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Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Kindergarten Readiness

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The University of Southern Mississippi

PRE-KINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS
OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS

by

Joshua Aaron Bressler

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2011

ABSTRACT

PRE-KINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON KINDERGARTEN READINESS

by Joshua Aaron Bressler

May 2011

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a difference in perception between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers on kindergarten readiness. In addition, this study sought to find out if there was any difference in PEAK assessment scores between those students who attended pre-kindergarten versus those students who did not attend pre-kindergarten.

The instruments used for this research were the Pascagoula Early Assessment for Kindergarten (PEAK) scores and the *Kindergarten Readiness Questionnaire*. The PEAK scores measured students' readiness by assessing their knowledge on language, writing communication, math, and fine motor development from the onset upon entering kindergarten. The Kindergarten Readiness Questionnaire contained 42 questions. Of these 42 questions, five were demographic and the remaining questions were based on a 5-point Likert scale to determine the perceptions between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers.

The PEAK scores and the questionnaire results were analyzed by calculating the means, standard deviations, and independent samples *t*-test. There were also some ancillary findings on how pre-kindergarten correlated with testing proficient. These data were analyzed by calculating a chi-square test.

Once the data were analyzed, it was determined that students who did attend pre-kindergarten were much more likely to test higher on the PEAK assessment upon entering kindergarten. Also, those students who attended pre-kindergarten were at a greater likelihood to test proficient with the PEAK assessment. Data also showed that pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers had mixed feelings about kindergarten readiness. On perceptions of kindergarten readiness skills, kindergarten teachers believed students were not as ready as the pre-kindergarten teachers believed. On perceptions of at-risk factors, kindergarten teachers believed that these factors were more of a burden than the pre-kindergarten teachers believed. On perceptions of barriers, the kindergarten teachers believed that these barriers played more of a factor than the pre-kindergarten teachers believed. For perceptions of ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools and ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs, both the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers believed the same and that they both could benefit from communicating more effectively.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In today's educational world, accountability has been what drives every school in the nation. It has been what holds every teacher accountable for his or her job. Every elementary school has been graded based on a single test, the MCT2, which has been administered at the end of every school year. This test has allowed a school to find out what individuals and schools weak and strong areas were in terms of student achievement. Based on this information, the schools and/or teachers of the following school year modified the educational needs of each student.

Teachers would want the students that come to them having learned all the standards that were supposed to be taught to them in the previous years. In reality, this has not been what really happens because not all students were at the same level. This has sometimes been frustrating to teachers and had them wondering what grade or where did these "below-average" students actually fall behind in their education. To be fair, it may not have even been in any grade or in any school that hindered a child's education. For many "below-average" students, it all came down to the beginnings, before they even entered kindergarten. These students may not have been afforded an adequate amount of educational skills prior to entering kindergarten. These students will have fallen behind from the onset of their education and will spend much of their educational career completing interventions and taking remedial classes. If these students were fortunate enough to get a proper education prior to kindergarten and were prepared, then they would not have to be worried about these interventions and/or taking remediation classes.

Instead, they could have been working on broadening their education and depth of knowledge.

Since there were so many children falling behind at such a young age, it made sense to try and catch them up as soon as possible, so that they did not fall even further behind. According to Morgan, Farkas, and Hibel (2008), children who entered kindergarten unprepared unknowingly fell into the “Matthew Effect,” which meant “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” (p. 187). Children who lived in homes where reading was being fostered were the children who were likely to enjoy reading at a young age. These children were read to more frequently, which enhanced their reading proficiency and increased their reading acquisition. These children fell under the “rich get richer” in the “Matthew Effect.”

On the other end of the spectrum, children who did not acquire these skills at a young age followed a different path. These children were not fortunate enough to be introduced to good reading habits; therefore, they did not develop an enjoyment of reading. These students have difficulty developing reading skills that the other children have already had exposure to. These students have had negative attitudes toward reading and want to read less. These students have avoided reading for so long and have had fallen under “the poor get poorer” in the “Matthew Effect” (Morgan et al., 2008).

Morgan et al. stated that there was some evidence of the “Matthew Effect” present in schools (as cited in Smith, 1998). This study looked at the highest and lowest assessment scores of pre-kindergarteners and compared them to the students’ scores when they entered third grade. Smith found that 93% of those who tested high in pre-kindergarten also tested high in the third grade, whereas 71% of those who tested low in

pre-kindergarten also tested low in third grade. In similar study, Morgan et al. stated that there were similar results found. Their study looked at average-to-good and poor readers of first graders compared to when the students entered fourth grade (as cited in Juel, 1998). It was found that 87% of those who were average-to-good readers in first grade were also average-to-good readers in fourth grade, whereas 88% of those who were poor readers in the first grade were also poor readers in the fourth grade.

Although the “Matthew Effect” was evident, it could have been concluded that it was more one-sided, where the “poor get poorer.” Children who have entered kindergarten without adequate reading skills were likely to stay behind the rest of their peers and would not be able to catch up. The rate at which the low-skilled readers’ growth decreased was much more than the higher-skilled readers’ growth increase. These students needed intense early interventions to keep them from falling even further behind (Morgan et al., 2008).

According to Fielding (2006), this achievement gap that was evident among students in public schools was not created within the schools; it was likely created between birth and kindergarten. Data from the Northwest Evaluation Association stated that almost all of the language arts achievement gap and about 70% of the math achievement gap was created before the second grade. This indicates that high schools, middle schools, and even elementary schools were the cause of this achievement gap.

Fielding (2006) stated that in Kennewick, Washington, about 20% of the students were entering kindergarten with the language and math skills of a 2- or 3-year-old and another 20% were entering with the skills of a 4-year-old. This means that roughly 40% of their students were entering kindergarten one to 3 years behind where they were

supposed to be before they even got to kindergarten. Furthermore, if these students wanted to be on grade level by the third grade, they were expected to make adequate yearly progress every year and do 5 to 7 years of “catching up” in only 4 years. These students would continue to struggle unless something was done about it. Although this task does sound difficult, it is what all elementary principals are faced with under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requirements by 2014.

To help improve this deficit in Kennewick, Washington, the school district needed a solution. Here, the school district made the community aware of this problem and let residents know how they could help solve this epidemic. The school district held training sessions that let parents know the importance of early involvement and interaction with their children. These parents were given free teaching tools and activities to help encourage them to seek early learning for their children. In the long run, these training sessions paid off because 85% of the students who had their parents come to at least two meetings were meeting kindergarten standard, which was 35% higher than those who had parents who attended no sessions (Fielding, 2006).

According to Foster (2007), it was important for students to come to kindergarten prepared, because students’ learning “required students to move through hierarchal and overlapping developmental stages” (p. 178). These stages were literacy, phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension. Students who were prepared by the time they came to kindergarten were able to spend the first 2 years of their schooling becoming more fluent in their ability to decode and comprehend grade level text. Those students who did not come to kindergarten prepared were not able to acquire these decoding and comprehension skills until the end of the first grade, thus delaying the process of the

development stages. Students must be able to perform at certain levels in order to move on to the later developmental stages.

Ou and Reynolds (2006) stated that since so many children were beginning kindergarten unprepared, it was essential that they get the adequate amount of learning opportunities that would better prepare them from the beginning. Early childhood education was critical to preventing students from entering kindergarten unprepared. Early childhood education has offered students educational opportunities that were not available in childcare environments. These educational opportunities have allowed students to start kindergarten “equally” with their peers. In addition, they also have served families with “social and health services and parent educational components” (Ou & Reynolds, 2006, p.176).

Early childhood education has allowed children to be better prepared for kindergarten, but it has also had significant long-term effects on these children. Students who had early childhood education have had “higher reading and mathematics achievement test scores, fewer grade retentions, more years of education, greater likelihood to attend a 4-year college... higher rate of high school graduation... and higher adult earnings up to age 27” (Ou & Reynolds, 2006, p. 176).

Early childhood education has also had lasting effects on the community because of the graduation rates. Those who graduated high school earned 30% more income than those who dropped out of high school. High school dropouts counted for about half of those on welfare and about half the population in prison. With a greater opportunity to be financially stable, there was less of a likelihood that they would become a juvenile delinquent or commit a crime as an adult (Ou & Reynolds, 2006).

The community can also benefit financially from early childhood education. Pre-kindergartens have “provided a return of \$7.14 per dollar invested by increasing economic well-being and tax revenues, and by reducing public expenditures for remedial education, criminal justice treatment, and crime victims” (Ou & Reynolds, 2006, p.193). These financial benefits have had the same ramifications on school districts. It is much more cost-efficient to invest in childhood education than interventions later on in life (Ou & Reynolds, 2006).

Espinosa (1997) stated that kindergarten teachers felt that students were coming to school inadequately prepared to learn. Many of these kindergarten teachers feel that the parents not being available to their children is the primary concern for the children not being ready for kindergarten. Washington (2001) said that pre-kindergarten teachers have had a mixed perception on how prepared students were ready for kindergarten but did feel that the reason those students were not prepared was because of the unavailability of longer pre-kindergarten days and parental involvement.

Espinosa (1997) declared that there was a difference in readiness between children who came from rural areas versus those children who came from urban areas. Those children who came from the rural areas were more likely to not have had any pre-kindergarten programs or have had pre-kindergarten programs that were of poor quality compared to those from urban areas. It was the poor pre-kindergarten education or lack of pre-kindergarten education that was hindering these urban area children from becoming academically successful.

Statement of the Problem

The problem with many children when they entered kindergarten was that too many were coming to school unprepared and not ready to learn. Many children did not have the necessary skills that it took to become successful students in the educational world. For those students who were not prepared, it became even more difficult for them to keep up with their peers who had been adequately prepared upon entering kindergarten. With many of these children being at different levels of readiness, it became increasingly difficult for teachers to bring all students up to grade level. When children entered kindergarten unprepared and were not able to get on grade level by the end of kindergarten, it became even more difficult for these children to be on grade level as they moved along in their educational careers. Many of these children who did not get on grade level could “slip through the cracks,” could have to take remediation classes, or get placed into special education classes. If these children were afforded the proper education before they entered kindergarten then they could have been able to begin kindergarten prepared and not have fallen behind grade level.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward students' readiness as they enter kindergarten. This study also investigated if there was a difference between those teachers who identify their workplace as urban or rural. In addition, this study compared the kindergarten readiness test scores of students who went to pre-kindergarten to students who did not in order to determine if there was a difference between these students' level of readiness.

Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in kindergarten readiness test scores between those students who went to a pre-k program versus those students who did not attend a pre-kindergarten program?
2. Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward kindergarten readiness skills as the students enter kindergarten?
3. Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward at-risk factors on kindergarten readiness?
4. Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools?
5. Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools?
6. Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs?
7. Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers who are from urban populations versus rural populations?

Definition of Terms

The following terms were operationally defined to provide a better understanding of what was studied:

Disadvantaged students - students who come from homes that are economically disadvantaged and living in poverty (Beshorov & Morrow, 2009).

Achievement gap - the academic achievement between those students who are classified as disadvantaged students and those who are not disadvantaged students (Foster, 2007).

Readiness - how prepared a student is on a “prescribed set of knowledge, understanding and skills” (Cox, 2008, p. 53).

Cognitive development - the development of the mind (Day, 1981).

Accountability - the way schools measure productivity for all educators (Nichols & Berliner, 2008).

Rural - refers to “the open countryside and those outside urbanized areas” (Espinosa, 1997, p. 121).

Urban - refers to inner-city schools where there is a significant number of economically disadvantaged students (MacDonald & Figueredo, 2010).

Assumptions

The assumptions that were made in this study are as follows:

1. It was assumed that all teachers who participated in the study answered each question on the questionnaire honestly.
2. It was assumed that all teachers who participated and answered the questionnaire were able to read and speak English.

Delimitations

The delimitation of this study was as follows:

1. The data that were gathered from the kindergarten readiness scores were limited to the kindergarteners from the selected school district in south Mississippi and

cannot be generalized for all public schools or private school kindergarten students.

