

What does "kindergartner readiness" mean? Lately, in Oregon, that has been defined by the state as scoring well on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment. This assessment has been misguided from the beginning. Kindergartner teachers have always assessed students, to see where they are at and what they bring with them in the door to what, for many, is their first formal schooling experience. In the past, those assessments were done gently, when children were ready. Many spend a long time at the beginning of a school year just crying for their mommy or learning to sit still, for example, which is not the ideal time to do an academic assessment. My own grandson took the entire first month of school to settle in. Requiring a specified time, near the beginning of the school year, to formally assess small children's literacy that way is not a valid measure of what they know.

Further, I am gravely concerned that the OKA assesses student's literacy skills in English only. I was a teacher of ESOL and Spanish literacy for nearly 30 years. I was among one of the first cohorts in Oregon to receive the ESOL/Bilingual endorsement back in the 1990s. I can assure you that pre-reading and reading skills are not confined only to the English language, and that nearly all reading skills are transferrable to a child's second language once a certain level of proficiency in the second language is achieved. By assessing incoming kindergartners only in English, you automatically negate the vast majority of what those who come from homes where English is not spoken know about reading and writing. That is an insult to their primary language, their culture, and their home.

Finally, the OKA does not assess reading "readiness" skills in any language but rather is a sort of "pre-assessment" of what kids are expected to know by the END of kindergarten. This is a set up for every child to fail, or at least to feel as if they've failed. That is not what a small child's first experience of school should be and there is literally zero evidence that an early reader is a better reader. There are, however, plenty of studies that have been done over the past 50 years that show how quality preschool programs affect the lifelong trajectory of kids whose families participate. This is not a short term project. These studies are longitudinal in nature and do not focus on discrete skills and what is, honestly, unimportant information (like how many letters children learned their first year in school). There is also plenty of information and studies about what makes a quality preschool program. It's not skill drills and worksheets. Focusing on these discrete skills as early as when children step in the door of kindergarten will drive that idea downward to preschools. We already have many kindergartners who "hate school" because they are being forced to attempt to learn things that some are simply not developmentally ready for due to the inappropriate nature of the testing focus we've landed on. You can't teach a baby to walk earlier by practicing more and that is exactly the same for teaching a young child to read. There is a wide range of what is average and normal in children's literacy development and the early testing we are currently doing of small children does not seem to recognize this. Let's get off that path before we throw any more good money after bad and let's stop letting people who are not experts in Early Childhood Development and learning determine how we teach and assess our little ones. They are not mini adults and some of what is being done is potentially harmful to their psyches.

I am including here a link to an organization that focuses on young children's learning and has an amazingly qualified Board of Directors and advisors. If anyone would like to connect, I am happy to initiate or facilitate that connection. Please feel free to reach out to me if you are interested in doing so. <https://dey.org/about-us/#1596568801878-8197f717->