topic of the study might seem more relevant at the beginning of the school year, the responses on the questionnaire might be different if the same questionnaire were distributed in the fall. The investigator neglected to include gender as one of the factors to be rated on the questionnaire.

Definition of Terms

Prekindergarten Alternatives

This term excludes preschool and refers to options exercised before a child enters kindergarten. These options are intended to better prepare the child for school entry. This study considers two such alternatives: delayed entry and prekindergarten class.

Extra-year Programs

Extra-year programs add an extra year at the primary level, so that a child may spend five years in grades kindergarten through three. These programs go by various names: Kindergarten Plus, Junior First, Transitional First, etc.

Prekindergarten class

This type of extra-year program adds the extra year before kindergarten. These programs are known by many other names as well: Developmental Kindergarten, Begindergarten, Readiness Kindergarten, Young Fives, etc.

Delayed Entry

Children enter kindergarten one year after they are legally eligible to do so. The intent is to give the child an extra year to mature so that he might cope more effectively with the demands of school.

Academic Kindergarten

The academic kindergarten focuses heavily on academic skills and may isolate these skills from meaningful context.

Developmental Kindergarten

The developmental kindergarten has no formal expectations of beginning students. A developmental program accepts each child no matter where he may be on the learning continuum and uses developmentally appropriate teaching practices and curriculum to help him progress as far as he is able.

Preschool

Preschools are public or private programs for children between three and five years of age.

Developmentally Appropriate

This term refers to whether a material, activity, curriculum, or program is compatible with typical expectations of a child's developmental capability at a given age (NAEYC, 1987).

Readiness

Readiness refers to the possession of academic, social and emotional skills needed for a successful start to the schooling process.

Late birthdate

For the purposes of this study, late birthdate refers to an August or September birthday, since the cutoff date for school entry in the state of Ohio is September 30.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

A review of the literature suggests that there are alternatives for children who are deemed not ready for "regular" kindergarten. The investigator chose to explore two of these alternatives: extra-year prekindergarten classes and delayed entry. These two options were chosen for study because both are exercised the year *before* a child enters kindergarten.

Alternatives for the Child Who is Legally Eligible for School Entry, But is Deemed Not Ready

Extra-Year Programs

Extra-year programs insert an extra year between grades at the primary level, so that a child may spend 5 years in grades kindergarten through three. This extra year is intended to encourage readiness skills or to provide remediation for those students who may not be achieving at grade level. At the kindergarten level, these programs have many different labels: Kindergarten Plus, Junior First, Transitional First, etc. The prekindergarten program is unique in that this type of extra-year program inserts the extra year before a child begins kindergarten. These programs also have various names: Developmental Kindergarten, Beginndergarten, Young Fives, Readiness Kindergarten, and of course, Prekindergarten.

According to Meisels (1992), such programs are "designed to provide children who are academically, socially, emotionally, and/or physically 'immature'

with more time to grow and develop" (p. 163). But Meisels questions whether this gift of time serves its intended purpose. Teachers exaggerate the benefits of these programs (Shepard & Smith, 1988). Educators tend to bypass the research and rely instead on beliefs, attitudes, teaching philosophies, and experience of self and colleagues (Siegel & Hanson, 1991). Shepard and Smith (1986) reviewed the research on children who completed 2 years of public school before first grade and found that the extra-year children showed "virtually no academic advantage over equally at-risk children who have not had the extra year" (p. 85). Eads (1990) reported that in a statewide study of prekindergarten extra-year, retained, and pre-first programs, no advantages were shown in any of the three programs. In fact, Eads found a "significant *negative* cognitive effect associated with transitional programs. . ." (p.4).

Unfortunately, data related to extra-year programs is sometimes difficult to obtain, since these programs are usually regarded as regular kindergartens or first grades when audited by state agencies (Meisels, 1992). Ordinarily, funding for prekindergarten programs is approved annually, so a district's prekindergarten program may exist for a year or two, then vanish (Charlesworth, 1989). Shepard and Smith (1988) note that only a limited number of studies have been conducted regarding pre-first grade and prekindergarten programs.

Existing studies of extra-year programs are fraught with methodological problems (Meisels, 1992). Meisels (1992) very succinctly describes Shepard's criticism of research investigating transitional programs:

Specifically, she points out that those students who are recommended for transition programs, and who then enroll in those programs, are rarely compared with students who were similarly recommended for transition programs but who enrolled in regular grades instead. Moreover, for an adequate comparison to be made, these two groups should be comparable in terms of race, sex, SES, and general academic ability. The problem of equivalence between groups is especially acute when one recognizes that transitional programs are frequently

designed for students who are considered academically able but "immature." Students with academic problems are often promoted and then compared with students who are in extra-year programs, despite the confound in ability between these two groups. (p.163)

Some studies indicate that children who are involved in extra-year programs are less likely to be retained in the primary grades. These studies ignore some districts' tacit understanding that children are not to be retained more than once in the primary grades; these districts do not differentiate between retention and extra-year programs, so the retention rate of the extra-year children appears deceptively low (Walsh, 1989).

Experts, too, consider extra-year programs to be synonymous with retention (Charlesworth, 1989; Meisels, 1992; Shepard & Smith, 1988, 1986; Siegel & Hanson, 1991; Walsh, 1989). Studies show that extra-year programs and retention tend to produce the same results. Mantzicopoulos & Morrison (1990) found that retained and extra-year children achieved virtually the same results when tested on academics, visual-motor skills, and perceptual skills. Retained and extra-year children had lower achievement scores and more behavioral, perceptual, and visual-motor problems than the children who were promoted. Comparisons of extra-year students and retained students showed more likenesses than differences. A study in Colorado compared 40 extra-year children with a control group of 40 children from schools that did not retain kindergartners. At the end of first grade, there were no differences in teacher ratings of academics, maturity, self-concept, and attention. However, the parents whose children were enrolled in the extra-year programs felt that their children had poorer attitudes toward school. The researchers concluded that these findings indicate that kindergarten retention does not increase achievement by allowing children time to mature (Shepard & Smith, 1988). Like retention, extra-year programs in schools could increase the probability of

dropping out (Meisels, 1992). ". . .The very alternative selected to protect children from an increasingly inappropriate curriculum carries within it the seeds of failure, low self-esteem, and reduced achievement" (Meisels, p. 165).

Delayed Entry

Promising athletes sometime skip a year of play in hopes that this extra year of growth will enable them to achieve greater success when they return to the sport. This "redshirting" has made its way to kindergarten (Viadero, 1998). Delayed entry has been referred to as "holding out" or "academic redshirting" because this practice allows a child to enter kindergarten one year after he is legally eligible to do so (Frick, 1986; Viadero, 1998). The intent is to give the child an extra year to mature so that he might cope more effectively with the demands of school. While many parents believe their children need more time to develop social skills, some parents may be trying instead to give their children a competitive edge over their peers.

Specific data on the prevalence of delayed entry is lacking in educational literature. However, many studies demonstrate that more boys than girls wait an extra year to begin kindergarten (Bellissimo, 1995). White males and children diagnosed as developmentally delayed were more likely to delay entry (Viadero, 1998). Holding out was not as prevalent in school districts with early cutoff dates for school entrance, but some parents still delayed entry for boys who had spring birthdays (Meisels, 1992). A 12-year study of delayed entry in a middle class suburban district in upstate New York found a significant increase in the number of delayed entrants. The cutoff date for school entrance in this particular district was December 1, and most of the delayed entrants were males with autumn birthdates (Brent, May, & Kundert, 1996).

The practice of delayed entry is influenced by the parents' socio-economic status (SES) and level of education. A study in one northern

California county found that SES was connected to holding out boys, but not girls. Schools with higher numbers of high SES parents were more likely to see a greater percentage of boys who delayed entry into school (Bellissimo, 1995). A study of hold-out patterns in 19 Colorado school districts found that delayed entry occurred much less frequently in low SES districts than in high SES districts (Shepard, Graue, & Catto, 1989). For many families with low SES, delayed entry is a moot point, since they may not be able to afford one more year of preschool or day care (Meisels, 1992). Parents with a college education were more likely to hold out their children in 1993, but not in 1995 (Viadero, 1998).

Chronological age alone seems to be insufficient reason for holding out. Focusing only on chronological age ignores the fact that maturation is not the only contributor to a child's development (Meisels, 1995). Since learning is not necessarily a series of sequential steps toward skill mastery and a wide range of development is considered normal, setting school entry standards based on mastery of particular skills and demonstration of specific abilities is not appropriate. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1990) believes that "raising the legal entry age or holding an individual child out of school a year are misdirected efforts to impose a rigid schedule on children's growth in spite of normal differences" (p. 22). In any group of 5-year-olds, a developmental range of 12 to 24 months is certain (Cryan, Sheehan, Wiechel, & Bandy-Hedden, 1992). "It is not being 'just five' itself that makes children seem unready; rather, a student's age relative to the age of classmates is more important" (Shepard & Smith, 1988, p. 139).