Justification

Kindergarten readiness has been a critical indicator on how well a child has performed academically from the onset and has had lasting effects. Although schools did not have any control of how prepared students were as they entered their classrooms, they still had to educate each and every child. Children have come from their own unique backgrounds; therefore, their kindergarten readiness was at different levels. Many of these children have had some type of pre-kindergarten education and inadequately prepared for kindergarten; however, there have been some children who were not able to attend a pre-kindergarten whatsoever and were not academically prepared. Much of what children already know when they enter kindergarten has had significant implications on their early childhood success and long-term success.

Although there has been research done about kindergarten readiness, there was a limited amount done regarding the perceptions of pre-k and kindergarten teachers. Understanding the perceptions of these teachers can allow curriculum designers more insight on how these teachers felt about children who were academically prepared versus those who were not. Obtaining the perspectives of the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs can help justify if these programs need to become more aligned in their curriculum and help children become more successful.

The result of this study could allow legislators to understand what has been happening with children prior to entering kindergarten. Have the pre-kindergarten teachers believed that the children were ready for kindergarten? Have the kindergarten

teachers believed that the children were ready for kindergarten? Understanding these perceptions, then finding out where these children actually were in their academics, could allow curriculum designers to revamp certain areas for the curriculum to assure that all children are academically prepared. For those children who did not attend a pre-k program and were not academically prepared, the perceptions of the kindergarten teachers would allow families to better understand what skills were lacking.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

According to Stebbins and Scott (2007), every day are were millions of three and 4-year-old children who attend some type of early educational program. These children learn in many different ways from looking at books, listening to stories, counting and measuring objects, and learning how to express their own thoughts and ideas through language. They were able to explore and discover the world around them with others, as well as independently. It was through all of these activities that these young children were able to succeed in their education through strengthening the foundations of their literacy, numeracy, social, emotional, and physical development.

Early childhood educational programs have spanned from a wide variety of programs, from state-funded pre-kindergarten (pre-k), Head Start, and child care programs. Many of these children have attended programs that were in public schools, private schools, colleges, businesses, community-based centers, and homes. Even though there were numerous types of educational services, many of them had inadequate resources, poor quality, limited operating hours, and had strict eligibility requirements that made it difficult for families to obtain their children access to these opportunities (Stebbins & Scott, 2007).

In order to promote high-quality early childhood education, it was important that these programs hire highly educated teachers. Regardless of where parents chose to send their children, 3- and 4-year-old children needed to be able to learn and play at full-day, full-year programs for working families. The education these children needed to be

getting should have been able to better prepare them as they transitioned from pre-kindergarten into kindergarten (Stebbins & Scott, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

According to Day (1981), Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development changed the way many psychologists and educators view the development of a child. Piaget stated that there were four stages of development, which are the sensory-motor, the pre-operational, the concrete operational, and the formal operational. It was within these stages that children thought about the world around them and tried to solve everyday problems.

Boeree (2006) stated that the first stage, sensory-motor, lasted from birth to age 2. Here, infants used their senses and motor abilities to understand their complex environment. The knowledge that infants gained was rapidly developed through physical interaction and through new experiences. Through these experiences, the infants were able to develop a mental representation of objects; thus, further developed their imagination (Boeree, 2006).

The second stage, pre-operational, lasted from age 2 to about age 7. When infants' minds developed, they were able to imagine symbols through their imagination. They were able to understand that one object could represent another object. For example, they understood that a drawing, written word, or spoken word could have also represented a real object. Here, infants were able to develop their creativity with the absence of the actual object. During this stage, there was an understanding of the past and the future. The child was able to learn from past experiences and applied them to what goes on in the future (Boeree, 2006).

The third stage, concrete operational, lasted from age 7 to age 11. During this stage, a child was able to think logically and could better understand the world around them through their problem solving abilities. Here, a child could put objects in order, realize the relationships objects had and did not have with each other, understand that objects could change to a different form and return back to its original form, and view ideas from a different perspective (Boeree, 2006).

The fourth and final stage, formal operational, lasted from age 12 to adulthood. In this stage, a young adult was able to start thinking abstractly and could envision concrete objects in hypothetical situations. When encountered with everyday problems, they were able to break down the situation, think in a systematic way, and solve the problem by coming up with a conclusion (Boeree, 2006).

According to Warrick (2001), Piaget suggested that through his theory of Constructivism that knowledge was gained through experience. It was through these experiences that learners learned how to construct knowledge on their own. It was through assimilation that individuals develop knowledge. When individuals assimilated new knowledge, it was developed from previous knowledge and then it built upon this previous knowledge. Here, learners could come up with their own conclusion of a particular situation, based on their background or the way they saw the world (Warrick, 2001).

Learning through social interaction was an important aspect of constructivism. Through social interaction, the learner could gain knowledge through learning experiences that were designed to allow students to discover the desired information. In order for learners to acquire more knowledge, they had to be around others to interact and

develop their own independent understandings of the environment around them. This social interaction was much more meaningful to learners because it was more relevant to them and they could gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum (Warrick, 2001).

Accountability

What is Accountability?

According to Nichols and Berliner (2008), there was a great bearing on high-stakes testing. Educators from every aspect have constantly been under pressure to perform at high levels each and every year. High-stakes testing was how schools and school districts were measured in relation to academic success. Even though high-stakes testing has not been accepted by all educators, it is here to stay, and educators all strived to achieve academic success (Nichols & Berliner, 2008).

There were many indicators that could point to success in high-stakes testing. There has not been a simple recipe that equaled success for those schools that achieved academic success. For those schools that were trying to reach academic success, they were trying to raise tests scores as well. In order for schools across the nation to avoid being under constant pressure to improve, all schools must reach academic success (Nichols & Berliner, 2008).

High-Stakes Testing

According to Lay and Stokes-Brown (2009), standardized testing played a significant role in educational policies. They have been administered to students for years throughout elementary, middle, and high schools across the United States. Many of these test scores were used to find out the students' academic strengths and weaknesses. In addition, these tests were being used to determine if a child would advance to the next

grade level and even to find out if a child would graduate from high school. Teachers could earn tenure based upon these tests. Individual schools could be punished or rewarded based on their schools performance. It was through this accountability that students receive an equitable education.

Mississippi Curriculum Test

The high-stakes test that is taken in Mississippi is the Mississippi Curriculum Test, Second Edition (MCT2). According to the Mississippi Department of Education (2008), it is a criterion-referenced test that consisted of two types of assessments, reading/language arts and mathematics. The reading/language arts assessment portion of the MCT2 was fully aligned with the *2006 Mississippi Language Arts Framework Revised*. The mathematics assessment portion of the MCT2 was fully aligned with the *2007 Mississippi Mathematics Framework Revised*. The MCT2 was the test that Mississippi used for grades 3 through 8, under the federal legislation requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). As a result of these tests each year, schools and school districts in Mississippi were held under the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System, specifically the Achievement, Growth, and Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) Models. Based on the yearly findings of each individual school and school district's test scores, instruction and student achievement needed to be increased (Mississippi Department of Education, 2008).

MCT2 was a federally required high-stakes test that each school in Mississippi took under the guidelines of the NCLB Act. The MCT2 had serious consequences for students and educators. Students could establish whether or not they were eligible for certain programs within a school. In addition, depending on whether a student made a

low enough test score, it decided on whether a student needed additional help and took remediation classes. High-stakes testing was supposed to encourage teachers to teach only the meaningful areas and improve those areas in their students. These tests were believed to be reflecting the quality of instruction of teachers and providing them accountability. Schools and school districts that did not reach the goal set by their individual state were given undesirable consequences from the NCLB Act (Merchant, 2004).

Paris and Urdan (2000) suggested that schools and school districts have continued to try and improve within their respective schools, but an area that these schools reached out to for help was the parents. Many parents had not grasped the whole concept of high-stakes testing. They also did not understand how the scoring of the test was used to show their child's mastery of a basic skill. They have often misinterpreted criterion-referenced test scores with a normative percentile. It was misunderstandings such as these that parents were unable to measure the ability of their child's educational progress (Paris & Urdan, 2000).

Accountability was what drove every school in the nation. It was what held every teacher accountable for his or her job. Every elementary school was basically graded based on a single test, the MCT2, which was administered at the end of every school year. This test allowed a school to determine individuals' and schools' weak and strong areas. Based on this information, the schools and/or teachers of the following school year could modify the educational instruction for the needs of each student.

No Child Left Behind

Since early childhood education has had such a major impact on the lives of so many, it was important that children be afforded the opportunity to an adequate education. There have been many children across the United States who were still not proficient academically and it was up to the school to try and close the achievement gaps between those who were low achieving to those who were already high achieving. According to Beecher and Sweeny (2008), since the NCLB of 2001, the focus on closing the achievement gap has intensified. This was especially true for those achievement gaps among the culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and economically diverse groups because of the great concern of educators and policymakers. Along with the initiation of the NCLB came accountability and the adoption of high-stakes testing that measured schools and their effectiveness. Accountability was not anything new to schools because it has been popular since the early 1990s. Since this time, “school report cards, school choice through vouchers and charter schools, and school takeovers through local and state-level oversight and reconstruction have gained popularity” (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008, p. 502). Even though accountability has been around for quite some time, the achievement gap has not decreased; it has actually increased (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008).

Through the 1960s-1980s, efforts to close the achievement gap had also faltered through the progress in reducing school segregation. Communities had become economically segregated, which caused schools to have larger populations of minorities and a poorer population, thus causing lower achievement. Poverty has been widely known to have a negative impact on achievement. Under NCLB, reading and mathematics were the two main subjects that were measured to determine academic

progress for grades 3-8. Although efforts have been made to reduce achievement gaps, there were still gaps evident between White students and African-American and Hispanic students, as well as between high and low socioeconomic (SES) households (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008).

There were many factors that could have affected student achievement, which included “the rigor of curriculum; the experience, quality, and the commitment of the teachers; the learning environment, including safety and expectations of students; and class size” (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008, p. 504). The family also played a crucial role in a child’s education, which included how often a parent read to the child at home, how involved a parent was at the school, and how regularly a child attended school. Schools that had low student achievement had to go through the process of school improvement, which included “standards-based instruction, curriculum alignment and coherence, data-based decision making, improving teacher skills through evaluation and professional development, family and community involvement, and other research-based initiatives” (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008, p. 504).

Pre-Kindergarten Preparation

Parental Involvement

Berliner (2009) stated that in the U.S. there had been a goal to try and narrow the achievement gap between the lower and middle class, as well as between racial and ethnic groups. A key component of the NCLB act was to promote change within schools and accomplish this goal. The difficulty behind trying to close this achievement gap was the out-of-school factors (OSF). It was these OSFs that affected the health and learning opportunities of children. The key OSFs were: “(1) low birth-weight and non-genetic

prenatal influences on children; (2) inadequate medical, dental, and vision care, often a result of inadequate or no medical insurance; (3) food insecurity; (4) environmental pollutants; (5) family relations and family stress; and (6) neighborhood characteristics” (Berlinger, 2009, p. 1). It was these OSFs that increased the children’s physical, sociological, and psychological problems, thus causing the children to become more likely to have attention disorders, increased absenteeism, underdeveloped language skills, and oppositional behavior.

Feleding (2006) declared that in Kennewich, Washington, the school district found a solution to help improve this achievement gap. The school district made the community aware of this problem and let residents know how they could help solve this epidemic. The school district held training sessions that apprised parents of the importance of early involvement and interaction with their children. These parents were given free tools and activities to help encourage them to seek early learning for their children. In the long run, these training sessions paid off because 85% of the students who had their parents come to at least two meetings were meeting kindergarten standard, which was 35% higher than those students who had parents who did not attend any of the sessions (Fielding, 2006).

Since children in their pre-kindergarten years were totally dependent on their parents, it was also vital that parents play a major role in the understanding of how they could improve on their children’s educational well-being. Bailey (2006) indicated that a key ingredient in trying to get students to read more had been getting the parents to encourage their children to read. When parents had encouraged their children to read, there had been a higher that likelihood reading would take place. The best time for

parents to encourage their child to read was as early as possible. It was also beneficial for parents to read to their children before they were able to read for themselves to give them exposure to reading. Research had shown that pre-kindergarten reading exposure does influence reading proficiency for the general student population, and even more so for those students who were economically at-risk (Bailey, 2006).

