Children Entering School
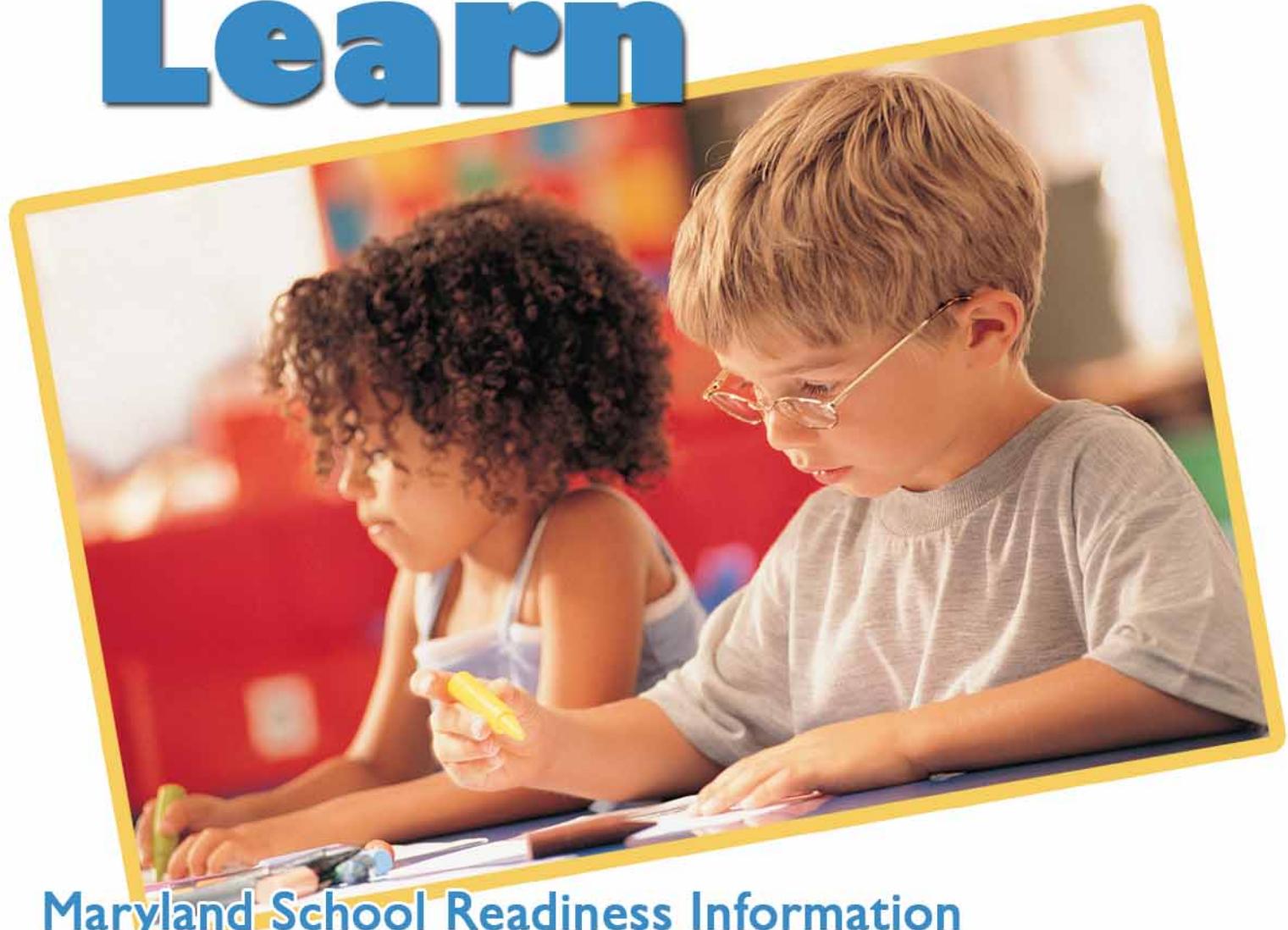
Ready to Learn

Maryland School Readiness Information
2005-2006 State Data

MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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I am very pleased to provide you with the report, *Children Entering School Ready to Learn: School Readiness Information for School Year 2005-06.* Each year, MSDE informs policymakers and practitioners of what children know and are able to do when they start formal education in kindergarten.