Delayed entry is not always beneficial to the child. Children's progress is not uniform, nor do all children lack the same skills. They may do well with some, but have difficulty with others. All too often, parents and teachers ascribe

weak areas to immaturity and believe that holding out will allow the child to catch up. But unless the real problem or problems are addressed, the extra year may cause the problems to increase in severity so that they are much more difficult to correct. Delayed entry often denies these 'not ready' children the learning experiences they need in order to catch up, causing them to lag further and further behind (Charlesworth, 1989). Sometimes the problems do not appear for several years. Older, more mature students may become bored, leading to behavior problems and lowered motivation (Peck, McCaig, & Sapp, 1988, chap. 1). With so many variables involved, parents must be informed that research shows that academic and social advantages of being older are short-lived (Rafoth & Carey, 1995).

As more parents opt for delayed entry for their children, the ability gap in kindergarten groups tends to widen. Children who have been held out were not necessarily at-risk anyway, but their maturity now exacerbates the immaturity of the young fives. Because parents of high SES are more likely to hold out their children, teachers are now faced with a group in which the oldest children are most advantaged and the youngest are the least advantaged (Meisels, 1992).

Curricular expectations tend to change as more parents choose delayed entry for their children. Parents' perceptions of classroom expectations, whether accurate or not, do influence the decision to delay entry (Bellisimo, 1995).

Meisels (1992) makes a valid point when he argues that

as the kindergarten group grows older through holding out, the focus of instruction typically shifts upward in response to the needs of the older students and the expectations of their parents. Ironically, this contributes to the escalation of academic demands that brought parents and some professionals to recommend holding out originally. (p. 166)

Recommending that a child enroll in an extra-year program or wait an extra year to begin kindergarten involves consideration of a multitude of

characteristics. The investigator used the related literature to identify five factors which are likely to influence a teacher's decision to recommend one of these two alternatives for a child who is legally eligible for school entry but is deemed not ready. These five factors are: preschool attendance, components of readiness, problems with kindergarten screening, the birthdate issue, and pressure from sources outside the classroom.

Factors Influencing a Teacher's Decision to Choose an Extra-Year Program or Delayed Entry for a Child Deemed Not Ready For Kindergarten

Preschool Attendance

Preschool attendance is becoming more common in the United States. In fact, over 52% of children in the state of Ohio will attend some kind of formal preschool program, be it nursery school, day care, Head Start, or Chapter I preschool (Bendixen-Noe, 1998). This figure reflects nationwide statistics as well, since 53% of 3-to-5-year-olds in the United States will attend a center-based preschool program (West, Hausken, & Collins, 1993).

Preschool attendance positively affects success in kindergarten and the primary grades (Cryan et al., 1992). A statewide longitudinal study investigated the effects of preschool attendance on elementary children's success related to achievement, retention, classroom behavior, and provision of special education services. Results indicated that children attending day care or preschool programs performed 10 percentile points higher on standardized achievement tests, and this relationship was still present at the end of the second grade. The authors found that preschool alumni were half as likely to be retained at the primary level and better than half as likely to participate in Chapter I services. Preschool experience had no relationship to special education placements. Preschool seemed to have a "balanced beneficial effect (academic and

behavioral) for all children in [the] study" (Cryan et al., 1992, p. 200). Gullo and Burton (1992) conducted one of the first studies to examine effectiveness of preschool experience on the readiness of non-at-risk children at the end of kindergarten; earlier studies have centered on effects of preschool on disadvantaged children. The findings suggest that chronologically young children need not delay entry into kindergarten if they have two years of preschool experience. Generally children with either one or two years of preschool scored significantly higher in academic achievement when compared with children who had no preschool experience. The authors found that two years of preschool were not necessarily more beneficial than just one year.

SES is another factor influencing preschool attendance. Across the United States, over two-thirds of children from low SES families will enroll in kindergarten without having attended a preschool program. These families often include at least one parent who lacks successful experience in school (Bendixen-Noe, 1998). Certainly preschool attendance is related to successful school experiences of at-risk children. It is important to consider the socio-economic correlates of preschool experience when determining relationships between preschool experience and school performance since, with the exception of Head Start, "the ability to pay for preschool (or day care) may be a reflection of a larger ability to provide home environments that are rich in educational stimuli" (Cryan et al., 1992, p. 199).

It appears that parents, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers have different expectations of skill outcomes resulting from preschool attendance. Parents expect a more academic kindergarten in comparison to their child's preschool. A survey of preschool and kindergarten teachers in two school districts in Kansas revealed that the preschool teachers' expectations for kindergarten entry skills exceeded those of the kindergarten teachers.

Furthermore, when considering which skills were most important for kindergarten entry, the preschool teachers noted social interaction and communication skills. The kindergarten teachers felt that behavior and the ability to follow directions were most critical (Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, & Rosenkoetter, 1989).

Components of Readiness

Experts have different opinions as to which developmental components comprise readiness. The NAEYC (1990) acknowledges three dimensions to consider: the diversity and disparity of experiences among children, degrees of variation within what is considered to be within the normal range of child development, and the appropriateness of expectations for kindergarten entrants. The National Education Goals Panel defined readiness in terms of five areas: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge (Kagan, 1995). Meisels (1992) asserts that a developmentally appropriate approach to readiness must be

relative, acknowledging that different children come to school prepared for different experiences; *holistic*, including an affective component that facilitates a child's successful interaction with the school milieu; *comprehensive*, extending well beyond the typical reading readiness and behavioral compliance expectations of traditional programs to include a focus on active learning and developmental objectives; and *bi-directional*, focusing on both children's capabilities for learning and on schools' abilities to meet the individual needs of their students. (p.170)

The conflict among experts is to what extent development is determined by maturation or experience. Those emphasizing innate development argue that allowing time for maturation to take place will enable the child to derive more from formal instruction. Experts who stress experience presume that all human beings are born with the desire to learn and that both maturation and experience

are contributors to the learning process (Gullo & Burton, 1992; Katz, 1991). But what about the "experts" in the schools who deal with this problem daily?

Parents, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers differ regarding which components of readiness are most crucial for success in school. A study interviewing kindergarten parents found that many had conflicting ideas about what kindergarten should be. Most parents mentioned that it was worthwhile to reinforce social skills, but they also felt that more academic tasks, such as completing skill sheets, were necessary (Graue, 1993). In other studies as well, parents gave more weight to academic skills than did the kindergarten teachers (Knudsen-Lindauer & Harris, 1989; National Education Goals Panel, 1993). Preschool and kindergarten teachers concurred that listening skills and compliant behavior were desirable, but only the kindergarten teachers felt that the ability to function in a group was a critical skill (Foulks & Morrow, 1989).

Child developmentalists believe that components of readiness are unimportant. Levels of development and skill acquisition do not always occur at the same chronological age for every child, nor do they proceed in consistent intervals. A wide range of ability can exist between children of the same chronological age, and within an individual child may exist different levels of ability among various skills (NAEYC, 1990). Developmentalists argue that it is the schools, rather than the children, that are not ready. It is the school's responsibility to adapt to the child's needs (Charlesworth, 1989; Golant & Golant, 1997; Meisels, 1992).

Problems with Kindergarten Screening

Kindergarten screening is becoming akin to a rite of passage for preschoolers. Preschoolers fidget, parents worry, teachers do their very best to

evaluate children objectively. Is kindergarten screening an effective predictor of a child's readiness to begin formal schooling?

A common problem with kindergarten screening is the inappropriate use of developmental tests. About 30 years ago a developmental test known as the Gesell School Readiness Test evolved from the work of Dr. Arnold Gesell, a pediatrician who believed that child development unfolds through predictable stages (Golant & Golant, 1997). Gesell observed 50 boys and 50 girls at each age level and established behaviors that appear to be normal in each age group. Most of the subjects were Caucasians from the state of Connecticut. The test yields a developmental age score. The Gesell test is "based on an outmoded theory of child development, lack[s] reliability and validity, and use[s] a concept of developmental age that has never been empirically verified" (Meisels, 1987, p. 69). Developmental tests were intended to identify children with possible handicaps or disabilities. Developmentalists argue that the Gesell is not an accurate predictor of success in kindergarten (Golant & Golant, 1997; NAEYC, 1990). Nationwide, 18% of school districts use the Gesell School Readiness Tests (Golant & Golant, 1997). Walsh (1989) muses that the test "would be more widely used except that it is considered too long to administer and score and too expensive" (p. 387).

A second problem with kindergarten screening is the inappropriate use of readiness tests. Readiness screenings were originally designed to assist teachers in curriculum planning, since the tests measure mastery of specific skills. The Metropolitan Readiness Tests (MRT) are frequently used in screening kindergarten entrants (Golant & Golant, 1997). The MRT includes a test booklet in which the child identifies letters of the alphabet, matches identical pictures, follows oral directions, does simple word problems, identifies pictures of rhyming words, and demonstrates prereading skills such as identifying

beginning consonant sounds (Golant & Golant, 1997). The MRT is 70 to 78% accurate in foretelling success in first grade. So, almost one third of the subjects would be mistakenly classified as not ready if the test is used for kindergarten placement decisions (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989).