When there was reading taking place at the home by the students, parents reading to their children, or pre-kindergarten reading experiences, children had acquired reading literacy at a higher rate. Regardless of socioeconomic status, pre-kindergarteners who had been exposed to reading have enhanced their early reading literacy and help eliminate failure rates for public school children in the United States (Bailey, 2006).

Pre-kindergarten reading exposure has played a vital role in influencing reading literacy. The presence of book availability to families also influenced parental involvement in a child's education. Parents have laid the foundation for reading literacy for their children with pre-kindergarten experiences. These parental efforts to build early literacy for young children were especially critical for those families who were economically at-risk. Pre-kindergarten experiences have also correlated with children's reading achievement. Children who had exposure to literary activities in pre-kindergarten had positive influences on whether they developed reading skills (Bailey, 2006).

Pre-kindergarten reading experiences did not have to be limited to only reading. Pre-kindergarteners who were exposed to picture books quickly moved on to reading books. There were other literacy materials that could be exposed to children, such as everyday reading for information, singing songs, and storytelling. Children with this exposure have had a higher likelihood of early reading success. Parents have been

encouraged to read to their children at least three to four times a week to increase the chance of reading literacy. It had been the parent modeling the reading at an early age that set an example to their children. This interaction between the parent and the child has built a positive attitude toward reading for the child. This has helped the child develop a love for reading and turned him or her into a lifelong reader, no matter what SES background (Bailey, 2006).

According to Kuo, Franke, Regalado, and Halfon (2004), a national survey showed that parents have been reading to their children less frequently. Of children ages 4 to 35 months, 52% of them were read to on a daily basis. Even though these rates were low, they were even lower for Black or Hispanic children than for White children. A key reason for this was because many homes do not have the resources, such as children's books (Kuo et al., 2004).

This interaction of child and parent had been crucial for the child's likelihood of school success. Not only was it important for the child's success, but it promoted an emotional attachment to the parents and enhanced parent-child interaction. This interaction between the child and parent improved their language ability by increasing the number of words they hear (Kuo et al., 2004).

A National Literacy Survey found that 90 million adults in the United States had low English literacy proficiency. Of these adults, 35% were between the ages 16 and 34. These low literacy rates of adults can have a substantial effect on reading literacy rates of children. Even though there was much attention on the youths' reading literacy, many children in the United States have had difficulty mastering basic reading levels (Kuo et al., 2004).

In the 2000 National Report Card of Fourth Grade Reading, there were only 32% of children at or above the proficient level and 37% below the basic level. These numbers were even lower for ethnic and low SES children. Here, 63% of the Black children and 58% of the Hispanic children were reading below basic levels and 27% of the White children were reading below basic levels (Kuo et al., 2004).

These indicators for SES were found in the National Report Card, which came from the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Here, 14% of the children who were identified as low income on the NSLP tested above the proficient level, and 60% tested below the basic level. In comparison, 41% of the children who were not eligible for NSLP tested above the proficient level, and 28% tested below the basic level. This disadvantage for the low SES children has started at an early age of the child's life (Kuo et al., 2004).

In the United States, parents who had not been reading to their children at a young age had become a major problem and had been an epidemic across all ethnic and SES. The promotion of reading to children at a young age had been essential, in order to increase their reading proficiency. These early experiences had helped children's brain develop and increase their long-term social, economic and academic success in adulthood (Kuo, Franke, Regalado, & Halfon, 2004).

Another important aspect of promoting early literacy to children came from pediatricians. Pediatricians encouraged parents to start reading to their children at the age of 6 months. Pediatricians provided parents with guidance on how to improve language and reading skills for their children. Although pediatricians had been beneficial, many of them did not discuss the importance of reading to the parents. Pediatricians were in a

position to make an impact on the development of children, not only academically, but for long-term health outcomes (Kuo et al., 2004).

Regardless whether or not the pediatricians guided the parents, Faires, Nichols, and Rickelman (2000) stated that the parents were their children's first and primary teachers. A primary misconception to the public was that children did not learn to read until they reach kindergarten or first grade. However, this was not true; first grade teachers' primary focus had been to facilitate reading instruction to the students. A child should have had the foundation of reading provided to them prior to entering the first grade. Parents needed to provide these opportunities for reading before and after first grade for later literacy success. Many parents lack confidence in their ability to help their children with reading. This behavior had been a deterrent to parental involvement in schools. When parents became involved in early intervention of their children, it increased the chances that they will become active in their children's education (Faires et al., 2000).

A majority of where a child's oral language and reading skills came from was the home. Therefore, parents should not rely on schools to be their children's sole teacher. Schools act as instructional facilities that built the students' background of language and reading. Children should be encouraged as early as pre-kindergarten to foster a love for learning to read. This helped out as they entered kindergarten, then they build as readers and became a proficient learners (Faires et al., 2000).

Many educators offered parents hands-on activities to help out with the literacy growth of their children. However, there were many parents, such as those with low income, which had been perceived to not have an interest in their child's education. This

was not the case; low income parents, just as any other parents, wanted to try and help their children succeed. They wanted to help their children with their homework and help develop their children's reading and writing skills (Faires et al., 2000).

The main key to teachers helping their students in the home had been keeping the lines of communication open with the parents. This type of partnership between the teachers and parents was extremely important to the child's education. Parents needed to know what their child's strengths and weaknesses are at school. Without this communication, it was much more difficult for parents to help. Something as simple as a letter home was very beneficial and had gone a long way (Faires et al., 2000).

Schools that set up programs to engage parents to share their thoughts promoted literacy. Many schools did not have programs like this, and this hindered early literacy proficiency. Many schools encouraged parents to listen to their children, but this was not enough. Even when children read to their parents, this did not show literacy gains, especially for the at-risk children. This only became beneficial to the children when the parents were taught how to assist their children during these reading periods. When parents knew how to guide their children in reading, their children became more enthusiastic about their ability to read (Faires et al., 2000).

Chard and Kameenui (2000) asserted that it was crucial that struggling readers be identified at an early age. Unfortunately, due to most state policies, many children who had a reading disability did not receive special education until they reached the second or third grade. Once this disability was discovered, it was been too late to make a significant impact on their reading achievement. First graders who did not show good reading skills had a 90% chance of staying a poor reader for the next 3 years. This, in turn, began to

turn their minds away from reading and start to dislike reading altogether. Third graders who performed poorly reading were not likely to progress significantly by the time they reached the end of eighth grade (Kameenui, 2000).

Due to students who had the potential to fall behind early, it was essential for parents to ensure that their children quickly became able to read and understand how to read text fluently. Many parents were not aware of this; thus, many of them were not taking advantage of sitting down with their children and reading (Senechal, 2006).

Economic Impact

Samuels (2009) stated that in hard economic times, lawmakers attempted to hold the cuts in early-childhood programs. Even though many states continued to fund pre-kindergarten programs, they were at more modest levels than in previous years.

Samuels (2009) stated that most state-funded pre-kindergarten programs were for low-income families that lived in poverty, such as Head Start and Early Head Start. There were some advocates who wanted a universal pre-kindergarten, regardless of the family income. In the Obama administration, there was a proposal for the fiscal 2010 budget to expand “early-childhood programs through the federal economic-stimulus package” (Samuels, 2009, p. 1). Much of this money was provided to programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start. The budget proposed a \$7,235 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start. This was an increase of \$122 million over fiscal year 2009 and did not include the \$2.1 billion that the programs received over the next years from the economic stimulus bill.

Ewen, Mezey, and Matthews (2005) proclaimed that under Title I, there was some flexibility for schools to use funds for pre-kindergarten services for at-risk children, but

there were only a small number of school districts that took advantage of this funding. Most localities used their funds to supplement other pre-kindergarten funding sources, including Head Start. If school districts were to use these Title I funds on pre-kindergarten services, it would allow states and local communities to reach more at-risk children and improve the quality of existing programs. Most school districts did not spend much of the Title I funding on pre-kindergarten programs because they were intended to be used on older children. When states and local communities did set aside Title I funding for pre-kindergarten services, there was pressure put on these investments to help with school improvement. “While the impacts of NCLB on the use of Title I for pre-kindergarten are yet unknown, there is growing apprehension that NCLB might limit the availability of Title I funding for ‘discretionary’ but beneficial programs like preschool” (Ewen et al., 2005, p. 15).

Since the economic ramifications were so extraordinary, it was crucial that this be a national priority. According to Lewis (2009), the welfare of early childhood education was a federal concern for portions of the last century, but it was not until the Nixon Administration that proposals came to the forefront to make it a national priority. Economists endorsed that spending money in early education would benefit more than spending on other educational reform. These economists argued that high-quality pre-kindergarten programs would bring in \$4 to \$10 in future benefits for every dollar spent. This was largely because these children had strong support early on in life and did better in school, and then they were more likely to be employed later on in life. Despite the evidence from research, early childhood education funding had gone away in recent years. Funding at the federal level decreased during the Bush Administration for young

children. The Obama Administration pledged to expand funding to \$10 billion for early childhood education (Lewis, 2009).

According to Robelen (2009), in 2009, the United States House of Representatives approved a bill that allotted \$8 billion over the next 8 years to states to help improve early childhood education from the time children were born until they reach the age of 5. In recent years, the amount of money spent on early childhood education continued to be on the incline. In the 2001-2002 school year, the amount of state spending on pre-kindergarten was \$2.4 billion, and this amount grew to \$4.6 billion in the 2006-2007 school year. Thus far, early learning was spared from state budget cuts compared to that of the cuts elsewhere in the state budget (Robelen, 2009).

According to Samuels (2009), from the 2007-2008 school year to the 2008-2009 school year, there was an increase in pre-kindergarten enrollment of more than 108,000 children. In 2008-2009, there were more than 1.1 million children enrolled in a state-funded pre-kindergarten program (Samuels, 2009).

A study done by the Economic Policy Institute found that a universal pre-kindergarten program would pay for itself in just 6 years. The government would spend less money on educational remediation and law enforcement, and there would be less crime; thus, the savings would total more than \$315 billion in 2050. A universal pre-kindergarten program would save the government over \$779 billion in 2050 (Ashford, 2007).

Gender

According to Logue (2007), many children who entered kindergarten were not prepared with the social skills to participate in activities that help them with academic

achievement. Across the United States, there were more pre-kindergarten students getting expelled from school than there were older children. It was more prevalent for boys to be expelled than it was for girls. When these children were expelled from school at a young age, it hindered the child's behavioral and academic readiness. Much of the kindergarten learning standards were content-driven, and the children's social and behavioral needs were not addressed. Many schools did not teach social skills; rather, they were punishing children for not having these tools for success.

Logue (2007) stated that in some schools, social workers were being called in to address the children who were having problems adapting. These social workers had to develop intervention plans to make sure these students learned without being punished for skills that they had not mastered. When a classroom experienced an incidence of disruption, the teacher had to spend valuable instructional time with the disobedient children, thus causing the other children to be distracted from learning. All students needed to be progressing academically, as well as socially. Social workers needed to be able to set prevention plans by collaborating or integrating social and learning goals. This can prevent social workers from intervening later by facilitating discussions in school about social learning. This can be the difference between success and failure for many children because they will have the necessary social skills.

Combs-Ronto, Olson, Lunkenheimer, and Sameroff (2009) asserted that as a child, having aggressive and disruptive behavior can be an early factor that can lead to "a multitude of adverse developmental outcomes, including poor academic performance, increased risk for school drop-out, delinquency, peer rejection, conflicts with family, and persistent, life-course antisocial behavior" (p. 1151). Understanding the origins of this

behavior played a major factor on development of a child. Although individuals showed differences in disruptive behavior, it can be identified as a toddler and remain stable throughout early and middle childhood. At an early age, children learned to master the skill of self-regulation. When children were unable to acquire this skill, they were at a high risk of behavioral maladjustment, including disruptive behavior, aggression, and noncompliance.

About half of young children showed high levels of aggressive behavior. It is through the parent-child relationship that was the most crucial in getting the child to get past these behaviors. The quality of parenting that these children received had a significant impact on how children transition through school. For the most part, boys were more likely to show disruptive behavior at school entry than girls. The need for prevention efforts at the earliest age were beneficial to trying to stop these behaviors at the onset, if not; these children would be at developmental risk as they progressed later on in their education (Combs-Ronto et al., 2009).

