

LEARNS Early
Learning Work Group
August 17, 2023

LEARNS Early Learning Work Group Agenda

Purpose: During this call, we will discuss the current kindergarten readiness definition in Arkansas.

- Scope and Sequence
- Kindergarten Readiness
- Next Steps

Scope and Sequence

Scope and Sequence

To accomplish the timeline outlined in LEARNS, this group will meet biweekly for the next several months to discuss the following topics. Adjustments may be made or additional topics added at a later date based on the pace and timing of work group meetings.

Date	Anticipated Topics
July 6	Kick-Off
July 20	Transition plan
August 3	Local early childhood leads
August 17	Definition of K readiness



Kindergarten Readiness

Why does Kindergarten Readiness Matter?

Arkansas is working hard to achieve the goals established in LEARNS. This starts with supporting children to be ready for kindergarten.

- **Teachers:** Teachers report that 48% of students have “difficulty” or “some problems” when starting Kindergarten both academically and socially. Ensuring students are ready for Kindergarten sets K teachers up for success from day 1¹.
- **Parents/Community:** School readiness begins at home and in the community. When parents and caregivers know what kindergarten readiness should look like, they are better prepared to support their child before the first day of school².
- **Students:** Students who participate in early childhood programs and, therefore, are ready for kindergarten are less likely to repeat a grade, more prepared academically for later grades, more likely to graduate from high school and are ultimately higher earners in the workforce³.
- **Arkansas:** Children who are not kindergarten ready score lower on third- and eighth-grade tests and are nearly half as likely⁴ to master basic academic and social skills by age 11⁵.

1. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0885200600000491?via%3Dihub>

2. <https://www.gale.com/kindergarten-readiness>

3. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0013189X17737739>

4. <https://cepa.stanford.edu/content/portrait-educational-outcomes-california>

5. <https://www.ffyf.org/why-it-matters/school-readiness/>





Current State of K Readiness in Arkansas

Arkansas's Definition of School Readiness: School ready children have the social and academic knowledge, skills and behaviors for school success and lifelong learning. School readiness occurs when families, schools and communities support and serve ALL children, so they are successful in school and in life⁶.

9 Domains:

- Social and emotional development
- Cognitive development
- Physical development and health
- Language development
- Emergent literacy
- Mathematical thinking
- Science and technology
- Social studies
- Creativity and athletics

17 states have kindergarten readiness specified in statute or legislation.





Assessing Kindergarten Readiness in AR

Kindergarten Entry Assessments are required: Each school district conducts individual school readiness assessments on each child entering kindergarten⁷.

School districts have the choice to use 1 of the 4 following assessments. While all assessments are considered KEAs in Arkansas, each assessment measures something different.

- Curriculum Associates: i-Ready
- Istation: ISIP
- NWEA: MAP Growth
- Renaissance: Star

30 states require KEAs. Of these 30 states, 10 of them have no requirement for the state to do anything with the data results.

Results must be shared: Districts must provide the results of the testing to the child's parents in a timely manner, and in clear, understandable terminology.



⁷<https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/learning-services/assessment/-k-2-assessment>

Current State of K Readiness Nationally ⁸

Kentucky	School readiness means a student is “ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the student’s success”
Maryland	Regulations define ready children as those who show an eagerness to explore, discover, engage, and learn. They demonstrate interest and abilities in all dimensions of early learning and development: social and emotional development; language development; cognition and general knowledge; physical well-being and motor development; and approaches toward learning...school readiness should be viewed as a continuum of behaviors rather than an inflexible or narrow set of proficiency skills. Any age-eligible child who is eager to attend kindergarten should be deemed 'ready'.
Mississippi	The state of early development that enables an individual child to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences. As a result of family nurturing and interactions with others, a young child in this stage has reached certain levels of social and emotional development, cognition and general knowledge, language development, and physical well-being and motor development. School readiness acknowledges individual approaches toward learning as well as the unique experiences and backgrounds of each child
Illinois	By the 40th day of school, kindergarten teachers observed their students and collected multiple pieces of evidence of the child displaying skills, knowledge, and behaviors. This evidence indicates that the child has reached a developmental level associated with typical expectations at kindergarten entry. Children who display these typical or anticipated behaviors and skills in <i>all three</i> developmental areas [Social and Emotional Development, Language and Literacy Development, Math] demonstrate kindergarten readiness.
Florida	The Office of Early Learning must develop and adopt standards and benchmarks that address the age-appropriate progress of children in the development of school readiness skills. The standards for children from birth to 5 years of age in the school readiness program must be aligned with the performance standards adopted for children in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program and must address the following domains: approaches to learning; cognitive development and general knowledge; numeracy, language, and communication; physical development; and self-regulation.



8. <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/state-k-3-policies-2023-03>

New Kindergarten Assessment Work

While kindergarten readiness encompasses more than just literacy, Arkansas is working on vertical alignment of early literacy skills so that kindergarteners are set up for success as a result of their early learning experiences.

Phonemic Awareness



A child's level of phonemic awareness on entering school is widely held to be the strongest single determinant of the success that she or he will experience in learning to read — or, conversely, the likelihood that she or he will fail.

(Adams, 1990; Stanovich, 1986)

With a revamping of Arkansas kindergarten literacy standards, pre-K classrooms are now working to ensure they are setting their students up for success in kindergarten.⁹

- Kindergarten classrooms are starting with phonemic awareness.
- Pre-K classrooms need to send students into kindergarten with phonological awareness to be best prepared for the first day of kindergarten.

“The best two predictors of reading achievement in early kindergarten to 2nd grade are alphabetic knowledge and phonemic awareness (sound isolation)”¹⁰



9. https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Files/20201201142946_AR_Early_Learning_Standards_2016.pdf

10. Timothy Shanahan and Christopher J. Lonigan, *Early Childhood Literacy: The National Early Literacy Panel and Beyond*, pg 10-14

Discussion

- As you consider the early learning transition taking place in AR right now, what is important to consider about current definition and assessment of kindergarten readiness?
- When you consider a strong or high-quality early childhood experience, one that the unified system should be set up to offer for every kid in Arkansas, what skills would that set each child up with on their path to Kindergarten?
- Why does a Kindergarten Readiness definition matter? What does Arkansas use it for now, and what should it use for in the future?

You can capture your notes at tinyurl.com/LEARNS23.





Next Steps

Upcoming Meetings

The LEARNS Early Learning Work Group will revisit each topic discussed thus far in order to extend and expand upon the earlier conversations:

- Office of Early Childhood transition plan
- Local early childhood leads
- Kindergarten readiness

The group will reconvene in two weeks (August 31) to discuss progress on the transition to the Office of Early Childhood.