Another problem with kindergarten screening procedures is the use of a single standardized test score to determine a child's school readiness. Katz (1991) states that the trend toward using standardized tests with young children is due to the unfortunate reality that "an academic curriculum and direct instruction teaching practices that are appropriate for the upper grades have gradually been moved down into the kindergarten and first grade" (p. 2). A child may score favorably on the standardized test, but may lack other critical skills such as social skills, listening skills, and the ability to follow directions (Hains et al., 1989). The NAEYC (1988) position is that "decisions that have a major impact on children, such as enrollment, retention, or assignment to remedial or special classes, should be based on multiple sources of information and should never be based on a single test score" (p. 44).

Kindergarten screening is commonly ineffective because of a lack of valid and reliable tests to assess a child's readiness for school. Valid and reliable instruments to evaluate abilities of young children are difficult to develop and administer, since development and rate of skill mastery varies widely among children. There is no existing readiness test with acceptable validity and reliability that is specifically intended to predict a child's success in kindergarten (NAEYC, 1990). In one Virginia study, teachers considered a test to be valid if it singled out the same children the teachers suspected were not ready for kindergarten (Walsh, 1989).

Testing very young children involves numerous variables that are difficult to control. By nature, a young child's mood and attention span vary widely from

day to day or even from hour to hour, and development inevitably includes periods of rapid growth as well as periods of little or no growth (Reeve & Holt, 1987). Shepard and Smith (1986) point out that "the cognitive domains that can be sampled at younger ages are only moderately related to the cognitive skills demanded later by reading and other academic tasks" (p. 83). Young children simply do not have experience with formal assessment.

The Birthdate Issue

Over the past 20 years, changing kindergarten cutoff dates has raised the age for school entry, making birthdate a relative issue. Children in the United States typically begin kindergarten at about age 5. In 1978, 15 states required that a child turn 5 by September; by 1986, 26 states had a September cutoff date. In changing their school entrance dates, states did not consult the research, but responded instead to interest groups and political pressure (Wolf, 1987). In California and some other states, the cutoff date is as late as December or January. Kindergarten entrants in Indiana must be 5 years of age by June 1. Most states, including Ohio, require that children turn 5 by September or October (Jacobson, 1997). Compared to other countries, the United States ranks among the earliest in school entry age. In New Zealand, for example, there is no uniform entry date in the fall; each child enters school on his fifth birthday (Meisels, 1992).

Children, especially boys, with late birthdates are more likely to experience academic difficulty in the primary grades. Younger children also have more difficulty with learning, and earn lower scores on standardized tests (NAEYC, 1990; Uphoff, Gilmore, & Huber, 1986). A study by Langer, Kalk, and Searls (1984) investigated relationships between school entry age and trends in achievement. December, January, and February cutoff dates found 50% of boys

and 25% of girls not developmentally ready for school. Fall cutoff dates reduced the number of not ready boys to one third (Langer et al., 1984).

At the end of the kindergarten year, teachers view children with late birthdates differently when compared with peers. Children with summer birthdays who begin school as soon as they are legally eligible are seen by their kindergarten teachers as

significantly less original, less independent in learning, less involved, less productive with peers, more intellectually dependent, more prone to anxiety of failure, more unreflective, more prone to irrelevant talk, more holding back and withdrawn, more blaming, and less willing to approach teachers than their older peers. (Cryan, et al., 1992, p. 196)

One study found that age was an important consideration for 68% of teachers who were recommending retention. In other words, if two kindergartners with the same general level of ability were having difficulty, teachers were more likely to retain the younger child and send the older child on to first grade (Shepard & Smith, 1986). Cryan et al. (1992) found that children with summer birthdates were the most likely to be retained at least once through the elementary grades. Children who were held out were least likely to be retained. A study by the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics also found that delayed entrants were less likely to be retained (Zill, Loomis, & West, 1997). In other grade levels, academic failure is usually the prime reason for retention; but at the kindergarten level, the most oft cited reason is immaturity (Shepard, as quoted in Education Week, 1998).

Children, especially boys, with late birthdates are more likely to be referred for special services. Cryan et al. (1992) found that 14 to 37 percent of children with summer birthdates received Chapter I services. Younger children are also much more likely to be referred for testing for learning disabilities (Uphoff, Gilmore, & Huber, 1986).

Effects of a late birthdate usually disappear by the end of the third grade. Shepard and Smith (1988) reviewed "dozens" of studies bemoaning the poor achievement of the youngest first graders. They found that being among the youngest in a grade amounted to a difference of about 7 or 8 percentile points; even this difference usually disappeared by third grade, or sooner if the child was provided with individualized instruction. However, Byrd and Weitzman's (1994) study based on a nationally representative longitudinal study of 948 children found that for children who did not turn five until after January 1 of kindergarten, academic difficulties and behavior problems were still evident in the sixth grade. The authors also found that chronologically young boys are more likely than girls to exhibit lasting difficulties (Byrd & Weitzman, 1994).

Although the youngest children in a given group tend to have more problems in school, simply changing the birthdate cutoff for school entry will only establish a new group of youngest children. Changing the entrance age would not change the fact that some children will perform below grade level expectations, because even among groups with children whose mean age was higher, the younger boys still lagged behind (Langer et al., 1984). Altering age requirements so that children are older when they begin school only hinders the child from receiving the benefits of a public education (Shepard & Smith, 1988).

Modifying the school entrance age sets the stage for a more academic, less developmentally appropriate curriculum (Meisels, 1995). The NAEYC asserts that "kindergarten-aged children still think like younger children; they think differently, see the world differently, act differently, and have different skills than children of seven or eight" (Peck et al., 1988, chap. 3). But too many kindergartens focus on isolated skills and have expectations that are developmentally inappropriate. Love, Logue, Trudeau, and Thayer (1992) found that kindergarten teachers are implementing both developmentally appropriate

and inappropriate activities in their classrooms. Ninety-three percent of teachers surveyed confessed that they, not the children, usually chose the class activities. Eighty percent did not integrate subject areas. These habits could be influenced by increased pressure to focus on academics in kindergarten (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992). The National Transition Study, sponsored by the United States Department of Education, revealed that most schools believe they have developmental kindergarten programs, but these schools gave their programs low ratings on classroom activities associated with developmentally appropriate practice (Bendixen-Noe, 1998). The curriculum has shifted, perhaps as a result of pressure from parents or the desire to improve standardized test scores, and kindergarten children are now expected to contend with what used to be taught in first grade (NAEYC, 1990).

Pressure from Sources Outside the Classroom

Compliance with administrative decisions and expectations is one source of pressure from outside the classroom. Eighteen percent of elementary school principals surveyed shared that district policy is for all kindergartners to receive reading instruction. Kindergartners who appeared "ready and able" received reading instruction in another fifty percent of the schools surveyed. Eighty-five percent of the principals gave medium or high priority to academic achievement in their kindergarten programs (Educational Research Service, 1986). Kindergarten teachers are struggling to reconcile their beliefs about appropriate practice with pressure to use required instructional practice and achieve acceptable scores on standardized tests (Hatch & Freeman, 1988).

A school district's financial concerns can be another source of pressure from outside the classroom. Not all districts can afford to provide extra-year programs for those children who need extra help. Some districts find ways to

label these children as special learners so that the district will be eligible for additional funding (Connell, 1987).

A third source of pressure from outside the classroom is the increased academic demand resulting from the need to prepare students for expectations at future grade levels. Many educators feel powerless to resist increased academic demand in kindergarten, and they see screening, raising the entrance age, or retention as the only feasible options for protecting children from inappropriate curriculum (Shepard & Smith, 1988). Some first grade teachers pressure their kindergarten colleagues to work on skills that have traditionally been introduced in first grade. The hope is that when the kindergartners enter first grade, they will be better prepared to deal with equally inflated first grade goals (Charlesworth, 1989). Shepard & Smith (1988) interviewed 40 kindergarten teachers from a middle-class school district. A "substantial" number of teachers had set standards over and above district guidelines in order to satisfy the expectations of the first grade teachers.

Parents, too, can be a source of pressure from outside the classroom. Many middle-class parents judge a teacher's competence in terms of how well the teacher has improved their child's reading skills and disregard other indications of cognitive development (Shepard & Smith, 1988). Parents whose children attended preschool expect kindergarten to focus more on academics (Walsh, 1989).

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Subjects

The subjects chosen for this study are certified kindergarten teachers who teach in central and southwest Ohio. The investigator consulted the *Ohio Educational Directory* and randomly selected names and addresses of elementary school buildings and principals.

Setting

The schools in which these educators teach vary in enrollment, SES of students, and type of school district (urban, suburban, or rural). The communities are located in central and southwest Ohio.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collection Instrument

The investigator used information gleaned from review of the literature to construct the instrument, thereby establishing content validity (Isaac & Michael, 1995). The instrument includes a combination of Likert-type (Best & Kahn, 1993) and open-ended questions.

The instrument addresses the following factors as they relate to prekindergarten extra-year programs and delayed school entry: birthdate, preschool attendance, kindergarten screening, academic skills, social skills, emotional maturity, socio-economics, and teacher perceptions of pressure from

sources outside the classroom. Any teacher who disagreed with delayed entry or prekindergarten programs was given the option to explain his/her reasons in narrative form. The instrument was reviewed and field tested by two kindergarten teachers and one elementary school principal from within the southwestern Ohio school district where the investigator is employed.