Buss and Brooker (2008) proclaimed that when it came to socioemotional development, gender also played a major role, especially with problem behaviors. For the most part, girls were likely to develop some internal symptoms, and boys were likely to develop external symptoms. These behaviors were usually developed and expressed in pre-kindergarten. Girls were likely to show signs of anxiousness or sad emotions, whereas boys were likely to show anger. Although these were present during pre-kindergarten, these behaviors were usually not present before pre-kindergarten. Much of how a child acts can be from how the child was reinforced socially. These behaviors occurred cross-culturally and they had also been attributed to biological influences.

Thompson, Arsenaault, and Williams (2006) stated that when it came to communicating with adults in pre-kindergartens, gender played a major influence on how they were perceived by adults and what they were capable of accomplishing. In the classroom, girls and boys had different ways of communicating with others when trying to solve a problem. When boys sought help, they were looked upon as highly motivated. On the other hand, when girls sought help, they were looked upon as having lower motivation.

Bower (2008) declared that even the make-up of a pre-kindergarten classroom had an impact on children. When there are a majority of boys, it was the boys who struggled more. In these classes, the boys fell increasingly behind girls in developmental skills. Although there was an effect on boys, there was no effect on girls. Girls had showed steady progress when they were in a classroom with majority boys. On the other hand, when there was a classroom of majority girls, boys learned at the same rate as girls.

Race

According to Miller (2007), at a young age most children were very curious. When it came to race, many of them were confused about physical appearances and ethnic differences in others. Although the children were not fully aware of the concept of “culture,” they were aware of things such as eating styles, language, and clothing. It was through this awareness that pre-kindergarten aged children used these generalizations and were inclined to create stereotypes. It was up to adults to help prevent these young children from having negative reactions to the different ethnicities.

Lay and Stokes-Brown (2009) proclaimed African-American and Latino students were more likely to have disciplinary problems, lower college rates, and had to take

remediation classes. The graduation rates for African Americans and Latinos were at much lower rates and were more likely to attend failing schools than that of the White students. In 2003, 78% of Whites, 55% of African Americans, and 53% of Latinos graduated from high school. Despite attempts over the past several decades to close the achievement gap between racial minorities and Whites, “millions of minority students... attend schools that were segregated, inequitably financed, vapid in curricula delivery, teacher-centered and generally hostile in any sense of learning environment” (Lay & Stokes-Brown, 2009, p. 431).

Since there was such a discrepancy among the different races, Wang (2008) asserted that over the past several decades, there were numerous government resources devoted to trying to close the achievement gap, such as Head Start and other activities funded through Title I. These programs had increased the access to child care and a wide array of educational resources to low socioeconomic children. Through all these efforts, the closing of the achievement gap had been disappointing. It had closed somewhat, but the margin was still substantial. The existence of the achievement gap appeared as early as the entry to kindergarten, and it increased through each successive grade level.

Transition to Kindergarten

According to Foster (2007), it was important for students to come to kindergarten prepared, because students’ learning “required students to move through hierarchal and overlapping developmental stages” (Foster, 2007, p.178). These stages were literacy, phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension. Students who were prepared by the time they came to kindergarten spent the first 2 years of their schooling becoming more fluent in their ability to decode and comprehend grade level text. Those students who did not

come to kindergarten prepared were not able to acquire these decoding and comprehension skills until the end of the first grade, thus, delaying the process of the development stages. Students must be able to perform at certain levels in order to move on to the later developmental stages (Foster, 2007).

To help pre-kindergarteners better succeed in a kindergarten classroom, there needed to be some sort of transition where all schools, public and/or private, were on the same page. Lewis (2009) suggested that since early childhood education and K-12 schools existed separately, there was a poor transition into kindergarten or even first grade. The 2007 Improving Head Start Act required governors to collaborate at the state level with the federal early childhood programs and services to become horizontally aligned. Pre-kindergarteners entering schools not only impacted a kindergarten classroom, but they impacted an entire school district. In 2008, the mayor of Boston added pre-kindergarten classrooms to all of the Boston elementary schools. Many of these schools were not prepared for these 4-year-olds to enter their schools. Thus, the school district revamped its entire kindergarten curriculum so that these children came to their schools better prepared in the upcoming school years (Lewis, 2009).

According to Guernsey (2009), many kindergarten teachers were spending much of their time in the beginning of the school year trying to gauge what the students knew. Instead of kindergarten teachers building on their students' prior knowledge, they were spending valuable time assessing children, trying to find out where each child stood academically. This hindered much of the children's motivation when they got to kindergarten, and they were set back at the beginning of school year by taking all these assessments. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms needed to come together, so

these children can thrive upon the arrival to the kindergarten classroom. This lack of communication between pre-kindergartens and kindergarten classrooms was hampering many children because they were entering kindergarten feeling like they were in a “pressure cooker,” instead of a place of learning (Guernsey, 2009, para. 10).

With this lack of communication and all the testing that was occurring at the beginning of the kindergarten year, many schools had cut back on some of the entertaining activities that kindergarten classrooms usually had. According to Manzo (2009), many kindergarten classrooms were having their playtime or entertaining time substituted for other structured activities that were sometimes not age-appropriate. This was not only occurring in kindergarten classrooms, but it was also happening in pre-kindergarten classrooms as well. The National Early Literacy Panel stated that skills-driven instruction may become a part of the daily activities for 3- or 4-year-olds in the classroom, just like it was in the early elementary grades (Manzo, 2009). In early education, when children played together, children “developed higher levels of thinking, stronger language skills, better social skills, more empathy and more imagination” (*Play Fever*, 2009, p. 6), as well as lower stress levels, than those who do not (*Play Fever*, 2009).

Ou & Reynolds (2006) stated that since so many children were starting kindergarten unprepared, it was essential that they get the adequate amount of learning opportunities that better prepared them from the beginning. Early childhood education was critical to preventing students from entering kindergarten unprepared. Early childhood education offered students educational opportunities that were not available in childcare environments. These educational opportunities allowed students to start

kindergarten “equally” with their peers. In addition, they also served families with “social and health services and parent educational components” (Ou & Reynolds, 2006, p. 176).

Special Education Transition

Before children enter kindergarten, a school must evaluate the children and develop an Individual Education Program (IEP). This evaluation was done to help the school determine if a child needed special educational services. A multidisciplinary team, along with the parents, determined what special educational services were needed for each child. When developing an IEP, it was beneficial to look at how children at age five were developing. This information helped guide the school in determining what educational needs were appropriate for the child. Another aspect that helped the kindergarten transition was to have the pre-kindergarten invite some of the elementary school staff to a transition meeting. Also, the parent can go to the school and meet the teacher, principal, and special education director. When the parent went to the school, having the child visit the teachers and classroom helped lower anxiety, which helped assist in successfully transitioning to kindergarten (Transition, 2007).

Harry and Klingner (2007) stated that many students in school encountered challenges and difficulties every day. Did this mean that these children had a disability or were these children merely being challenged? The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, it “ensured that schools could no longer turn away students on the basis of perceived developmental, sensory, physical, or cognitive development” (Harry & Klingner, 2007, p. 16). The main criterion to be eligible for special education services had been proof of intrinsic deficit. The problem with this was that identifying the

disability can be subjective. Much of the special education placement was based on several conditions, such as “lack of adequate classroom instruction prior to the student’s referral, inconsistencies in policy implementation, and arbitrary referrals and assessment decisions” (Harry & Klingner, 2007, p. 16). In addition, children from poor neighborhoods had a higher risk of getting a poor education, which increased the likelihood of a child failing and possibly placed into special education.

Special education placement was on the rise in recent decades. In 1974, 1.21% of the students were identified as having a learning disability. This number had increased to 6.02% in 1998. Much of this increase was explained by the law’s provisions of disabilities categories for learning and behavioral difficulties. Here, schools had been able to dodge the responsibility of providing high-quality education. Many of these children came from homes and communities that did not prepare them for school. Once these children entered school, they were being targeted for disability too quickly (Harry & Klingner, 2007).

Recent changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), it recommended that students enter tiered intervention. Here, students who showed signs of difficulty went through intensive and individualized instruction where the student struggled without placing the student into special education. Schools were able to spend 15% of their funds for special education toward this early intervention. Other changes to the law indicated that schools must increase their efforts in including parents in their child’s placement. Schools must make sure that parents understood every aspect of their child’s IEP (Harry & Klingner, 2007).

Daley and Carlson (2009) stated that in IDEA, the process for a child obtaining educational services was well specified. On the other hand, there were no clearly defined federal regulations to follow for a child to leave special education. All that was stated in IDEA was that “a public agency must evaluate a child with a disability in accordance with Sections 300.532 and 300.533 before determining that the child was no longer a child with a disability” (Daley & Carlson, 2009, p. 412). Sections 300.532 and 300.533 showed the procedures for evaluation. Whatever the reasoning was behind children leaving special education, as many as 50% of the pre-kindergarten programs did not have a written specification for exiting criteria. As little as one-sixth to one-third of these children who graduated from pre-kindergarten were placed into a regular education classroom without any support (Daley & Carlson, 2009).

According to Harry and Klingner (2007), there was a disproportionate amount of minorities placed into special education. Daley and Carlson (2009) declared that this had been happening for decades. African Americans were more likely to be labeled as being mentally retarded and having emotional disturbances than those who were non-African-American children. On the other hand, schools that were lower than average performing had African American, Hispanic, and Asian students less likely to be placed in special education programs.

Although there was a disproportionate problem with racial special education classification, there was also a similar problem with the demographics of special education declassification. White children were more likely to be declassified than those who were African American or Hispanic. In addition to race, income played a factor in

declassification. Those families with a higher income had a greater chance of being declassified than those families with a lower income (Daley & Carlson, 2009).

Other factors that accounted into a child being declassified from a special education program were the economics of a school district. Children who attended a less affluent school district had a greater chance of being declassified than those children who attended a wealthier school district. The reasoning behind this was because the low-wealth school districts had fewer funds and served fewer children; thus, the school district had to exit some children from special educational services because their needs were as great as other children's needs (Daley & Carlson, 2009).

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

According to Lee, Lahey, Owen, & Hinshaw (2008), another disorder that tremendously impacted schools around the U.S. was attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This was a disorder characterized by having inattention or hyperactivity with significant impairments in different settings, including school, social relationships, and family interactions. Many children with ADHD have poor "academic achievement, neuropsychological and executive function deficits, elevated comorbidity, and negative peer regard" (Lee et al., 2008, p. 373). Although not all children showed the same signs of ADHD dysfunction as a child, some children did show a reduction of symptoms over time. Between 25-45% of pre-kindergarten children with ADHD no longer met the criteria or showed signs of ADHD 8 years later. Although there were some children who had signs of ADHD becoming nonexistent, there was still a significant amount of children who showed signs of the disorder. Many of these children showed signs of school problems that were driven by peer rejection, aggression, or learning

disorders. Although many did have these negative outcomes, many of these children were very much academically competent.

Long-Term Benefits to Pre-Kindergarten

Early childhood education allowed children to be better prepared for kindergarten and their academic career, but it can also have significant long term effects on these children. Students who had early childhood education had “higher reading and mathematics achievement test scores, fewer grade retentions, more years of education, greater likelihood to attend a 4-year college... higher rate of high school graduation... and higher adult earnings up to age 27” (Ou & Reynolds, 2006, p. 176).

Early childhood education had lasting effects on the community because of the graduation rates. Those who graduated high school earned 30% more income than those who dropped out of high school. High school dropouts counted for about half of those on welfare and about half the population in prison. With a greater opportunity to become more financially inclined, there was less of a likelihood that they became a juvenile delinquent or committed a crime as an adult (Ou & Reynolds, 2006).

The community has also benefited financially from early childhood education. Pre-kindergartens have “provided a return of \$7.14 per dollar invested by increasing economic well-being and tax revenues, and by reducing public expenditures for remedial education, criminal justice treatment, and crime victims” (Ou & Reynolds, 2006, p. 193). These financial benefits had the same ramifications on a school district. It was much more cost-efficient to invest in early childhood education than interventions later on in life (Ou & Reynolds, 2006).