This report, which is unique in its kind nationally, provides a profile of children's skill levels as they enter school based on the evaluation of their teachers. It includes valuable trend data about the school readiness levels of specific groups of children for the state and each of the 24 jurisdictions in Maryland.

The major results of the report are:

- More children were starting kindergarten better prepared for school than last year. Sixty (60) percent of the entering kindergarten students were evaluated by their teachers as "fully" ready for kindergarten, a two (2) percent increase over the previous year and an eleven (11) percent increase since 2001-02. This statistically significant increase occurred for both the composite score and the results for *Language and Literacy*. Most notable, the increase in *Language and Literacy* since 2001-02 has been fourteen percent.

- Children with limited English proficiency were making significant progress over last year's data. The number of English language learners evaluated by their teachers as fully ready increased by eight (8) percent over last year. This increase is a reflection of the work in the early childhood community to improve the early learning opportunities for English language learners.

I encourage you to review the report and work with your constituencies in promoting school readiness skills among our youngest learners. Neuro-scientific research has shown that young children's learning before they enter formal education is an essential foundation for later school success.

Sincerely,

Nancy S. Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools

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Results for School Year 2005-06

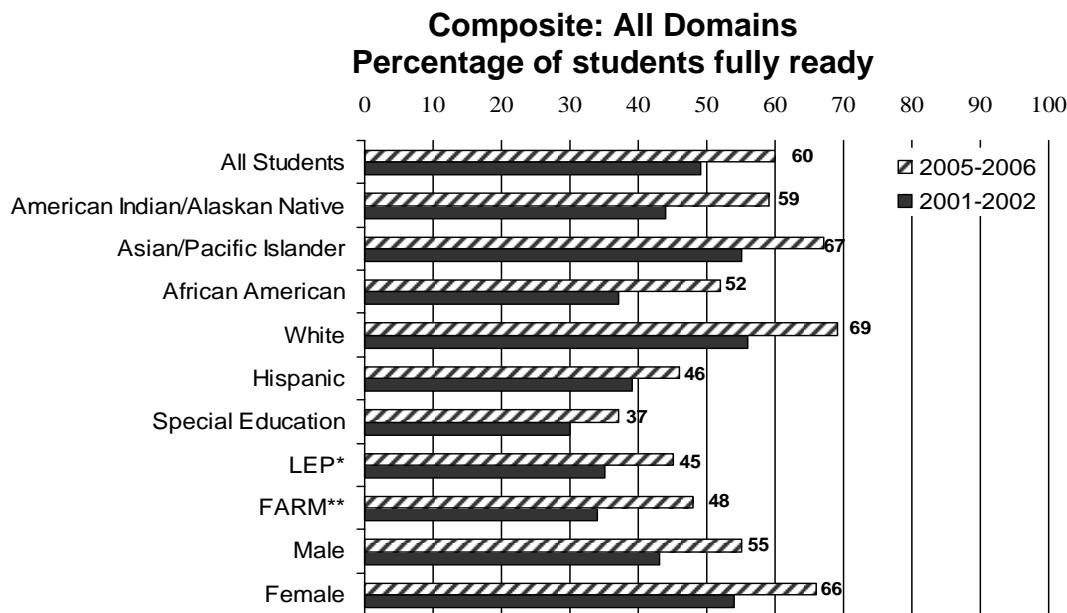- **More Students are Entering Maryland Classrooms Prepared to Learn**

Maryland students entering kindergarten this school year were better prepared than those in the past. The cohort of Maryland's students entering kindergarten in school year 2005-2006 improved its overall school readiness skills by two (2) percent compared to students who entered kindergarten in the 2004-2005 school year. The percentage of incoming kindergarteners considered by their teachers as "fully ready" went from 58 last year to 60 percent this year. The increase from the baseline year of 2001-02 was eleven (11) percent.

