

# RESEARCH BRIEF

Oregon School Readiness Research Consortium

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## ENSURING ENROLLMENT INTO EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

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Attending Kindergarten comes with many challenges for young children, one of which is adapting to a new environment. Adapting to a new environment will take time, but the transition can be accelerated by the development of certain skills that help prepare children for change. Within this brief we will first talk about the importance of developing skills that assist children with the transition into Kindergarten, next we will discuss how delays in the physical domain can influence later life success and academic achievement, and lastly we will provide suggestions to policy makers on how to revise current practice that will promote age-appropriate development of motor skills for all children in the state of Oregon, ultimately aimed at better school readiness.

Although parent involvement, peer influences, and school characteristics all influence engagement and motivation in school, there are individual characteristics that a child holds that can assist a child's transition to school. Children who are able to embrace the new experience and transition into the classroom quickly begin learning new

knowledge. Alternatively, children who have difficulty with the transition will have a more challenging time beginning to learn new content before they adapt to their new environment<sup>1</sup>. Skills that assist children with engagement and motivation, as well as help transition into Kindergarten are commonly referred to as school readiness skills. Included in a host of school readiness skills are the timely development of age-appropriate motor skills. Commonly motor skills are broken down into two types, fine motor skills and gross motor skills. Both of these skills are important for a child's development and have been linked to school readiness outcomes<sup>2,3</sup>. Fine motor skills involve smaller movements and include tasks such as picking up a pencil between the thumb and finger or pointing to a toy to play with. Gross motor skills involve movement and coordination and include tasks such as running across the playground to catch friends playing tag or hopping from square to square during hopscotch. Motor skills allow children to explore their environment, learn new information, and simultaneously develop social skills. It is important for children to acquire these motor skills early to foster optimal child development.

# RESEARCH BRIEF

## Oregon School Readiness Research Consortium

Unfortunately, many children with disabilities or those experiencing developmental delay (ranging in nature) have deficits in the physical domain and challenges acquiring age-appropriate motor skills. In the state of Oregon, a child that is experiencing significant delay in the physical domain is eligible to receive early intervention services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act<sup>4</sup>. Standardized assessments are used to determine if a child is eligible and no single measure or source of information alone may be used to establish eligibility into the program<sup>4</sup>. The services most commonly accessed by children less than five years of age are speech language therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy<sup>5</sup>. Getting children into the service programs early on is important for their development and for later school success. The earlier that children are able to develop fine and gross motor skills the more exposure they will get to their environment before the start of Kindergarten. Intervening early on to develop motor skills and other aspects of development is important for later school success<sup>6</sup>.

Policy has great influence on family and children's access to early intervention services. Research has shown that in states with narrow eligibility criteria, such as Oregon, lower rates of enrollment into services occur<sup>7</sup>. Narrow eligibility criteria creates delayed access to services, that then have to be implemented later, when a child's successes in acquiring motor skills are known to be fewer. Waiting for delays to emerge has implications beyond the physical domain and negatively impacts salient child behaviors known for school readiness, in

addition waiting also results in greater expense to the state<sup>8</sup>. Other factors associated with lower enrollment into early intervention programs include lower socioeconomic status, mild severity of delay, and no formal disability/ delayed diagnosis<sup>7</sup>. To ensure that children who are eligible for services receive those services in the state of Oregon, programs should be developed to target children within lower socioeconomic status areas. Educating individuals will bring awareness of these available services and we predict will help remediate the disparity seen between those of differing status in our population. Revising policy to include a greater number of children eligible for early intervention services will not only benefit children as they grow, but will also be an investment for the state of Oregon and ultimately impact aspects of school readiness.

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<sup>1</sup>Ponitz, C. C., McClelland, M. M., Matthews, J. S., & Morrison, F. J. (2009). A structured observation of behavioral self-regulation and its contribution to kindergarten outcomes. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), 605.

<sup>2</sup>Tepfer, A. T. S. (2015). Predicting school readiness using motor skill proficiency of at-risk preschooler (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ScholarsArchive@OSU. (<http://hdl.handle.net/1957/56068>)

<sup>3</sup>MacDonald, M., Lipscomb, S., McClelland, M., Duncan, R., Becker, D., Anderson, K. & Kile, M. (in review). Relations of preschoolers' visual motor and object manipulation skills with executive function and social behavior.

<sup>4</sup>H.R.1350 - 108th Congress (2003-2004): Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress. (2004). Retrieved May 2, 2015, from <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/1350?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22IDEA%22%5D%7D>

# RESEARCH BRIEF

## Oregon School Readiness Research Consortium

<sup>5</sup>Raspa, M., Hebbeler, K., Bailey Jr, D. B., & Scarborough, A. A. (2010). Service provider combinations and the delivery of early intervention services to children and families. *Infants & Young Children, 23*(2), 132–144.

<sup>6</sup>McClelland, M. M., Acock, A. C., & Morrison, F. J. (2006). The impact of kindergarten learning-related skills on academic trajectories at the end of elementary school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21*(4), 471–490.  
<http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2006.09.003>

<sup>7</sup>McManus, B., McCormick, M., Acevedo-Garcia, D., Ganz, M., & Hauser-Cram, P. (2009). The effect of state early intervention eligibility policy on participation among a cohort of young CSHCN. *Pediatrics, 124*(4), 368–374.  
<http://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-1255G>

<sup>8</sup>Grant, R. (2005). State strategies to contain costs in the early intervention program: policy and evidence. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 25*(4), 243–250.