Administration of the Instrument

The investigator mailed the questionnaires, along with a cover letter, to building principals. Principals were asked to distribute surveys to kindergarten teachers in their respective buildings. Each questionnaire included a cover letter to participating teachers and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Copies of the cover letters for principals and teachers are included in the Appendix. The investigator mailed 40 surveys, and 21 were returned. The return rate was 53%.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of the Likert Portion of the questionnaire are reported in percentages (see Tables 1, 3, and 5). Table 1 presents the responses of all teachers surveyed regarding factors influencing their recommendation of prekindergarten alternatives for "not ready" children. Table 2 lists the mean, range, and standard deviation for all responses. Table 3 categorizes the responses in terms of the type of school district, i.e. urban, suburban, or rural. Table 4 lists the mean (*M*), range, and standard deviation (*SD*) for each response according to type of school district. Table 5 organizes the responses according to each teacher's level of education. Table 6 lists the mean, range, and standard deviation according to each teacher's level of education.

The most notable results in the overall responses from Table 1 are found with respect to August and September birthdates, social skills, and emotional maturity. Eighty-six percent of teachers felt that an August birthdate was more important for delayed entry, as compared to 76% who held the same opinion for August birthdate/prekindergarten. Ninety percent of teachers felt that for both delayed entry and prekindergarten, a September birthdate was a worthy consideration. Concerning delayed entry, 90% of teachers felt social skills were important, and 95% rated emotional maturity as crucial. Teachers felt these same skills are critical for prekindergarten, since 86% of teachers valued social skills and 90% cited emotional maturity as important.

Table 1 illustrates that the majority of teachers, that is 76% or more, consider August and September birthdates, screening results, social skills, academic skills and emotional maturity to be the most important considerations when making recommendations. Conversely, the child's socio-economic level and the school district's financial concerns were judged not important by at least 76% of the respondents. Teachers reached little consensus as to the importance of preschool attendance, pressure from parents, pressure from other teachers, and expectations of administrators. Table 2 shows five factors with mean scores greater than four: September birthdate, emotional maturity, social skills, August birthdate, and passed screening. Delayed entry/emotional maturity was the area of greatest agreement among respondents ($SD=0.49$). The factor with the least agreement among teachers was prekindergarten/socio-economic level ($SD=1.45$).

The number of respondents was evenly divided across type of school district: seven urban, seven suburban, and seven rural. Table 3 shows that the type of school district where a teacher is employed does influence perception of certain factors. All rural teachers said that both August and September birthdates were important items for delayed entry. Although the perceived importance of preschool was divided, suburban teachers were more likely to attach meaning to this factor. All urban teachers said that screening was crucial for prekindergarten, but they were less likely than suburban or rural teachers to say that screening was important for delayed entry. All suburban teachers valued social skills for both prekindergarten and delayed entry; all rural teachers considered social skills a significant factor for delayed entry. All rural teachers rated emotional maturity a critical element for delayed entry, but all suburban teachers felt emotional maturity was equally important for prekindergarten and delayed entry. Suburban teachers were more likely than the others to regard

academic skills as an important factor for both prekindergarten and delayed entry. Prekindergarten/academic skills enter into only the suburban group's top five mean scores (see Table 4).

At the other end of the spectrum, Table 3 shows that all suburban teachers rated socio-economic level as unimportant. Suburban and rural teachers were more likely than urban educators to perceive socio-economic level as unimportant for both prekindergarten and delayed entry. Rural teachers were least likely to consider expectations of administrators when contemplating delayed entry for a child. Rural teachers were also least likely to worry about their school district's financial concerns when recommending prekindergarten. Urban teachers were most likely to view their district's financial concerns as unimportant for delayed entry.

Table 4 shows that responses from teachers in urban schools were in most agreement in the areas of delayed entry/August and September birthdate ($SD=0.52$), closely followed by prekindergarten/passed screening ($SD=0.53$). Responses from suburban teachers showed the most agreement in prekindergarten/emotional maturity ($SD=0.49$). Rural teachers' responses showed the greatest agreement in regard to delayed entry/September birthdate ($SD=0.38$) and delayed entry/emotional maturity ($SD=0.38$). Responses of urban teachers showed the least agreement in prekindergarten/socio-economic level ($SD=2.03$). Areas of least agreement among suburban teachers included prekindergarten/August birthdate ($SD=1.41$) and prekindergarten/passed screening ($SD=1.41$), closely followed by prekindergarten/socio-economic level ($SD=1.40$). Rural teachers' responses showed the least agreement in prekindergarten/pressure from parents ($SD=1.51$).

Table 5 shows that the respondents fell neatly into three categories when sorted by level of education: those who have a Bachelor's degree and have

completed some graduate work (Bachelor's Plus), those who have a Master's degree (Master's), and those who have a Master's degree and have completed some post-graduate work (Master's Plus). The Bachelor's Plus group seemed less likely to be influenced by others when making decisions. Bachelor's Plus teachers were much more likely to say that pressure from parents and other teachers was not important when considering delayed entry; they were also less likely to consider other teachers' opinions toward prekindergarten. The Bachelor's Plus group was unanimous in their decision that socio-economic level was not a significant factor for either prekindergarten or delayed entry. Master's Plus teachers were more likely to consider academic skills. Table 6 shows that academic skills ranked in the top five mean scores of the Master's Plus group. According to Table 5, the Master's and Master's Plus groups were more likely to cite the significance of screening; they also agreed that a school district's financial concerns are not critical to making decisions about prekindergarten alternatives. But it was the Bachelor's Plus and Master's Plus teachers who were more likely to ignore pressure from other teachers.

Table 6 reveals that responses of the Bachelor's Plus group were in most agreement ($SD=0.55$) across five factors: delayed entry/August and September birthdates, emotional maturity, and socio-economic level, and prekindergarten/socio-economic level. Recall that the Master's group included one teacher who disagreed with the practice of delayed entry. All of the other respondents in the Master's group were in complete agreement in the area of emotional maturity for both delayed entry and prekindergarten ($SD=0.0$). The area of most agreement for the Master's Plus group was delayed entry/academic skills ($SD=0.33$). Responses of the Bachelor's Plus group indicated that the areas of least agreement were prekindergarten/passed screening ($SD=1.52$) and school district's financial concerns ($SD=1.52$) for both prekindergarten and delayed

entry. Both the Master's and the Master's Plus groups showed the least agreement in prekindergarten/socio-economic level ($SD=1.89$ and $SD=1.50$, respectively).

Table 1

Percent Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers (N=21)

Factors and alternatives	Very important/important	Undecided	Somewhat/not important
August birthdate			
PreK class	76	10	14
Delayed entry	86	0	10
September birthdate			
PreK class	90	10	0
Delayed entry	90	0	5
Attended preschool			
PreK class ^a	48	10	38
Delayed entry	57	0	38
Passed screening			
PreK class	81	5	14
Delayed entry	81	5	10
Social skills			
PreK class	86	0	14
Delayed entry	90	0	5
Academic skills			
PreK class	76	0	24
Delayed entry	76	0	19
Emotional maturity			
PreK class	90	0	10
Delayed entry	95	0	0
Socio-economic level			
PreK class	19	0	81
Delayed entry	10	5	81
Pressure from parents			
PreK class ^a	48	5	43
Delayed entry ^a	43	0	48
Pressure from other teachers			
PreK class ^a	19	14	62
Delayed entry ^a	14	14	62
Expectations of administrators			
PreK class	29	14	57
Delayed entry	29	10	57
School district's financial concerns			
PreK class	24	0	76
Delayed entry	14	5	76

Note. One teacher disagreed with the practice of delayed entry.

^aOne response was missing.

Table 2

Mean Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers (N=21)

Factor and alternatives	<i>M</i>	Range ^a	<i>SD</i>
August birthdate			
PreK class	4.19	5/2	1.12
Delayed entry	4.25	5/2	0.91
September birthdate			
PreK class	4.52	5/3	0.68
Delayed entry	4.55	5/2	0.76
Attended preschool			
PreK class ^b	3.10	5/1	1.25
Delayed entry	3.35	5/2	1.18
Passed screening			
PreK class	4.19	5/2	1.08
Delayed entry	4.25	5/2	0.97
Social skills			
PreK class	4.33	5/2	1.06
Delayed entry	4.40	5/2	0.75
Academic skills			
PreK class	3.86	5/2	1.15
Delayed entry	3.70	5/2	0.92
Emotional Maturity			
PreK class	4.52	5/2	0.93
Delayed entry	4.65	5/4	0.49
Socio-economic level			
PreK class	2.00	5/1	1.45
Delayed entry	1.80	5/1	1.10
Pressure from parents			
PreK class ^b	3.10	5/1	1.33
Delayed entry ^b	2.89	5/1	1.37
Pressure from other teachers			
PreK class ^b	2.35	4/1	1.04
Delayed entry ^b	2.10	4/1	1.10
Expectations of Administrators			
PreK class	2.57	4/1	1.07
Delayed entry	2.55	4/1	1.10
School district's financial concerns			
PreK class	2.09	5/1	1.30
Delayed entry	1.80	4/1	1.10

Note. One teacher disagreed with the practice of delayed entry.

^aHighest/lowest responses. ^bOne response was missing.