Quality of Pre-Kindergarten Programs

According to Rigby, Ryan, and Brooks-Gunn (2007), the quality of a pre-kindergarten had a dramatic effect on a child and helped close the achievement gap. Children that attended some type of pre-kindergarten or early childcare program tend to be more ready for kindergarten because it helped them engage with others playfully and socially, as well as developing their physical, language, and cognitive skills. High-quality programs increased the performance of many students in the early years and even into the later years. Although this may be true, the quality among all the different pre-kindergartens or early childcare programs varied considerably.

In the 1990s, state governments were given more flexibility on their child care policies. Here, states were given more funding to provide low-income families with transition child care services. This caused many states to vary widely on the dimensions of their child care policies, such as access, funding levels, program standards, teacher quality, and school readiness assessment (Rigby et al., 2007).

Berliner (2009) declared that in most schools, there was a “one-size-fits-all” learning style (p. 3). It was this type of learning that was not reaching all the differences in talents and interests among the children. Alternate learning styles helped the impoverished children more than it helped those children from the middle-class or wealthy families.

Holochwost (2009) stated that an important aspect of high quality early childhood education was the low rate of turnover of the caregivers or teachers. When there was stability in the caregiver, it promoted socioemotional development. On the other hand, when there was high turnover, it hindered the socio-emotional development.

Additionally, Gormley et al. (2005) proclaimed that a high quality pre-kindergarten program can be based upon the high teacher education requirements. When pre-kindergarten teachers were able to be compensated like elementary and secondary teachers, it helped programs recruit and retain talented teachers. When pre-kindergarten programs did not require this type of education or salary, then these programs were likely to experience lower quality.

Collaboration

Stebbins and Scott (2007) stated that policymakers acknowledged that pre-kindergarten programs and Head Start were two programs that were extremely beneficial to helping at-risk children. These programs provided valuable services to children, but these programs also lacked collaboration, which hindered families seeking educational services. In order for these educational services to achieve higher quality, it was important for them to overcome their collaboration obstacles and create partnerships. Some challenges between these programs were the different missions, teacher credentials, comprehensive services, and eligibility requirements. Although this collaboration was difficult, it was happening across the county. This collaboration created a partnership that provided children and families with higher quality services. Much of this collaboration was bridged through leadership, compromise, and tactful evaluation of policies.

According to Ashford (2007), pre-kindergarten programs needed to collaborate with local school districts and be aligned with those of the K-12 academic content standards. Besharov (2008) proclaimed that in many places, the pre-kindergarten programs did very little or made no attempt at all to try and coordinate with existing

child-care programs or Head Start. The eventual goal of having a universal pre-kindergarten was to substitute for all these programs that did serve all 4-year-olds.

Assessment

Mahone (2005) asserted that over the past two decades, the need for a valid assessment for pre-kindergarten children had become more important. Much of the assessment that had been measured was focused on “global development, general intellectual functioning, language, motor skills, or preacademic development” (Mahone, 2005, p. 216). The tools that were used to measure the development of these children had been very limited. Many children at a young age did not have a high attention span and it was difficult to measure performance.

After children were born, their brain continued to develop rapidly over the first few of years of life and plasticity exists over this time. The effects of a child’s environmental experiences had a profound impact on the neurological development in the child. Much of these environmental experiences had a tremendous impact on a child’s attention span throughout pre-kindergarten years. In addition, the more a child watched television as an infant, the more it caused a child to have increased attention problems once these children reach their elementary years. It was recommended that children under the age of two not watch television at all and older children should not watch more than one to two hours of quality television. Even though this was what was recommended, more than 43% of children that were under the age of two watched television everyday; 26% of these children had a television in their room; and 68% of children that were under the age of two watched over two hours of television a day (Mahone, 2005).

Kindergarten

History of Universal Pre-Kindergarten

Besharov (2008) stated that in order to meet the high demands of high-stakes testing, some schools districts had turned to pre-kindergarten. The idea of pre-kindergarten had been around for years, as there have been attempts to try and implement a universal pre-kindergarten throughout the United States. In the 1950s, there was a higher rate at which married women with children were taking jobs outside the home. From this point until the 1970s, the rate of women in the workforce nearly doubled from about 20% to about 40%. In 1971, due to the emerging women's movement, the House pushed the Child Development Act through Congress. This elaborate measure was designed to create a federalized child development service to children, regardless of whether their mothers had jobs or needed child care. It was based on the belief that all children would benefit from a government-supervised child development effort (Besharov, 2008).

Initially, the Nixon administration supported this bill and saw this as an important aspect to the president's approach to welfare reform. But after some uncertainty, President Nixon vetoed the bill after criticizing it "communal approaches to child rearing over and against the family-centered approach" (Besharov, 2008, para. 9). Over the next few decades, there were many child-care advocates who tried to come up with many different methods that would be more attractive to voters. To no avail, the advocates "repeatedly overestimated support for government-provided child care for middle-class children and underestimated the desire of parents for choice and flexibility" (Besharov, 2008, para. 12).

In a second effort to try and get universal pre-kindergarten, child-care advocates pushed for the Act for Better Child Care Services, or “ABC bill,” in 1987. This bill appeared to be headed for an easy approval until a new provision stated that there could be no funding to religiously oriented organizations, unless these programs were to remove all religious aspects from their premises (Besharov, 2008).

In the 1990s, the number of married women with children entering the workforce rose to about 70%. At this time, about 74% of four-year-olds were in some type of “formal” childcare, whereas the remainder were in some type of “informal” childcare (Besharov, 2008).

In 1996, the Clinton administration decided that if mothers are expected to work, then the government should step in and help pay for child-care. From 1996 to 2000, federal and state spending on child-care has almost doubled from \$7 billion to \$13.6 billion. When Head Start is included, it rose from \$11.7 billion to \$19.9 billion (Besharov, 2008).

Dellinger and Oxobio (2007) proclaimed that in 2006, California voters consider Proposition 82, which would have established a pre-kindergarten program for all three and four-year olds in the state. “The California Teachers Association (CTA) and the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), state affiliates of the NEA and AFT, vigorously supported Proposition 82: It would boost their membership by requiring the state to hire more preschool teachers” (Dellinger & Oxobio, 2007, p. 549). These teachers claimed that Proposition 82 would strengthen the education system because it would put qualified teachers in every pre-kindergarten classroom. When Proposition 82 came to the forefront, it was not passed. Reasons for it not passing were: there were many more voters without

children, then there were with children; parents with children already had placed their children in a local pre-kindergarten program and they believed that these private programs benefited them more. These teachers unions wanted the universal pre-kindergarten to be publicly funded and argued against a study that stated that these programs would cause the state to lose money.

Why Not Universal Pre-Kindergarten?

Dellinger and Osobio (2007) stated that in order to close the achievement gap, many teachers unions asserted that universal pre-kindergarten was essential. They claimed that in order to meet the demands of NCLB testing requirements, states needed to push to get more students into the classroom prior to entering elementary school. Those who were in favor of universal pre-kindergarten had held Georgia as the model, where 70% of the 4-year olds in the state were enrolled in a publicly funded pre-kindergarten program. Much of this funding was supported by the state-run lottery for certain educational purposes.

Ashford (2007) declared the development of a new voluntary pre-kindergarten program for all 3- and 4-year-olds were one of the top priorities of the National School Board Association (NSBA). The NSBA believed that having pre-kindergarten programs publicly funded helped raise student achievement by providing them with a solid foundation in education. Many of those who did advocate universal pre-kindergarten did not want to replace existing programs, such as Head Start, but wanted to supplement them. These universal pre-kindergarten programs had to meet certain requirements, in regards to teacher education, teacher training in early childhood education, age appropriate curriculum, high quality, and a high teacher-to-student ratio.

According to Miller (2007), supporters of universal pre-kindergarten believed that kindergarten was too late for children to start school. In 1965, only 5% of 3-year-olds and 16% of 4-year-olds attended pre-kindergarten. Ever since then, pre-kindergarten became very popular. Today, more than 40% of 3-year-olds and more than two-thirds of 4-year-olds attended a pre-kindergarten program.

In the 1990s, the number of Americans who read decreased, but the amount parents read books to their pre-kindergarteners actually increased. This could be part of the reason that young American children performed well when compared to other countries. On language, math and science tests, young American children scored above average and outperformed many other countries (Miller, 2007).

Gormley et al. (2005) asserted that in the United States, it was more common for pre-kindergarteners to be enrolled in a state-funded pre-kindergarten program to lead them into kindergarten. In 1980, there were only 10 states that had publicly funded pre-kindergarten services, and this had soared to 38 in 2002. Most of these programs were aimed at 4-year-olds and their primary goal was to help prepare these children with the “skills, knowledge, and behaviors that are associated with success in elementary school” (Gormley et al, 2005, p. 872). Studies had shown that these state-funded pre-kindergarten programs made a positive impact on children across the United States. In Georgia, a universal pre-kindergarten program showed that 82% of the former pre-kindergarten students were rated as average or above-average on third-grade readiness compared to the national norms. Also, in Georgia, those children who were economically disadvantaged and attended a pre-kindergarten program started pre-kindergarten below the national norms on letter and word recognition tests, but when they began kindergarten they scored

above the national norms. In Michigan, kindergarten teachers rated those students who had attended a pre-kindergarten program as being higher in language, literacy, math, music, and social relations.

Opposition to Universal Pre-Kindergarten

According to Ashford (2007), there was a risk that money would be spread out too thinly, if there are too many children included in a universal pre-kindergarten. Here, there would be a result in poor quality programs with poor results, which would defeat the purpose in the long run. Cheap programs could become ineffective programs.

Sticht (2009) declared that many problematic children came from disadvantaged homes; thus society should focus their investments where there was a likelihood of getting high returns. Since this was the disadvantaged population, it would be irrational to try and replace for what the middle class and upper class parents had been doing for years. Also, when looking at these disadvantaged children, the parenting skills had more of an influence on a child's development than that of the childcare. "High-quality childcare will not offset the negative effect of poor parenting, and poor-quality childcare will not prevent success for children with effective parents" (Sticht, 2009, p. 16). Many childcare programs were likely to have a greater effect on the disadvantaged families than those of the highly advantaged families.

Besharov (2008) stated that universal pre-kindergarten did very little, if anything, to help solve the educational problems in America, which was the achievement gap that put many low-income families so far behind the more fortunate families. Many of these low-income families suffered from social and cognitive deficits compared to others. Much of this achievement gap was "from the poverty stemming from a history of

discrimination and restricted opportunity to the child-rearing styles of many disadvantaged families” (Besharov, 2008, para. 50). Although early childhood education was an early remedy for some problems, in the end, it was the families that were the primary teacher of their children.

According to Miller (2007), pre-kindergarten was not where the problem lies; the problem was when children left elementary schools and enter middle schools. When children were in eighth grade, they were performing average on achievement tests and when they got to twelfth grade, they were performing mediocre. Based on this, there needed to be a reform on the upper grades.

For middle-class parents, it can be worse for them to send their children to a pre-kindergarten that was average or below-average than what they were already providing for their children at home. This was not true for the low-income families because their parenting skills were not as good (Miller, 2007).

Perry Preschool Project

According the Miller (2007), there was a small-scaled experiment conducted in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in the early 1960s to test universal pre-kindergarten. This research became known as the Perry Preschool Project. The children in this study were poor, Black children with low IQs. Researchers claimed that these children were prone to “retarded intellectual development and eventual school failure” (Miller, 2007, p. 50). There were two groups in this study; one group was placed in a “gold-plated” pre-kindergarten program and the other group was put into a control group. These children were tracked in a longitudinal study, where those who went to pre-kindergarten “encountered highly trained instructors, low teacher-to-student ratios, and a regime of

home visits” (Miller, 2007, p. 50). All of this appeared to have been beneficial, because, over time, these children were more likely to finish college and less likely to commit crime or become pregnant as a teenager. The result was that this pre-kindergarten experience gave these at-risk children the preparation they needed to enter kindergarten, where they were ready to commit to their own education.