Percentage of Students Fully Ready 2002-2006
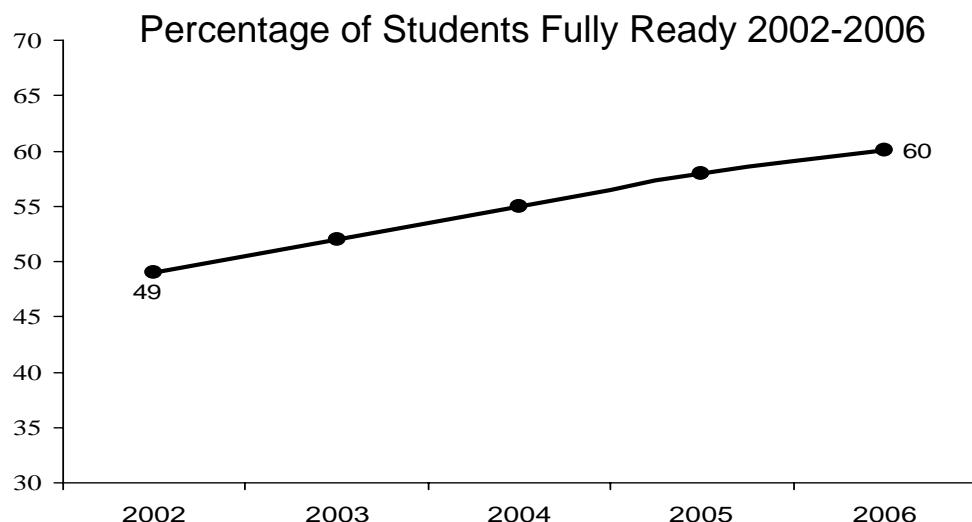
The upward trend is a statistically significant shift from school year 2001-02 and reflects the statewide efforts of improving the early learning opportunities for young children as they begin their school career. The results for the domain *Language and Literacy* are even more pronounced. According to the teachers' assessment of emergent reading and writing skills, 14 percent more children were rated "fully ready" compared to youngsters who entered kindergarten in 2001-02. The increase from last year was two (2) percent from 48 to 50 percent.

- **Improvement in School Readiness is Apparent In Most Demographic Categories**

The overall improvements appear for many subgroups. For instance, the school readiness levels for African American kindergarteners improved for the Composite by two (2) percent for the composite score. The increase for Hispanic children was three (3) percent for the Composite and two (2) percent for *Language and Literacy* scores. The improvement among low-income children and children with disabilities was modest with one (1) for the Composite to 37 percent for each group. However, the composite results for English language learners increased at a greater rate than in previous years. The composite score for English language learners increased by eight (8) percent and by five (5) percent in the domain *Language and Literacy* from 26 to 31 percent.

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Composite: All Domains
Percentage of students fully ready

Category	2005-2006	2001-2002
All Students	60	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	59	
Asian/Pacific Islander	67	
African American	52	
White	69	
Hispanic	46	
Special Education	37	
LEP*	45	
FARM**	48	
Male	55	
Female	66	

*LEP is limited English proficiency. **FARM is Free and Reduced-price Meals.

- **Relationship of School Readiness and Prior Early Care Experiences**

Each year, local school systems collect information of where children received their early care and education one year prior to kindergarten. The co-called Prior Care categories reflect children who were <u>exclusively</u> enrolled in on of the following early childhood programs: childcare centers, Head Start, non-public nursery, family child care, or public school prekindergarten. In addition, the report includes information about children who were not enrolled in state regulated programs but either stayed home or had informal care by a relative or next-to-kin. Each category represents different demographic groups of children. For instance, public school prekindergarten and Head Start programs are for free and almost exclusively serve low-income children, while the parents of children enrolled in child care and non-public nurseries pay substantial tuition for early care and education.