Table 3

Percent Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers According to Type of School District (N=21)

Factor and alternatives	Very important/important			Undecided			Somewhat/not important		
	U ^a	S ^a	R ^a	U	S	R	U	S	R
August birthdate									
PreK class	71	71	86	14	0	14	14	29	0
Delayed entry	86	71	100	0	0	0	0	29	0
September birthdate									
PreK class	86	100	86	14	0	14	0	0	0
Delayed entry	86	86	100	0	0	0	0	14	0
Attended preschool									
PreK class ^b	43	57	43	0	14	14	43	29	43
Delayed entry	43	71	57	0	0	0	43	29	43
Passed screening									
PreK class	100	71	71	0	0	14	0	29	14
Delayed entry	71	86	86	14	0	0	0	14	14
Social skills									
PreK class	86	100	71	0	0	0	14	0	29
Delayed entry	71	100	100	0	0	0	14	0	0
Academic skills									
PreK class	71	86	71	0	0	0	29	14	29
Delayed entry	71	86	71	0	0	0	14	14	29
Emotional maturity									
PreK class	86	100	86	0	0	0	14	0	14
Delayed entry	86	100	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Socio-economic level									
PreK class	43	0	14	0	0	0	57	100	86
Delayed entry	14	0	14	0	14	0	71	86	86
Pressure from parents									
PreK class ^b	29	43	71	0	14	0	57	43	29
Delayed entry ^b	14	43	71	0	0	0	57	57	29
Pressure from other teachers									
PreK class ^b	0	14	43	29	14	0	57	71	57
Delayed entry ^b	0	14	29	29	14	0	43	71	71
Expectations of administrators									
PreK class	29	14	43	14	29	0	57	57	57
Delayed entry	43	14	29	0	29	0	43	57	71
School district's financial concerns									
PreK class	14	29	29	0	0	0	86	71	71
Delayed entry	14	14	14	0	14	0	71	71	86

Note. U=urban. S=suburban. R=rural. One urban teacher disagreed with the practice of delayed entry.

^an=7. ^bOne response was missing.

Mean Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers According to Type of School District (N=21)

Factor and alternatives	<i>M</i>			Range ^a			<i>SD</i>		
	U ^b	S ^b	R ^b	U	S	R	U	S	R
August birthdate									
PreK class	4.00	4.00	4.57	5/2	5/2	5/3	1.15	1.41	0.79
Delayed entry	4.33	3.86	4.57	5/4	5/2	5/4	0.52	1.34	0.53
September birthdate									
PreK class	4.28	4.57	4.71	5/3	5/4	5/3	0.75	0.53	0.75
Delayed entry	4.67	4.14	4.86	5/4	5/2	5/4	0.52	1.07	0.38
Attended preschool									
PreK class ^c	2.83	3.43	3.00	4/1	5/2	5/1	1.33	1.13	1.41
Delayed entry	3.17	3.57	3.28	5/2	5/2	5/2	1.33	1.13	1.25
Passed screening									
PreK class	4.57	4.00	4.00	5/4	5/2	5/2	0.53	1.41	1.15
Delayed entry	4.33	4.14	4.28	5/3	5/2	5/2	0.82	1.07	1.11
Social skills									
PreK class	4.57	4.43	4.00	5/2	5/4	5/2	1.13	0.53	1.41
Delayed entry	4.17	4.43	4.57	5/2	5/4	5/4	1.17	0.53	0.53
Academic skills									
PreK class	3.86	4.14	3.57	5/2	5/2	5/2	1.34	1.07	1.13
Delayed entry	3.83	3.86	3.43	5/2	5/2	4/2	0.98	0.90	0.97
Emotional maturity									
PreK class	4.43	4.71	4.43	5/2	5/4	5/2	1.13	0.49	1.13
Delayed entry	4.50	4.57	4.86	5/4	5/4	5/4	0.55	0.53	0.38
Socio-economic level									
PreK class	2.86	1.57	1.57	5/1	2/1	4/1	2.03	0.53	1.13
Delayed entry	2.00	1.86	1.57	5/1	3/1	4/1	1.55	0.69	1.13
Pressure from parents									
PreK class ^c	2.50	3.14	3.57	4/1	5/2	5/1	1.22	1.21	1.51
Delayed entry ^c	2.00	3.00	3.43	4/1	5/2	5/1	1.22	1.29	1.40
Pressure from other teachers									
PreK class ^c	2.00	2.43	2.57	3/1	4/2	4/1	0.89	0.79	1.40
Delayed entry ^c	2.00	2.43	1.86	3/1	4/2	4/1	1.00	0.79	1.46
Expectations of administrators									
PreK class	2.57	2.57	2.57	4/1	4/2	4/1	1.13	0.79	1.40
Delayed entry	3.00	2.57	2.14	4/2	4/2	4/1	1.09	0.79	1.34
School district's financial concerns									
PreK class	1.71	2.57	2.00	4/1	5/1	4/1	1.11	1.40	1.41
Delayed entry	1.50	2.28	1.57	4/1	4/1	4/1	1.22	0.95	1.13

Note. U=urban. S=suburban. R=rural. One urban teacher disagreed with the practice of delayed entry.

^aHighest/lowest responses. ^bn=7. ^cOne response was missing.

Table 5

Percent Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers According to Level of Education (N=21)

Factor and alternatives	Very important/important			Undecided			Somewhat/not important		
	B+ ^a	M ^b	M+ ^c	B+	M	M+	B+	M	M+
August birthdate									
PreK class	60	100	67	20	0	11	20	0	22
Delayed entry	100	86	78	0	0	0	0	0	22
September birthdate									
PreK class	80	100	89	20	0	11	0	0	0
Delayed entry	100	86	89	0	0	0	0	0	11
Attended preschool									
PreK class ^d	40	57	44	0	0	22	60	43	22
Delayed entry	60	43	67	0	0	0	40	43	33
Passed screening									
PreK class	60	100	78	0	0	11	40	0	11
Delayed entry	60	86	89	20	0	0	20	0	11
Social skills									
PreK class	80	86	89	0	0	0	20	14	11
Delayed entry	80	86	100	0	0	0	20	0	0
Academic skills									
PreK class	60	71	89	0	0	0	40	29	11
Delayed entry	80	43	100	0	0	0	20	43	0
Emotional maturity									
PreK class	80	100	89	0	0	0	20	0	11
Delayed entry	100	86	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Socio-economic level									
PreK class	0	29	22	0	0	0	100	71	78
Delayed entry	0	0	22	0	0	11	100	86	67
Pressure from parents									
PreK class ^d	60	43	56	20	0	0	40	43	44
Delayed entry ^d	20	43	56	0	0	0	80	29	44
Pressure from other teachers									
PreK class ^d	0	29	22	20	14	11	80	43	67
Delayed entry ^d	0	29	11	20	14	11	80	29	78
Expectations of administrators									
PreK class	40	29	22	20	29	0	40	43	78
Delayed entry	40	29	22	0	29	0	60	29	78
School district's financial concerns									
PreK class	40	14	22	0	0	0	60	86	78
Delayed entry	40	0	11	0	0	11	60	86	78

Note. B+=Bachelor's degree plus some graduate work. M=Master's degree. M+=Master's Degree plus some post-graduate work.

^an=5. ^bn=7, including one teacher who disagreed with the practice of delayed entry. ^cn=9. ^dOne response was missing.

Table 6

Mean Responses of All Kindergarten Teachers According to Level of Education (N=21)

Factor and alternatives	<i>M</i>			Range ^a			<i>SD</i>		
	B+ ^b	M ^c	M+ ^d	B+	M	M+	B+	M	M+
August birthdate									
PreK class	3.80	4.71	4.00	5/2	5/4	5/2	1.30	0.49	1.32
Delayed entry	4.40	4.33	4.11	5/4	5/4	5/2	0.55	0.52	1.27
September birthdate									
PreK class	4.20	4.86	4.44	5/3	5/4	5/3	0.84	0.38	0.73
Delayed entry	4.60	4.83	4.33	5/4	5/4	5/2	0.55	0.41	1.00
Attended preschool									
PreK class ^e	2.60	3.28	3.25	4/1	5/2	5/1	1.34	1.25	1.28
Delayed entry	3.40	3.17	3.44	5/2	5/2	5/2	1.34	1.33	1.13
Passed screening									
PreK class	3.60	4.71	4.11	5/2	5/4	5/2	1.52	0.49	1.05
Delayed entry	3.60	4.83	4.22	5/2	5/4	5/2	1.14	0.41	0.97
Social skills									
PreK class	4.20	4.28	4.44	5/2	5/2	5/2	1.30	1.11	1.01
Delayed entry	4.20	4.50	4.44	5/2	5/4	5/4	1.30	0.55	0.53
Academic skills									
PreK class	3.40	3.71	4.22	5/2	5/2	5/2	1.34	1.25	0.97
Delayed entry	3.60	3.17	4.11	4/2	5/2	5/4	0.89	1.33	0.33
Emotional maturity									
PreK class	4.00	5.00	4.44	5/2	5/5	5/2	1.22	0.00	1.01
Delayed entry	4.40	5.00	4.55	5/4	5/5	5/4	0.55	0.00	0.53
Socio-economic level									
PreK class	1.60	2.28	2.00	2/1	5/1	5/1	0.55	1.89	1.50
Delayed entry	1.60	1.33	2.22	2/1	2/1	5/1	0.55	0.52	1.48
Pressure from parents									
PreK class ^e	2.80	3.17	3.22	4/1	5/1	5/2	1.30	1.72	1.20
Delayed entry ^e	2.00	3.40	3.11	4/1	5/1	4/2	1.22	1.82	1.05
Pressure from other teachers									
PreK class ^e	2.00	2.50	2.44	3/1	4/1	4/1	0.71	1.38	1.01
Delayed entry ^e	2.00	2.60	1.89	3/1	4/1	4/1	0.71	1.52	1.05
Expectations of administrators									
PreK class	2.80	2.71	2.30	4/1	4/1	4/1	1.30	1.11	1.00
Delayed entry	2.80	2.67	2.33	4/2	4/1	4/1	1.09	1.37	1.00
School district's financial concerns									
PreK class	2.40	1.71	2.22	4/1	4/1	5/1	1.52	1.11	1.39
Delayed entry	2.40	1.17	1.89	4/1	2/1	4/1	1.52	0.41	1.05

Note. B+=Bachelor's degree plus some graduate work. M=Master's degree. M+=Master's degree plus some post-graduate work.