Matthew Effect

Every teacher would like for every student to come to their respective classrooms having learned all the standards that were supposed to have been taught to them in the previous school years. In reality, this was not what really happens because not all students were at the same level academically. This can sometimes be frustrating to teachers and have them trying to gauge what grade or where did these “below-average” students actually fell behind in their education. To be fair, it was not any grade or in any school that hindered a child’s education. For many “below-average” students, it all came down to the beginnings, before they even entered kindergarten. These students were not afforded an adequate amount of educational skills prior to entering kindergarten. For these students, they fell behind from the onset of their education and spent much of their educational career doing interventions and taking remediation classes. If these students were fortunate enough to get a proper education prior to kindergarten and were prepared, then they would not have to worry about these interventions and/or taking remediation classes. Instead, they could have worked on broadening their education and depth of knowledge.

Since there were so many children falling behind at such a young age, it made sense to try and catch them up as soon as possible, so they did not fall further behind.

According to Morgan, Farkas, & Hibel (2008), children who enter kindergarten unprepared unknowingly fell into the “Matthew Effect,” which meant “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” (p. 187). Children who live in homes where reading was being fostered were the children that were likely to enjoy reading at a young age. These children read more frequently, which enhanced their reading proficiency and increased their reading acquisition. These children fell under “rich get richer” in the “Matthew Effect” (Morgan et al., 2008).

On the other end of the spectrum, children that did not acquire these skills at a young age will follow a different path. These children were not fortunate enough to be introduced to good reading habits; therefore, they did not develop an enjoyment to read. These students had difficulty developing reading skills that the other children had already had exposure to. These students had negative attitudes toward reading and did not want to read as much as the other students in the class. In time, most of these students avoided reading for so long and fell under “the poor get poorer” in the “Matthew Effect” (Morgan et al., 2008).

Morgan et al. stated that there was some evidence of the “Matthew Effect” present in schools (as cited in Smith, 1998). There was a study that looked at the highest and lowest assessment scores of pre-kindergarteners and compared them to when they got to third grade. He found that 93% of those who tested high in pre-kindergarten also tested high in the third grade, whereas 71% of those who tested low in pre-kindergarten also tested low in third grade. In a similar study, Morgan et al. stated there were similar results found. Here, it looked at average-to-good and poor readers of first graders compared to when they got to the fourth grade (as cited in Juel, 1998). It was found that 87% of those

who were average-to-good readers in first grade were also average-to-good readers in fourth grade, whereas 88% of those who were poor readers in the first grade were also poor readers in the fourth grade (Morgan et al., 2008).

Although the “Matthew Effect” was evident, it could be concluded that it was more one-sided, where the “poor get poorer.” Children who had entered kindergarten without adequate reading skills were likely to stay behind the rest of their peers and were not able to “catch up.” The rate at which the low-skilled readers’ growth decreased was much more than the higher-skilled readers’ growth increase. These students needed intense early interventions to help these children from falling even further behind (Morgan et al., 2008).

According to Fielding (2006), this achievement gap that was evident among students in public schools was not created within the schools; it was likely created between birth and kindergarten. Data from the Northwest Evaluation Association stated that almost all of the language arts achievement gap and about 70% of the math achievement gap was created before the second grade. This merely stated that high schools, middle schools, and even elementary schools were not the cause of this achievement gap.

In Kennewick, Washington, Fielding (2006) stated that about 20% of the students were entering kindergarten with the language and math skills of a 2- or 3-year-old and another 20% were entering with the skills of a 4-year-old. This meant that roughly 40% of their students were entering kindergarten one to 3 years behind where they were supposed to be before they even got to kindergarten. Furthermore, if these students wanted to be on grade level by the end of third grade, they were expected to make

adequate yearly progress every year and do 5 to 7 years of “catching up” in only 4 years. These students continued to struggle unless something was done about their progress. Although this task did sound difficult, it was what all elementary principals were faced with under the NCLB requirements by 2014 (Fielding, 2006).

Why Parent Aren't Sending Children to Pre-kindergarten

Miller (2008) stated that many families wanted to send their children to pre-kindergarten, but cannot because of many different reasons, such as “cost of care, waiting lists, lack of transportation to and from pre-kindergarten centers, and the need for full-time care” (Miller, 2008, p. 1). Although there were some families that needed to send their children to a part-time pre-kindergarten program, this was very difficult for many families. The majority of parents who had young children worked away from the home and needed full-time care. In the 2007 California Child Care Portfolio, it found that 74% of the child care requests sought programs that had care for more than 30 hours a week. In September of 2007, “there were approximately 80,000 3- to 5-year-old children actively waiting for subsidized services, more than three-quarters required full-time care” (Miller, 2008, p. 2). In order to help more working families and to increase the attendance of pre-kindergartens, states needed to create more full-day, full-year pre-kindergartens.

Besharov and Morrow (2007) declared that many families wanted to send their children to quality pre-kindergarten programs, like Head Start, but cannot because of eligibility. Although this may be true, there were factors that had led some families to get their children into this program. The main factor that generally made a family eligible for Head Start was income. However, there had been some exemptions that allowed nonpoor children into the program. Some of these exemptions were children that live in

communities with a population of less than 1,000 people and have no other pre-kindergarten program, Head Start programs that were run by Indian tribes, families that had children and were eligible for public assistance, children who were in foster care, families with children whose income was above poverty after enrollment, and families with children who were reenrolling for a second year even though their income has risen above the poverty line. Survey findings showed that at enrollment, about 28% were not poor; at midyear, 32% were not poor; and by the end of the year, 34 to 50% were not poor.

These findings cautioned researchers when trying to look at the effects of a Head Start program on poor children. The high proportion of nonpoor children understated the program's impact by seeing if the poor children benefited the most or it overstated the program's impact by seeing if the nonpoor children benefited the most (Besharov & Morrow, 2007).

Since there are such a large number of nonpoor children being enrolled in Head Start, it showed that the program was not fulfilling its goal of providing services to the developmentally disadvantaged children. Having these nonpoor children in Head Start did not seem so harmless at first, but with each nonpoor child admitted to the program, he/she takes the place of a poor legally eligible child, who was most likely in greater need of these services (Besharov & Morrow, 2007).

Teachers' Perceptions on Kindergarten Readiness

Espinosa (1997) stated that many kindergarten teachers believed that students were coming to kindergarten unprepared. There were many reasons that can be faltered for these students being unprepared, but many teachers believed that the parent

unavailability as the main problem. Many parents are busy working and by the time they get home they did not have enough time for their kids. Children were not getting enough attention from their parents. The result of these children not spending enough quality time with their parents was the development status of the children suffering. In addition to parents being unavailable, teachers cited parents as being “stressed, too young, on drugs or simply unable to adequately parent” (Espinosa, 1997, p. 123). Teachers believed that as the amount of time the parents spent with their children decreased, then the readiness of a student for kindergarten also decreased.

With many of these children came to school inadequately prepared, many teachers believed that a high-quality pre-kindergarten was beneficial to preparing students for kindergarten. Students were expected to have a wide variety of background knowledge prior to entering kindergarten. If these students were coming to kindergarten without these skills, then they fell behind early. Children that did go to some type of pre-kindergartens had the opportunity to acquire these skills and allowed them to have the necessary skills to complete tasks once they enter kindergarten (Espinosa, 1997).

Washington (2001) proclaimed that pre-kindergarten teachers were mixed about the readiness of kindergarteners. Many of these teachers believed students would be better prepared for kindergarten if the availability of full day or extended day pre-kindergarten programs were available. Many pre-kindergarten teachers believed that children were unable to transition to kindergarten and were unstable due to the inability of pre-kindergarten programs to have longer school days. Also, pre-kindergarten teachers suggested that an increase in parental involvement and enforcing attendance would be beneficial to educating pre-kindergarten students and preparing them for kindergarten.

Ackerman and Barnett (2005) proclaimed that when children entered kindergarten, at the age of 5, it marked a new stage in their life. Although children were meeting the age criteria to enter kindergarten, many of these children were not meeting the readiness criteria to meet the high demands to enter kindergarten. Many children had a wide variety of pre-kindergarten experiences and had varying knowledge and skills. Some children had positive experiences to prepare them, but others were not ready to learn at the age of 5. While most children do start kindergarten at the age of 5, there were some parents who do hold their children back one year in order to give their children another year of development before entering kindergarten. These parents believed their children were not mature enough to take on the rigors of school. This assumption by parents argued that these children were able to cognitively develop in the extra year to alleviate any future academic problems. Studies have shown that children who started kindergarten a year later than their peers showed statistically significant higher test scores.

Espinosa (1997) pronounced that there was also a difference in how urban and rural area children were coming to kindergarten prepared. Rural areas were less likely to have children enrolled in a pre-kindergarten program and when they were enrolled they were likely to have pre-kindergarten programs that were poor quality based on “staff training, credentials, child-to-staff ratios, and other measures” (Espinosa, 1997, p. 123). The education that these children were receiving in the rural communities was a major concern.

Espinosa (1997) stated that about one-fourth of the United States lived in rural areas, but these children were worse off than those children who live in urban areas.

These children are “more likely to be poor, less likely to have access to health services, less likely to attend educationally-oriented pre-kindergarten programs, and are more likely to have teenage mothers” (Espinosa 1997, p. 123). Also, these areas were more likely to have teachers with less experience and have a high teacher turnover rate.

Ackerman and Barnett (2005) declared that parents who lived in rural areas had limited employment opportunities, which meant they had to work multiple jobs; thus, more time away from home and away from the children. Rural areas also had less access to public transportation, libraries, and health services, and did not have many choices when it came to child care.

Summary

In this educational world, accountability was a huge burden on educators everywhere. With this burden, all educators wanted to get an upper hand on helping their students become successful. One lasting effort in education that was beneficial was the establishment of pre-kindergarten programs. The effects of pre-kindergarten on young children were extremely valuable. Although there were hurdles that many young children had to climb in the past, there had been many strides in helping children from every realm of the U.S. become prepared for kindergarten. Pre-kindergarten programs helped these children start school where they needed to be and not fall behind at the onset. The ramifications of a child that did not start school prepared and ready to learn were poor.

Since there was such a wide margin in the achievement gap, families had to take advantage of sending their children to these successful pre-kindergarten programs. Schools and families had come together, in order to make sure all children were getting an adequate education. Children had to be ready to go to school or they would have to go

through many different programs to try and get them back on track. In order to avoid this, children needed high-quality pre-kindergarten programs that challenged children and got them ready for their educational careers that laid ahead of them.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

In this study, the purpose was to analyze the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers on students' readiness for kindergarten. Ultimately, the goal was to understand these teachers' perceptions and how they could help identify which of these teachers had more insight and better knowledge of where students were at academically, once they entered kindergarten. This knowledge could be beneficial in adapting an in-depth curriculum to help pre-kindergarten programs and families better prepare their children and help them be equipped prior to entering kindergarten. With the continued pressure of accountability, it has been essential for the standards and benchmarks be aligned with content that the children were learning.

Design

In this study, quantitative data were used to analyze the dependent and independent variables. The dependent variables were the kindergarten readiness test scores from the Pascagoula Early Assessment for Kindergarten (PEAK) and the perceptions of the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. The independent variables were students who attended pre-kindergarten versus students who did not attend pre-kindergarten and the teachers' rural versus urban location of occupation. The PEAK test scores were the scores that every kindergartener took in the first month of kindergarten, which measured where each and every child was academically. The teachers in this study were every participating pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teacher in a school district in southeast Mississippi. The perceptions of the teachers were how each participating

teacher feels about certain kindergarten readiness skills at the time the questionnaire was completed. The location of occupation was what type of area each school was identified as, whether it was a rural or urban community.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers in a school district in south Mississippi. There were 77 pre-kindergarten teachers and 54 kindergarten teachers who participated in the questionnaire. In order for a pre-kindergarten or kindergarten teacher's questionnaire to be qualified for this study, he or she had to be a teacher during the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 school year. The teachers represented in this study ranged between the ages of 23 and 60 years old. The pre-kindergarten teachers involved in the study comprised of teachers from Head Start and private pre-kindergarten programs. The kindergarten teachers who were used in the study were from a public school district in south Mississippi. All teachers involved were selected purposeful, rather than randomly, due to the smaller population size.

The number of students who were involved in this study was 1,046. These students' kindergarten readiness test scores that were used for this study were chosen at random. In order for kindergarteners' test score to qualify for this study, they had to be enrolled in kindergarten for the first time in either the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 school year. The kindergarteners represented in this study ranged between the ages of 5 and 6 years. Several of the pre-kindergarten schools and kindergarten schools represented in the study were from high poverty areas.