This year's cohort of children who have been enrolled in most of the early care and education programs improved over last year's group of children. For instance, the composite scores for prekindergarten and Head Start children improved by three (3) and two (2) percent respectively. Children who attended child care centers and family child care had better composite scores (i.e., four (4) and five (5) percent, respectively) than the entering kindergarteners from last year. Children who spent their year prior to kindergarten at home or with a relative (i.e., informal care) did not as well as their peers from last year. The Home/Informal group dropped from 51 to 47 percent. A more in-depth report on the relationship between the school readiness results and prior early care experiences, including the results for children from multiple settings, will be released in May 2006.

Availability of the 2005-06 School Readiness Information Report
Data on the Web Site
On March 28, 2006, the school readiness information for school year 2005-06 will be available online at www.marylandpublicschools.org or at the dedicated website for the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) at www.mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/mmsr. Hard copies of the report are available upon request from the Maryland State Department of Education, Early Learning Office, at 410-767-0335.

Background

The Importance of School Readiness

Recent neuro-scientific research strongly supports the belief that young children's learning before they enter formal education is an essential foundation for later school success. Increasingly, state policy makers across the country are addressing readiness for school by improving the learning opportunities for young children before they enter school, particularly those who are enrolled in early care and education programs. In addition, many children require necessary family and health support to thrive developmentally.

Charge by the Maryland General Assembly and the Maryland State Board of Education

On January 20, 2000, the Subcabinet for Children, Youth, and Families submitted a report to the Joint Committee on Children, Youth, and Families outlining strategies to improve services for young children and to prepare them to enter school ready to learn. The report states, "if progress toward our goal (of school readiness) is to be made, policymakers must have access to data by which progress may be measured". In 2001, The Maryland State Board of Education incorporated a school readiness goal in MSDE's strategic plan, using the annual school readiness information to measure the progress toward this goal. The annual school readiness report has been issued since school year 2001-02.

Alignment of School Readiness Measures with the Maryland Content Standards

The Maryland Content Standards and Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC) are included in the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) defining early learning standards and indicators of what children should know and are able to do before they start formal education. The MMSR includes as its assessment component the Work Sampling System™ (WSS), a portfolio-based assessment system helping teachers document and evaluate children's skills, knowledge, behavior, and academic accomplishments across a variety of curricular areas. Through ongoing observation, recording, and evaluating everyday classroom experiences and activities, teachers gain a better understanding of what their students know, are able to do, and what they still need to work on. The WSS™ learning domains which are part of the school readiness information are:

1. Social and Personal Development;
2. Language and Literacy;
3. Mathematical Thinking;
4. Scientific Thinking;
5. Social Studies;
6. The Arts;
7. Physical Development and Health.

Information Reported

Kindergarten teachers use the WSS™ with all children throughout the school year[1]. For this report, teachers have provided information on students' skills for the first grading period in the fall 2005. The fall assessment ratings were done on 30 selected WSS™ performance indicators of the 66 WSS Kindergarten Checklist indicators, reflecting skills and abilities that can reasonably be expected from children when they enter kindergarten. The 30 WSS™ indicators represent the aforementioned seven WSS™ domains (Appendix A) that were used for the school readiness baseline information.

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[1] Several local school systems have the WSS indicators integrated into their kindergarten report cards.

More than 2,000 kindergarten teachers used portfolio-based assessment to document their students' performance in their classrooms during the first eight weeks of school. Between October 30 - November 11, 2005, the teachers evaluated and rated their students' performance according to the WSS™ assessment protocol and specific assessment guidelines ("Exemplars") that were developed by MSDE.

The assessment information in this report reflects scores for each of the seven (7) domains and the composite score of all domains. The information has also been analyzed for each of the seven (7) domains and the composite score by the following demographic information:

- race/ethnicity;
- gender;
- prior early care;[2]
- special education;[3]
- limited English proficiency;[4] and,
- enrollment in free and reduced priced meals program.[5]

Reporting of the scores reflects the percentage of students who have reached one of the following levels of readiness:[6]

Full Readiness: Students consistently demonstrate skills, behaviors, and abilities, which are needed to meet kindergarten expectations successfully.

Approaching Readiness: Students inconsistently demonstrate skills, behaviors, and abilities which are needed to meet kindergarten expectations successfully and require targeted instructional support in specific domains or specific performance indicators.