^aHighest/lowest responses. ^bn=5. ^cn=7, including one teacher who disagreed with delayed entry. ^dn=9. ^eOne response was missing.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, TRENDS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Today's kindergarten bears only a slight resemblance to the kindergartens of just a few decades ago. Kindergarten was the child's first opportunity to strike out on his own, to learn to make friends, to learn to get along with others, and to prepare for formal schooling. Kindergarten has lost its focus on readiness. Now that most children have preschool experience, kindergarten's focus on socialization and play has shifted in order to emphasize knowledge and skills. The first grade curriculum has made its way into kindergarten. While some children can adapt to a more academic curriculum, many children cannot. If even the better prepared youngsters find a developmentally inappropriate curriculum difficult to handle, what will become of the children who are developmentally and/or chronologically young at the beginning of the kindergarten year? Teachers are seeking ways to protect these children and remove them from the conflict between the child's needs and the curriculum's demands. The purpose of the study was to identify factors kindergarten teachers consider when determining whether to recommend a prekindergarten alternative for a child deemed not ready for kindergarten. The study examined two such alternatives: delayed entry and prekindergarten extra-year programs.

The subjects for the study were a random sample of certified kindergarten teachers teaching in communities located in central and southwest Ohio. The schools in which these educators teach vary in enrollment and type of school district (i.e. urban, suburban, and rural).

Twenty-one teachers returned Likert-type surveys in which they rated the importance of the following factors as they relate to delayed entry and prekindergarten extra-year programs: birthdate, preschool attendance, kindergarten screening, academic skills, social skills, emotional maturity, socio-economic level, and teacher perceptions of pressure from sources outside the classroom. Any teacher who disagreed with either delayed entry or prekindergarten extra-year programs was given the option of explaining his/her reasons in narrative form on the survey.

Survey responses were examined as a whole, then analyzed by type of school district (i.e. urban, suburban, or rural) and teacher level of education (i.e. Bachelor's degree plus some graduate work, Master's degree, or Master's degree plus some post-graduate work). One teacher disagreed with the practice of delayed entry. Clearly, six factors emerged as important when teachers consider a child's placement: August birthdate, September birthdate, social skills, emotional maturity, academic skills and screening results. Pressures from outside sources such as parents, other teachers, administrators, the school district's financial concerns, and the socio-economic level of the child were judged not particularly important. Overall, delayed entry/emotional maturity elicited the most agreement among responses ($SD=0.49$). The area of least agreement overall was prekindergarten/socio-economic level ($SD=1.45$). Areas of greatest and least agreement in responses were subject to change when analyzed by type of district and level of education.

Trends

Generally the responses regarding each alternative tended to be very similar for both prekindergarten and delayed entry. There were only a few undecided answers; apparently most teachers have clear opinions about these issues. One teacher with a Master's degree who teaches in an urban school district did not agree with the practice of delayed entry. She explained that "'at-risk' children need to be in a stimulating environment before entering regular kindergarten due to language delays and lack of experiences with learning." This teacher echoes Charlesworth's (1989) feeling that delayed entry denies 'not ready' children the learning experiences they need in order to catch up. Shepard and Smith (1986) strongly suggest that districts discourage parents from waiting an extra year to enroll their chronologically young children. The NAEYC (1990) makes similar recommendations.

A teacher from the Master's Plus group who teaches in a rural area related that twenty-two years ago she held out her son, who had a September birthday; she never regretted the decision. Her younger daughter, an August birthday, went to school the year she was eligible to enroll; her school years were a struggle. The same educator wrote that "My experience of being a kindergarten teacher for fourteen years tells me that the gift of time is never regretted. Not giving it, often is." Because only one of the teachers surveyed opposed delayed entry, and in spite of a wealth of research to the contrary, it appears that many teachers still consider delayed entry a viable option for 'not ready' children.

Since the survey results for delayed entry and prekindergarten class were very similar, perhaps this is an indication that teachers agree that prekindergarten programs are worth considering. These results would support

the finding that teachers tend to exaggerate the benefits of extra-year programs (Shepard & Smith, 1988). As noted earlier, experts consider extra-year programs to be synonymous with retention (Meisels, 1992; Siegel & Hanson, 1991). Studies show that extra-year programs and retention tend to produce the same results, generally unfavorable (Meisels, 1992; Shepard & Smith, 1988). It seems that the teachers surveyed are willing to support what experts say is not necessarily an appropriate practice.

The results showed that teachers are divided on the importance of preschool in making decisions about prekindergarten alternatives. But research has demonstrated the effectiveness of the preschool experience as it relates to success in school (Cryan et al., 1992). Research also shows that preschool is beneficial for both at-risk and non-at-risk children (Gullo & Burton, 1992). Is it possible that teachers who have a more academic kindergarten program are more likely to support the need for preschool experience? All of the Master's Plus teachers felt that academic skills were important when considering delayed entry. This same group attached more importance to preschool attendance than did the other two groups.

Overall the survey results indicated that most teachers are willing to consider delayed entry, even though the literature says that it is not necessarily in the best interest of the children to do so. Regarding the significance of preschool attendance, the spread of survey scores across the continuum would seem to indicate that all teachers are not convinced of the importance of preschool. In both instances, research does not appear to be influencing teacher opinions. This confirms research indicating that teachers are more likely to form their opinions based on their teaching philosophy and experience and the philosophy and experience of their colleagues (Siegel & Hanson, 1991). The results of this survey suggest that level of education makes little difference

in knowledge of both appropriate practice and existing research on prekindergarten and delayed entry.

Eighty-one percent of teachers felt that kindergarten screening played an important role in placement decisions. The literature condemns screening for many reasons: inappropriate use of developmental and readiness tests (Golant & Golant, 1997; NAEYC, 1990), lack of valid and reliable tests to assess school readiness (NAEYC, 1990), use of a single standardized test score to determine a child's placement (Golant & Golant, 1997; Katz, 1991; Meisels, 1992), and numerous obstacles inherent to the testing of young children (Bendixen-Noe, 1998; NAEYC, 1990). Once again the survey results seem to indicate that teachers are placing some degree of importance on a practice that research describes as inappropriate. Again, level of education seemed to make little difference, because the Master's and Master's Plus groups were much more likely to view screening as a critical factor in placement decisions.

A clear majority of teachers from all education levels ranked social skills and emotional maturity as very important factors. A child who lacked these skills upon entering kindergarten might be seen as immature by his teacher. The fact that these two characteristics enter into whether a child is seen as mature or immature reflects research findings that indicate teachers at the kindergarten level seem more preoccupied with age and/or maturity than teachers at other grade levels, especially if a teacher considers retention at the end of the kindergarten year (Shepard & Smith, 1989, chap. 4).

Implications for Practice

Teachers are human. When faced with making decisions, teachers are more likely to rely on and feel more strongly about personal experience rather than what the research says (Siegel & Hanson, 1991). So it appears that the

practice of delayed entry is likely to continue. There is an old story about a little boy who walks along the beach, picks up stranded starfish, and throws them back into the ocean. When told that he cannot save all the starfish, he replies, "No, but I can save that one." Teachers are doing all that they can to save their little starfish from inappropriate practice, and what works for most may not work for "that one."

In 1997 the Ohio General assembly passed Senate Bill 55. Beginning in 1999 the Ohio Department of Education must publish and distribute a report card to every school district in the state. The Ohio Report Card will assign each district an accountability rating based on 18 minimum performance standards. These standards are directly tied to the results of proficiency testing in grades 4, 6, 9, and 12. Each building within a district will receive a report card comparing that building's performance to the state average and to the performance of similar districts in Ohio. Senate Bill 55 also includes what is commonly known as the Fourth Grade Guarantee, which requires students to be reading at least at grade level before they are promoted to the fifth grade. Furthermore, Senate Bill 55 requires retention of truant students. Although district report cards will be issued in 1999, the standards do not officially take effect until the year 2000. How will Senate Bill 55 affect kindergarten teachers and their students?