Instrumentation

The instrument that was used for this study to assess the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perception on students' readiness as they enter kindergarten was the *Kindergarten Readiness Questionnaire*. With the permission of Dr. Mary O' Kane of the Dublin Institute of Technology (see Appendix A), the questionnaire that was used for this study was a modification of her questionnaire, which she used for a prior study on kindergarten readiness. Many of the questions of this researcher's questionnaire were the same as her questionnaire, except the format of the questionnaire was partially modified and edited to fit this particular research. The questionnaire for this study was a five-point Likert scale, which was broken down into six sections, with each section containing five to 10 questions. The questionnaire asked each teacher to give their level of agreement or disagreement on the different skill sets students should have been equipped with as they enter kindergarten. The six sections that were on this questionnaire were the teacher demographic questions, the at-risk factors children have entering kindergarten, skills students should have had entering kindergarten, barriers for kindergarten readiness, ways the pre-kindergarten can assist primary schools, and ways primary schools can assist pre-kindergartens. This questionnaire's validity was measured by having a panel of experts examine the questionnaire. Once the panel of experts examined the questionnaire, a pilot study was used to assure that the readability and sensitivity of the questions was appropriate. In this pilot study, approximately twenty teachers were randomly selected to partake in the questionnaire. These teachers were debriefed to better understand what items of the questionnaire needed more clarity, to assure the final questionnaire was as

reliable as possible. After this debriefing, there were several questions reworded and questions omitted to enhance the quality of the questionnaire.

The instrument that was used for this study to measure the actual readiness for kindergarteners was the PEAK scores. This test was created by the Pascagoula School District to assess kindergarteners on objectives from the Mississippi Department of Education Framework for Language Arts and Math. The assessment had measured 15 different activities, which included items in language, writing communication, math, and fine motor development, which each child had to demonstrate to the teacher. This test was used to give the teachers a way measure students' progress as they progressed through kindergarten. At the beginning of the year, the teachers assessed the beginning skills of every incoming kindergarten student. The PEAK scores gave the teachers a good idea of where the students were at in their education and gave them an indication of where to start their instruction. These assessments were scripted for teachers or assistant teachers who had been trained by the school district. When students take this assessment they were taken individually to a secluded place within the classroom or outside the classroom.

This assessment had a performance assessment rubric that was specifically designed to measure the students' progress and attainment for each activity. When the students were assessed in each respective activity, they were given either an "O" for outstanding, an "S" for satisfactory, an "N" for needs improvement, or a "U" for unsatisfactory. For each activity, the teacher gave the students a prompt, and based on how they performed, the teacher had a rubric to follow on whether the students received an "O," "S," "N," or "U." Then, the teacher recorded the results on the Individual Student

Evaluation Form. After every activity was completed, they were labeled as proficient or non-proficient, based on how each individual child performed. If a student were able to test an “O” or an “S” in eight of the 15 activities, then the student was considered proficient. If a student were unable to test an “O” or an “S” in eight of the 15 activities, then the student was considered non-proficient. The PEAK test was administered three times a year, at the beginning of the year, before Christmas holidays, and at the end of the school year. The school district used these assessments to help the teachers measure the students’ growth and assist the teachers on diagnosing each individual student’s instructional needs. For this study, only the PEAK scores from the beginning of the year were used, which were called the “Discovery Days.” These scores were analyzed by the researcher to find out if there was a difference between those students who attended pre-kindergarten versus those students who did not attend pre-kindergarten. The researcher worked with a school district coordinator to identify those students who attended pre-kindergarten and those students who did not attend pre-kindergarten. The district coordinator was able to identify those students who attended pre-kindergarten by actively working with the pre-kindergartens in the district, as well as conversing with parents. These test scores were limited because they did not provide any demographic data, such as race or gender, about the students who take the test.

Procedures

Once the approval of The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted (Appendix B), this study proceeded. After requesting the permission of the pre-kindergarten program directors (Appendix C) and the superintendent (Appendix D) of a school district in South Mississippi to send out

questionnaires (Appendixes E and F) and to gather the PEAK test scores, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the principals and program directors of the participating schools. The principal and program directors then distributed the questionnaires to the teachers to voluntarily fill out. The questionnaire had a letter explaining the purpose of this study as a cover page (Appendixes G and H) to the questionnaire. When the questionnaires were received by each teacher, each questionnaire was given a randomly assigned number, so the teachers' identities were kept confidential. The teachers filled out the questionnaires at their own leisure, but were asked to return them within two weeks to the principal or program director. After two weeks of the questionnaire being at each school, the principals and program directors of each school then returned the questionnaires in a self-addressed envelope to the researcher. Each teacher voluntarily answered the questionnaire, so they were advised that they do not have to answer any questions they feel uncomfortable answering. All teachers were reassured that their questionnaires would be kept confidential and would only be used for the purpose of this study. In order to keep the kindergarten students' PEAK test scores confidential, all names were removed from the test scores and replaced with a random number. After all the questionnaires and PEAK test scores were analyzed, they were kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were as followed:

1. The perceptions that were gathered from the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers were only limited to those teachers of the school district in South Mississippi.

2. The perceptions of the teachers were only how the teachers felt at the time they answered the questionnaire and may not have been honest or may have had an unknown bias.
3. The perceptions of the kindergarten teachers were only limited to public school teachers.
4. This study was limited to language, writing communication, math, and fine motor development as indications as kindergarten readiness.
5. The children who attended the pre-kindergarten programs prior to entering kindergarten may have been enrolled for different lengths of time.

Data Analysis

Once all of the questionnaires were collected, they were analyzed with SPSS version 18.0. The data from these questionnaires and PEAK scores were coded into the computer for the researcher to analyze. The first six research questions came from the questionnaire and were as followed: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward kindergarten readiness skills as they enter kindergarten? Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward at-risk factors on kindergarten readiness? Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools? Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools? Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs? Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-

kindergarten and kindergarten teachers who are from urban areas versus rural areas?

Using SPSS, the questions were analyzed to find out if there was a difference between the teachers' perception. The seventh question was as follows: Is there a difference in kindergarten readiness test scores between those students who went to a pre-kindergarten program versus those students who did not attend a pre-kindergarten program? SPSS was also used to determine if there was a difference in PEAK scores between those students who attended a pre-kindergarten program versus those students who did not attend a pre-kindergarten program. Data were analyzed using means, standard deviations, and *t*-tests.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This research was designed to determine if there was a difference between perceptions on kindergarten readiness between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Also, this research was designed to determine if there was a difference between in PEAK scores between those students who attended pre-kindergarten versus those who did not attend pre-kindergarten. This chapter includes the descriptive of the respondents to the questionnaires and students analyzed from the PEAK scores. The data analysis was used to test the stated research questions. Data were collected from the questionnaires, which were given to the participating pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Also, the data were collected from the PEAK scores from the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school year.

The questionnaires were completed by 77 pre-kindergarten teachers and 54 kindergarten teachers. These questionnaires were given to 11 elementary schools and seven pre-kindergarten programs. Six out of the seven pre-kindergarten programs completed and returned the questionnaires. There were 95 questionnaires given out and 77 were completed, for a return rate of 81%. Ten out of the 11 elementary schools completed and returned the questionnaire. There were 65 questionnaires given out and 54 were completed, for a return rate of 83%.

Descriptive Statistics

The study sample that was represented for this research was 528 students who completed the PEAK assessment during the 2009-2010 school year and 518 students who

completed the PEAK assessment during the 2010-2011 school year. Demographic data, such as ethnicity and gender, were not available.

Refer to Table 1 for a breakdown of teachers' teaching experience. For teaching experience, there were no major discrepancies between the pre-kindergarten teachers compared to the kindergarten teachers. The greatest percentage for pre-kindergarten teacher respondents had 1-5 years teaching experience at 44.6% (n=33), and the smallest percentage for pre-kindergarten teachers had 6-10 years of experience at 16.2% (n=12). The greatest percentage for kindergarten teacher respondents had more than ten years of experience at 47.2% (n=25). The smallest percentage for kindergarten teacher respondents had 6-10 years of experience at 15.1% (n=8).

Table 1

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers' Experience

Experience		Pre-Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Total
1-5 years	Count	33	20	53
	% within	44.6%	33.7%	41.7%
6-10 years	Count	12	8	20
	% within	16.2%	15.1%	15.7%
10+ years	Count	29	25	54
	% within	39.2%	47.2%	42.5%
Total	Count	74	53	127
	% within	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Refer to Table 2 for a breakdown of the teachers' ages. For the age of the teachers, there were some slight differences. The pre-kindergarten teachers tended to be younger than the kindergarten teachers. The greatest percentage for pre-kindergarten teacher respondents were between the ages of 20-35 at 43.4% (n=33). The smallest percentage for pre-kindergarten teacher respondents were over the age of 50 at 25.0% (n=19). The greatest percentage for kindergarten teacher respondents was between the ages of 36 and 50 at 44.2% (n=23). The smallest percentage for kindergarten teacher respondents was over the age of 50 at 25.0% (n=13).

Table 2

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers' Age

Age		Pre-Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Total
20-35 years	Count	33	16	49
	% within	43.4%	30.8%	38.3%
36-50 years	Count	24	23	47
	% within	31.6%	44.2%	36.7%
50+ years	Count	19	13	32
	% within	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%
Total	Count	76	52	128
	% within	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Refer to Table 3 for a breakdown of the teachers' ethnicity. For the ethnicity of the teachers, there was a significant difference. The greatest percentage for pre-kindergarten teacher respondents was African American at 71.6% (n=53). Caucasians

were at 23.0% (n=17). Other than African American and Caucasian, there was not a significant return rate of pre-kindergarten respondents that were of other ethnicities. There was only one Hispanic, one Asian, and one Other who responded. The greatest percentage for kindergarten teacher respondents was Caucasian at 78.8%. African Americans were at 21.2% (n=11). Other than African American and Caucasian, there was not any return of kindergarten respondents of any other ethnicities.

Table 3

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers' Ethnicity

Ethnicity		Pre-Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Total
Caucasian	Count	17	41	58
	% within	23.0%	78.8%	46.0%
Afr-American	Count	53	11	64
	% within	71.6%	21.2%	50.8%
Hispanic	Count	1	0	1
	% within	1.4%	.0%	.8%
Asian	Count	1	0	1
	% within	1.4	.0%	.8%
Other	Count	2	0	2
	% within	2.7%	.0%	1.6%
Total	Count	74	52	126
	% within	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Of all the pre-kindergarten teacher respondents, 100% (n=76) were female. Of all the kindergarten respondents 100% (n=54) were female.

Refer to Table 4 for a breakdown of the teachers' region. For the region, there were some similarities between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Of all the pre-kindergarten teacher respondents, 74.7% (n=56) labeled their population as rural and 25.3% (n=19) labeled their population as urban. Of all the kindergarten respondents, 77.4% (n=41) labeled their population as rural and 22.6% (n=12) labeled their population as urban.

Table 4

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers' Region

Region		Pre-Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Total
Urban	Count	56	41	97
	% within	74.7%	77.4%	75.8%
Rural	Count	19	12	31
	% within	25.3%	22.6%	24.2%
Total	Count	75	53	128
	% within	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Statistical Test Results

The PEAK scores that were analyzed was an assessment given to every student at the beginning of kindergarten to complete. Every student had 15 activities to complete in this PEAK assessment. The 15 categories were as followed: Recognizes name, identifies colors, identifies the front of a book, left to right progression, identifies beginning

sounds, sequences events, environmental print, draws self portrait, writes name, recognizes shapes, one to one correspondence, sorts by size, shape and color, uses positional words, models sets 0-10, and cuts on a line.

The scores from these 15 categories were computed into SPSS numerically. When each student took the assessment, he or she was given an “O” for outstanding, “S” for satisfactory, “N” for needs improvement, and “U” for unsatisfactory. In SPSS, the “O” was computed as a 4, the “S” was computed as a 3, the “N” was computed as a 2, and the “U” was computed as a 1.