Developing Readiness: Students do not demonstrate skills, behaviors, and abilities, which are needed to meet kindergarten expectations successfully and require considerable instructional support in several domains or many performance indicators.

School readiness data is reported for:
- Local School Systems and the Edison Partnership Schools
- State of Maryland

Each local school system receives the kindergarten assessment information on individual students, school building, and school system reports in the form of the aforementioned aggregated and disaggregated information. In addition, local school systems receive assessment information on each of the 30 WSS™ indicators of learning.

Determination of Progress
Interpreting the results regarding the readiness levels for specific groups should be evaluated as a way to track progress over time <u>for each domain and each demographic category</u>. For

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[2] This information describes the percentage of students who had their most recent (i.e., 12 months), predominant, and structured early care experience in the following types of programs: child care center; family child care, Head Start, nursery school, public school prekindergarten, or had their prior experience at home or in some type of informal care with a relative. A report on children in multiple settings of early care will be available in May 2006.
[3] This information describes the percentage of students assessed who receive special education services and have an Individual Education Plan (IEP).
[4] This information describes the percentage of students who have a primary or home language other than English and limited or no age-appropriate ability to understand, speak, read, or write English.
[5] This information describes the percentage of students whose application meet the family size and income guidelines of the U.S. Department of Agriculture School Lunch Program for the categories "free" and "reduced" price meals.
[6] See <u>Introduction to Scoring</u> on p. B1

instance, the trend for the domain, *Language and Literacy*, should be tracked over time by comparing the results from year to year. Any progress is measured at the 95 percent confidence interval[7]. The same measure applies, for example, to determining any significant changes over time for *Language and Literacy* using specific prior care categories, such as prekindergarten or child care center. Caution must be taken when interpreting the information when relatively small numbers of children are involved. The information presented in this report does not presume any specific causes for the annual changes in the data.

Use of Data and Accountability
The data provides a snapshot of school readiness levels of entering kindergarteners for the state and for each local school system in the fall of each year. The school readiness information is designed for purposes of instructional accountability, i.e., the data should inform practitioners and policymakers of how to improve the learning opportunities for young children and to begin the discourse for improving the quality of early childhood education. In general, the information can be used to:

- Develop a county-wide needs assessment regarding the skill levels of children entering kindergarten.
- Target federal, state, and local funds to address identified needs in the county.
- Develop forums for partnership building.
- Modify curricular and intervention programs and to identify resources for kindergarten.

Validity and Reliability of Data
Since Maryland's kindergarten teachers are using a portfolio-based assessment to evaluate their students' skill levels, any concerns about the subjectivity of the teachers' evaluations must be addressed. The school readiness information is based on formative and summative evaluation protocols. The summative evaluations in the fall include the students' observed and documented records of their skills, behavior, and knowledge in response to the introduction of the kindergarten curriculum. The teachers are trained in the use of specific guidelines[8] which define fall benchmarks of kindergarten expectations for each of the 30 WSS™ indicators of learning. The indicators for the WSS™ domains language and literacy, mathematical and scientific thinking, as well as social studies are aligned with the Maryland Content Standards and the state's Voluntary State Curriculum. Any sampling error of the results is eliminated by implementing census administration of the WSS™. In addition, each year the analyzed data is being verified by each local school system as well as an independent vendor who also provides reliability analyses for the state and county data sets.[9]

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[7] A program to test the difference between two proportions was made available to all local school systems
[8] The specific guidelines, MMSR Fall Performance Examples, describe exemplars of student behaviors in terms of rubrics established for the WSS rating scale.
[9] The reliability analysis includes (a) correlation analysis to identify the degree of association between the student scores and school scores; (b) linear regression analysis to determine the relative effect of each domain on the total score; (c) reliability coefficients to measure the inner consistency of the assessment; and (d) item-scale analysis to determine the relative influence of each item on the assessment. The results of the reliability analyses regarding the school readiness information for school year 2005-06 are available at MSDE's Early Learning Office.