The first grade curriculum, which has been pushing its way into kindergarten, may now squeeze the life out of a developmentally appropriate kindergarten curriculum. Academic skills must become the focus. Who will have time to help Tommy learn to share when there are test scores to consider? He should have learned to share in preschool.

If the first grade curriculum takes root in kindergarten, then the kindergarten curriculum has no place to go but preschool. Teachers and administrators are likely to place more importance on preschool attendance so

that students are prepared to enter a more academic kindergarten program. As this expectation filters down to the parents, those who cannot afford private preschools may demand that the state provide a public alternative. Private preschools are likely to find more intense competition for parent dollars, and existing programs such as Head Start may find that their waiting lists will grow longer and longer as more parents feel the pressure to enroll their children in preschool programs.

The resulting expectations for a more "ready" kindergartner are likely to fuel efforts for more screening of kindergarten entrants. Those who do not pass the screening might be encouraged to delay entry into kindergarten or enroll in a prekindergarten extra-year program. There may be an increase in the number of districts offering prekindergarten extra-year programs. The more educated parents might be even more likely to hold out a developmentally and/or chronologically young child, thus creating an ever-widening gap in ability levels in kindergarten classes.

Although research shows that retention is not effective, the Fourth Grade Guarantee requires that teachers retain those students who do not pass the reading portion of the Fourth Grade Proficiency Test. Included in this portion of Senate Bill 55 is a stipulation that each student must be assessed at the end of first, second, and third grade to identify those who are not reading at grade level. Kindergarten teachers are likely to feel increased pressure from administrators, fellow teachers, and parents as all struggle to see that children will be ready to pass the first grade assessment. Extra-year programs may become more commonplace in the primary grades as teachers look for ways to find more time for children to learn without having to use the word "retention."

The Fourth Grade Guarantee is not the only portion of Senate Bill 55 which mandates retention. Teachers may not promote a child to the next grade

level if the child has been absent, without an excuse, for more than 10% of the school year and has failed at least two subjects. Only if the teachers and principal agree that the child is academically prepared may the child move on to the next grade level. Although kindergarten's academic demands have been increasing, many parents still feel that it is "just kindergarten," and that attendance is not a critical issue. This attitude may be more prevalent in districts with half-day kindergarten programs, since "real school" is a full day. The impact of truancy and retention at the kindergarten level might very well be greater than anticipated.

Now that a Fourth Grade Guarantee has been established, is it possible that the future may bring a Third Grade Guarantee, a Second Grade Guarantee, a First Grade Guarantee, and eventually a Kindergarten Guarantee? What is the educator's role in this dilemma?

Recommendations

The State Board of Education needs to open the lines of communication with legislators and educate them about what research has shown to be effective and ineffective in public education. The State Board of Education asked to have input into the development of Senate Bill 55, but legislators refused to allow the Board to participate. One would not hire a medical doctor to design a housing development, nor would a plumber be qualified to develop a corporate financial plan. Yet educators and educational research were not consulted during the development of Senate Bill 55. Legislators ratified procedures that research has repeatedly shown to be ineffective.

The State Board of Education needs to conduct mandatory workshops to educate administrators about what research proves to be appropriate and inappropriate practices.

School districts and their administrators in turn must educate and support their teachers. Building support teams, composed of knowledgeable teachers and administrators, must provide teachers with updates of current research in education as well as support in decision-making.

Teachers, administrators, board members, and legislators must unite and educate the community about what research indicates is effective and ineffective in today's schools. Involving a variety of media, including television, radio, and newspapers would serve to communicate vital information more clearly and efficiently to the entire community.

Ohio legislators and the State Board of Education need to work together to re-examine the purpose and the effectiveness of proficiency testing. These groups must consider whether these tests reflect what researchers know about child development. Legislators and board members must re-evaluate Senate Bill 55's Fourth Grade Guarantee in the light of research on retention.

Because the general public assumes that children would be best educated in the same way that these adults were educated when they were in school, many seem to feel that they know enough about education to know what works and what does not work. When legislators acknowledge and utilize research in education, when legislators and educators unite to inform the public about appropriate practice in education, only then can public schools serve children effectively.

References

Bellisimo, Y., Sacks, C., & Mergendoller, J. (1995). Changes over time in kindergarten holding out: Parent and school contexts. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 10 (2), 205-222.

Bendixen-Noe, M. (1998, Winter). Educational continuity from prekindergarten experiences to kindergarten. Knowledge Is Developed by Sharing (KIDS), 2 (2).

Best, J., & Kahn, J. (1993). Research in education. (7th ed.) Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Bredenkamp, S., & Shepard, L. (1989). How best to protect children from inappropriate school expectations, practices, and policies. Young Children, 44 (3), 14-24.

Brent, D., May, D., & Kundert, D. (1996). The incidence of delayed school entry: A twelve-year review. Early Education and Development, 7 (2), 121-135.

Brophy, B. (1989). The kindergarten wars. U.S. News and World Report, 106 (14), 53.

Byrd, R. S., & Weitzman, M. L. (1994). Predictors of early grade retention among children in the United States. Pediatrics, 93 (3), 481-487.

Charlesworth, R. (1989). Behind before they start? Deciding how to deal with the risk of kindergarten "failure." Young Children, 44 (3), 5-13.

Connell, D. (1987). The first 30 years were the fairest: Notes from the kindergarten and ungraded primary (K-1-2). Young Children, 42 (5), 30-39.

Cryan, J., Sheehan, R., Wiechel, J., & Bandy-Hedden, I. (1992). Success outcomes of full-day kindergarten: More positive behavior and increased achievement in the years after. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7 (2), 187-203.

Eads, G. M. (1990). Kindergarten retention and alternative kindergarten programs: A report to the Virginia Board of Education. Richmond, VA: Virginia State Board of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 320670)

Educational Research Service. (1986). Kindergarten programs and practices in public schools. Arlington, VA: Author. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 269896)

Foulks, B., & Morrow, R. D. (1989). Academic survival skills for the young child at risk for school failure. Journal of Educational Research, 82 (3), 158-165.

Frick, R. (1986). In support of academic redshirting. Young Children, 41 (2), 9-10.

Golant, S., & Golant, M. (1997). Kindergarten--It isn't what it used to be. Los Angeles, CA: Lowell House.

Graue, M. (1993). Expectations and ideas coming to school. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 8 (1), 53-75.

Gullo, D., & Burton, C. (1992). Age of entry, preschool experience, and sex as antecedents of academic readiness in kindergarten. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7 (2), 175-186.

Hains, A., Fowler, S., Schwartz, I., Kottwitz, E., & Rosenkoetter, S. (1989). A comparison of preschool and kindergarten teacher expectations for school readiness. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 4 (1), 75-88.

Hatch, J. A., & Freeman, E. B. (1988). Kindergarten philosophies and practices: Perspectives of teachers, principals, and supervisors. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 3 (2), 151-166.

Isaac, S., & Michael, W. (1995). Handbook in research and evaluation. San Diego, CA: Educational and Industrial Testing Services.

Jacobson, L. (1997, June 4). Cutoff date for kindergarten again debated. Education Week, pp. 1, 20.

Kagan, S. L. (Ed.). (1995). Reconsidering children's early development and learning: Toward common views and vocabulary (Report No. 95-03). Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 391576)

Katz, L. (1991). Readiness: Children and schools (Report No. EDO-PS-91-4). Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 330495)

Knudsen-Lindauer, S. L., & Harris, K. (1989). Priorities for kindergarten curricula: Views of parents and teachers. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 4 (1), 51-61.

Langer, P., Kalk, J. M., & Searls, D. T. (1984). Age of admission and trends in achievement: A comparison of blacks and caucasians. American Educational Research Journal, 21 (1), 61-78.

Love, J. M., Logue, M. E., Trudeau, J. V., & Thayer, K. (1992). Transitions to kindergarten in American schools: Final report of the national transition study. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 344693)

Mantzicopoulos, P., & Morrison, D. (1990). Characteristics of at-risk children in transitional and regular kindergarten programs. Psychology in the Schools, 27 (4), 325-332.

Meisels, S. (1987). Uses and abuses of developmental screening and school readiness tests. Young Children, 42 (2), 4-6, 68-73.

Meisels, S. (1992). Doing harm by doing good: Iatrogenic effects of early childhood enrollment and promotion policies. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7 (2), 155-174.

Meisels, S. (1995). Out of the readiness maze. Momentum, 26 (2), 18-22.

Nall, S. W. (1982). Bridging the gap: Preschool to kindergarten. Childhood Education, 59 (2), 107-110.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1987). Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1988). NAEYC position statement on standardized testing of young children 3 through 8 years of age. Young Children 43 (3), 42-47.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1990). NAEYC position statement on school readiness. Young Children, 46 (1), 21-23.

National Education Goals Panel. (1993). The national education goals report: Building a nation of learners. Volume one: The national report. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 360394)

Peck, J., McCaig, G., & Sapp, M. (1988). Kindergarten policies: What is best for children? Washington, DC: NAEYC. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 299045)

Rafoth, M., & Carey, K. (1995). Best practices in assisting with promotion and retention decisions. In A. Thomas, & J. Grimes (Eds.), Best practices in school psychology III (pp. 413-420). Silver Springs, MD: National Association of School Psychology.

Reeve, R. E., & Holt, I. J. (1987). Children and school entry decisions. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), Children's needs: Psychological perspectives. Kent, OH: National Association of School Psychologists.

Shepard, L. A., Graue, M. E., & Catto, S. F. (1989). Delayed entry into kindergarten and escalation of academic demands. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. San Francisco, CA.

Shepard, L., & Smith, M. (1986). Synthesis of research on school readiness and kindergarten retention. Educational Leadership, 44 (3), 78-86.

Shepard, L., & Smith M. (1988). Escalating academic demand in kindergarten: Counterproductive policies. The Elementary School Journal, 89 (2), 135-145.

Shepard, L., & Smith M. (Eds.). (1989). Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention. Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.

Smith, M. L., & Shepard L. A. (1987). What doesn't work: Explaining policies of retention in the early grades. Phi Delta Kappan, 69 (2), 129-134.

Siegel, D., & Hanson, R. (1991). Kindergarten educational policies: Separating myth from reality. Early Education and Development, 2 (1), 5-31.

Uphoff, J. (1990). Real facts from real schools. Rosemont, NJ: Modern Learning Press.

Uphoff, J., Gilmore, J., & Huber, R. (1986). Pupil age at school entrance—How many are ready for success? Young Children, 41 (2), 11-16.

Viadero, D. (1998, January 28). U.S. kindergarten study sheds light on retention, delayed entry. Education Week, p. 8.

Walsh, D. (1989). Changes in kindergarten: Why here? Why now? Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 4 (3), 377-391.

West, J., Hausken, E.G., & Collins, M. (1993). Profile of preschool children's child care and early education program participation (Report No. NCES-93-133). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 355046)

Wolf, J., & Kessler, A. (1987). Entrance to kindergarten: What is the best age? Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 290225)

Zill, N., Loomis, L. S., & West, J. (1997). The elementary school performance and adjustment of children who enter kindergarten late or repeat kindergarten: Findings from national surveys (Report No. NCES-98-097). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 414076)

APPENDIX A
Principal Letter

Virginia Stevenson Elementary School
805 Harshman Rd.
Riverside, OH 45431

May 15, 1998

Mr. Principal
ABC Elementary School
123 Red Dr.
City, OH 00000

Dear Mr. Principal:

Although kindergarten teachers strive to provide an atmosphere in which every child can grow, it seems that every year there are some children who might benefit from either of two alternatives: waiting an extra year to begin kindergarten or attending a prekindergarten program.

I am a kindergarten teacher working toward a Master's Degree at the University of Dayton. I am searching for the professional opinions of kindergarten teachers regarding delayed entry and prekindergarten extra-year programs. I am asking for your help in distributing the enclosed surveys to the kindergarten teachers in your building. I apologize for the timing of this request, knowing that teachers and administrators alike are overwhelmed with end-of-the-year concerns.

The enclosed survey can be completed in about 5 minutes. I truly appreciate your assistance, as well as the cooperation of your kindergarten teachers.
Thank you!

Sincerely,

Teresa Hatton

APPENDIX B

Teacher Letter



B

C

D



May 15, 1998

Dear Teacher,

I am a kindergarten teacher working toward a Master's degree at the University of Dayton.

As a kindergarten teacher I have no doubt that you, too, have worked with children who are just not ready for the kindergarten experience. Although we do our best to provide an atmosphere in which every child can grow, it seems that every year there are some children who might benefit from either of two alternatives: waiting an extra year to begin kindergarten or attending a prekindergarten program. Prekindergarten programs often are referred to as Young Fives, Junior Kindergarten, Begindergarten, or simply Prekindergarten. These programs offer a year of intervention before an at-risk child has a chance to encounter difficulty in the regular kindergarten program.

I am searching for professional opinions, and I am asking for your help. I apologize for the timing of this request, knowing you are as busy as I am with end-of-the-year concerns. The enclosed survey takes about 5 minutes to complete. I truly appreciate your participation.

Please mail your completed survey in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope by May 29. If you would like to receive a composite of the responses, please include your return address on the envelope. Thank you, and have a great summer!

Sincerely,

Teresa Hatton

R



Q



P

N



Z
X
W
M
S
T
L
R

G
H
K
L

APPENDIX C

Survey, Part I Prekindergarten Programs

How important are the following factors when you consider whether a child might benefit from waiting an extra year before entering kindergarten? Please rate each factor by circling a number next to each item.

If you feel that prekindergarten extra-year programs are not beneficial, please explain your reasons below, then skip the questions on this page.

	Very Important	Important	Undecided	Somewhat Important	Not Important
August birthdate	5	4	3	2	1
September birthdate	5	4	3	2	1
Attended preschool	5	4	3	2	1
Satisfactory performance on kindergarten screening (in examiner's opinion)	5	4	3	2	1
Social skills	5	4	3	2	1
Academic skills	5	4	3	2	1
Emotional maturity	5	4	3	2	1
Socio-economic level	5	4	3	2	1
Pressure from parents	5	4	3	2	1
Pressure from other teachers	5	4	3	2	1
Expectations of administrators	5	4	3	2	1
School district's financial concerns	5	4	3	2	1

APPENDIX D

Survey, Part II Delayed Entry

How important are the following factors when you consider whether a child might benefit from waiting an extra year before entering kindergarten? Please rate each factor by circling a number next to each item.

If you disagree with the practice of delayed entry, please explain your reasons below, then skip the questions on this page.

	Very Important	Important	Undecided	Somewhat Important	Not Important
August birthdate	5	4	3	2	1
September birthdate	5	4	3	2	1
Attended preschool	5	4	3	2	1
Satisfactory performance on kindergarten screening (in examiner's opinion)	5	4	3	2	1
Social skills	5	4	3	2	1
Academic skills	5	4	3	2	1
Emotional maturity	5	4	3	2	1
Socio-economic level	5	4	3	2	1
Pressure from parents	5	4	3	2	1
Pressure from other teachers	5	4	3	2	1
Expectations of administrators	5	4	3	2	1
School district's financial concerns	5	4	3	2	1

APPENDIX E

Survey, Part III Demographics

Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions by placing an X next to the desired response.

1. Which word best describes your school district?
 urban
 suburban
 rural
2. Which word best describes the type of school where you are currently teaching?
 public
 private
3. How many years of teaching experience do you have at the kindergarten level? Please include the current year.
 1-15 years
 more than 15 years
4. Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed.
 Bachelor's degree
 Bachelor's degree plus some post-graduate work
 Master's degree
 Master's degree plus some post-graduate work
 Doctorate

HATTON, TERESA A.

FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER DECISIONS REGARDING PREKINDERGARTEN ALTERNATIVES FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE ELIGIBLE BUT NOT YET READY FOR KINDERGARTEN (54 pp.), December, 1998.

Faculty Advisor: Mary Ellen Seery, Ed. D.

PROBLEM. The purpose of the study was to identify factors kindergarten teachers consider when determining whether to recommend a prekindergarten alternative for a child deemed not ready for kindergarten.

PROCEDURE. After reviewing the related literature, the investigator designed a Likert-type questionnaire which required kindergarten teachers to rank the relative importance of twelve factors as they related to prekindergarten classes and the practice of delayed entry. Twenty-one Ohio kindergarten teachers returned completed questionnaires. Results were tabulated for all respondents, then analyzed according to type of school district and level of education.

FINDINGS. At least 76% of kindergarten teachers surveyed considered the following factors to be the most important considerations when making recommendations: August and September birthdates, screening results, social skills, academic skills, and emotional maturity. Teachers reached little consensus as to the importance of preschool attendance, pressure from parents, pressure from other teachers, and expectations of administrators. Delayed entry/emotional maturity was the area of greatest agreement among respondents ($SD=0.49$). The factor with the least agreement among teachers was prekindergarten/socio-economic level ($SD=1.45$). One urban teacher with a Master's degree disagreed with the practice of delayed entry.

When comparing responses in terms of type of school district where a teacher is employed, results indicated that the suburban teachers were more likely than the others to regard academic skills as an important factor. Prekindergarten/academic skills enter into only the suburban group's top five mean scores. Suburban and rural teachers were more likely than urban educators to perceive socio-economic level as unimportant for both prekindergarten and delayed entry.

Respondents were divided into 3 groups: Bachelor's degree plus some graduate work (Bachelor's Plus), Master's degree (Master's), and Master's Degree plus some post-graduate work (Master's Plus). Bachelor's Plus teachers were less likely to be influenced by parents and other teachers when making decisions. Master's Plus teachers were more likely to consider academic skills. Master's and Master's Plus teachers were more likely to cite the significance of screening. The Master's group was in complete agreement regarding the importance of emotional maturity for both delayed entry and prekindergarten ($SD=0.0$).

RECOMMENDATIONS. The State Board of Education needs to open the lines of communication with legislators and educate them about what research shows to be effective and ineffective in public education. The State Board of Education should conduct mandatory workshops to educate administrators about what research proves to be appropriate and inappropriate. School districts and their administrators in turn must educate and support their teachers. Teachers, administrators, board members, and legislators must unite and educate the community regarding appropriate practice. Ohio legislators and the State Board of Education need to work together to re-examine the purpose and effectiveness of proficiency testing and to re-evaluate Senate Bill 55's Fourth Grade Guarantee in the light of research on retention.