An independent samples *t*-test was analyzed to determine if there was a difference in PEAK scores in the 2009-2010 school year and the 2010-2011 school year between those students who attended pre-kindergarten versus those students who did not. In this independent samples *t*-test, all 15 of these PEAK activities were computed together to form a mean score and then analyzed by the researcher to find out if there was a statistical difference.

Research Question 1 stated: Is there a difference in kindergarten readiness test scores between those students who went to a pre-kindergarten program versus those students who did not attend a pre-kindergarten program? Based on the results from Table 5, there was a significant difference, $t(526) = -20.066, p \leq .001$, from the 2009-2010 PEAK scores between those students who attended pre-kindergarten versus those students who did not. Of the 528 students, 408 students attended pre-kindergarten versus 120 who did not. The mean ($M=3.24$) was almost a whole point higher for those students who did attend pre-kindergarten versus the mean ($M=2.37$) of those students who did not attend pre-kindergarten.

Table 5

2009-2010 PEAK Score Averages for Students Attending Pre-Kindergarten

	Pre-Kindergarten	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
PEAK Averages	No	120	2.37	.43
	Yes	408	3.24	.42

In addition to the PEAK scores from 2009-2010, the PEAK scores from 2010-2011 were also analyzed to find out if there was a difference between in PEAK scores between those students who attended pre-kindergarten versus those students who did not. Research Question 1 was also analyzed, which stated: Is there a difference in kindergarten readiness test scores between those students who went to a pre-kindergarten program versus those students who did not attend a pre-kindergarten program? Based on the results from Table 6, there was also a significant difference, $t(516) = -20.614$, $p \leq .001$, from the 2010-2011 PEAK scores between those students who attended pre-kindergarten versus those students who did not. Of the 518 students, 388 students attended pre-kindergarten versus 130 who did not. The mean ($M=3.28$) was almost a whole point higher for those students who did attend pre-kindergarten versus the mean ($M=2.38$) of those students who did not attend pre-kindergarten.

Table 6

2010-2011 PEAK Score Averages for Students Attending Pre-Kindergarten

	Pre-Kindergarten	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
PEAK Averages	No	130	2.38	.50
	Yes	388	3.28	.40

An independent samples *t*-test was computed to determine if there is a difference in the perceptions between pre-kindergarten teachers and kindergarten teachers in kindergarten readiness. These have been analyzed from the questionnaires completed by the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. In this questionnaire, the sections that were analyzed were as followed: kindergarten readiness skills, at-risk factors, barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools, ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools, and ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs. For each one of these sections, the scores were computed together by section to get a mean score, and then analyzed by the researcher to find out if there was a statistical difference.

The section of the questionnaire that was analyzed first was pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perception on kindergarten readiness skills. This section of the questionnaire was analyzed under Research Question 2, which stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward kindergarten readiness skills as they enter kindergarten? Here, the teachers were asked to give their perception on ten questions. There was a slight difference in the questioning, where the pre-kindergarten teachers were asked: Please circle the number that indicates

over the course of your career the percentage of students equipped with the following skills once they have left your program. The kindergarten teachers were instructed: Please circle the number that indicates over the course of your career the percentage of students equipped with the following skills upon arrival to kindergarten. These 10 questions were done on a 5-point Likert scale to gauge each teacher's perception, where a 1=0%-20%, a 2=21%-40%, a 3=41%-60%, a 4=61%-80%, and a 5=81%-100%. The ten questions were as follows:

1. Independence and self help skills
2. Ability to listen and sit still
3. Problem-solving skills
4. Speak clearly
5. Communicate effectively
6. Positive reading experiences (e.g., read to by others, enjoys books)
7. Social skills (e.g., take turns, get along with others)
8. Basic concepts (e.g., know numbers, letters)
9. Fine motor skills (e.g., cut paper, write)
10. Express appropriate emotions (e.g., happy, sad, anger).

These questions were computed into SPSS as they were on the 5-point Likert scale, where a 1=0%-20%, a 2=21%-40%, a 3=41%-60%, a 4=61%-80%, and a 5=81%-100%. All 10 of these questions' scores were computed together to form a mean score in SPSS, and then analyzed by the researcher to find out if there was a statistical difference.

Research Question 2 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward kindergarten readiness skills as they enter

kindergarten? Here, an independent samples *t*-test was analyzed to find out if there was a significant difference. Based on the results of Table 7 under the “Readiness Skills,” there was a significant difference, $t(129) = 11.751, p \leq .001$, between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers perception on kindergarten readiness skills. The mean ($M=4.13$) of the pre-kindergarten teachers was almost a point and a half higher than the mean ($M=2.74$) of the kindergarten teachers.

Table 7

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers’ Perceptions

	Type	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Readiness Skills	Pre-Kindergarten	77	4.13	.68
	Kindergarten	54	2.74	.64
At-Risk Factors	Pre-Kindergarten	77	3.05	.67
	Kindergarten	54	3.34	.50
Barriers	Pre-Kindergarten	77	3.13	.80
	Kindergarten	54	3.45	.71
Pre-K Help Primary	Pre-Kindergarten	77	4.52	.61
	Kindergarten	54	4.54	.40
Primary Help Pre-K	Pre-Kindergarten	77	4.29	.60
	Kindergarten	54	4.31	.49

The section of the questionnaire that was analyzed next was pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers’ perceptions on at-risk factors. This section of the questionnaire was analyzed under Research Question 3, which stated: Is there a difference between the

perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward at-risk factors on kindergarten readiness? Here, the teachers were asked to give their perceptions on ten questions. The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers were asked: "Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with each of the following groups of children who are at risk in general terms for being ready for kindergarten." These 10 questions were answered on a 5-point Likert scale where 1=*Strongly Disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, and 5=*Strongly Agree*. The 10 questions were as follows:

1. Children who have not been to some type of pre-kindergarten program are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.
2. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.
3. Children from minority groups are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.
4. Children from urban areas are more at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten than children from rural areas.
5. Children with special needs are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten..
6. Children with low self-esteem are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.
7. Children with behavior problems are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.
8. Children who find it difficult to listen or sit still are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.
9. Children who come from a single-parent family are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.
10. Boys, rather than girls, are more at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.

These questions were computed into SPSS as they were on the 5-point Likert scale, where 1=*Strongly Disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, and 5=*Strongly Agree*. All 10 of these questions' scores were computed together to form a mean score in SPSS and then analyzed by the researcher to determine if there was a statistical difference.

Research Question 3 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward at-risk factors on kindergarten readiness? Here, an independent samples *t*-test was analyzed to find out if there was a significant difference. Based on the results of Table 7, under the "At-Risk Factors," there was a significant difference, $t(129) = -2.720, p = .007$, between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward at-risk factors on kindergarten readiness. The mean ($M=3.05$) for the pre-kindergarten teachers was lower than that of the mean ($M=3.34$) for the kindergarten teachers.

The section of the questionnaire that was analyzed next was pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perception on barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools. This section of the questionnaire was analyzed under Research Question 4, which stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools? Here, the teachers were asked to give their perception on six questions. The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers were instructed: Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with some of the barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools that can affect kindergarten readiness. These six questions

were done on a 5-point Likert scale where 1=*Strongly Disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, and 5=*Strongly Agree*. The six questions were as follows:

1. Cultural differences between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.
2. Differences in curriculum of pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.
3. Differences in training/professional preparation for pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.
4. Lack of communication between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.
5. The number of “feeder” pre-kindergarten programs and “receiving” primary schools makes coordination difficult.
6. The decision for children to start school based on age rather than individual preparedness is a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.

These questions were computed into SPSS as they were on the 5-point Likert scale, where 1=*Strongly Disagree*, a 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, and 5=*Strongly Agree*. All six of these questions’ scores were computed together to form a mean score in SPSS and then analyzed by the researcher to find out if there was a statistical difference.

Research Question 4 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools? Here, an independent sample *t*-test was analyzed to find out if there a significant difference. Based on the results of Table 7, under “Barriers,” there was a significant difference, $t(129) = -2.390, p = .018$, between the perceptions of

pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools. The mean ($M=3.13$) for the pre-kindergarten teachers was lower than that of the mean ($M=3.45$) of the kindergarten teachers.

The section of the questionnaire that was analyzed next was pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perception on ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools. This section of the questionnaire was analyzed under Research Question 5, which stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools? Here, the teachers were asked to give their perception on nine questions. The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers were asked: Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with some of the activities pre-kindergarten programs should do to better prepare students to be ready for the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. These nine questions were done on a 5-point Likert scale where 1=*Strongly Disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, and 5=*Strongly Agree*. The nine questions were as follows:

1. Pre-kindergarten programs should discuss with the children what will be expected in primary schools.
2. Pre-kindergarten programs should arrange classroom visits to primary schools.
3. Pre-kindergarten programs should incorporate academic skills into pre-kindergarten curriculum.
4. Pre-kindergarten programs should encourage independence in children, responsibility for self and belonging.

5. Pre-kindergarten programs should use classroom-type rules (e.g., stand in line/wait your turn).
6. Pre-kindergarten programs should undertake evaluations (strengths/weaknesses) of each child to pass on to kindergarten teachers at the primary schools.
7. Pre-kindergarten programs should establish ongoing communication with the “receiving” schools’ teachers.
8. Pre-kindergarten programs should hold discussions with parents about readiness of children who plan on starting kindergarten.
9. Pre-kindergarten programs should devise a written “transition plan” outlining practices put in place to smooth the transition to kindergarten.

These questions were computed into SPSS as they were on the 5-point Likert scale, where 1=*Strongly Disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, and 5=*Strongly Agree*. All nine of these questions’ scores were computed together to form a mean score in SPSS, and then analyzed by the researcher to determine if there was a statistical difference.

Research Question 5 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools? Here, an independent sample *t*-test was analyzed to find out if there a significant difference. Based on the results of Table 7, under “Pre-K Help Primary,” there was not a significant difference, $t(129) = -.253, p = .800$, between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools. The mean ($M=4.52$) for the pre-kindergarten teachers was about the same as the mean ($M=4.54$) of the kindergarten teachers.

The section of the questionnaire that was analyzed next was pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perceptions on ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs. This section of the questionnaire was analyzed under Research Question 6, which stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs? Here, the teachers were asked to give their perceptions on seven questions. The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers were asked: Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with some of the activities primary schools should do to better prepare students to be ready for the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. These seven questions were done on a 5-point Likert scale where 1=*Strongly Disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, and 5=*Strongly Agree*. The seven questions were as follows:

1. Primary schools should send letters to parents prior to the start of kindergarten.
2. Primary schools should arrange parent meetings prior to the start of kindergarten.
3. Primary schools should arrange home visits prior to the start of kindergarten.
4. Primary schools should arrange for the children to visit prior to the start of kindergarten.
5. Primary schools should establish communication with pre-kindergarten teachers.
6. Primary schools should visit pre-kindergartens and observe children.
7. Primary schools should review pre-kindergarten evaluations of children.

These questions were computed into SPSS as they were on the 5-point Likert scale, where 1=*Strongly Disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, and 5=*Strongly Agree*.

All seven of these questions' scores were computed together to form a mean score in SPSS and then analyzed by the researcher to find out if there was a statistical difference.

Research Question 6 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs? Here, an independent sample *t*-test was analyzed to find out if there a significant difference. Based on the results of Table 7, under "Primary Help Pre-K," there was not a significant difference, $t(129) = -.223, p = .824$, between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs. The mean ($M=4.29$) for the pre-kindergarten teachers was about the same as the mean ($M=4.31$) of the kindergarten teachers.

The section of the questionnaire that was analyzed next was whether or not the region made a difference in the perception between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. This section of the questionnaire was analyzed under Research Question 7, which stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers who are from an urban population versus rural population? Here, the same five sections were analyzed, which were: kindergarten readiness skills, at-risk factors, barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools, ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools, and ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs. For each one of these sections, the scores were computed together by section to get a mean score, and then analyzed by the researcher to find out if there was a statistical difference.

First, Research Question 7 was analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference for the pre-kindergarten teachers. Based on the results of Table 8, the region of

the pre-kindergarten teachers did not have a significance difference on their perceptions for any of the five sections of the questionnaire. The pre-kindergarten teachers' perception on kindergarten readiness skills was not significant, $t(73) = .867, p=.389$. The mean ($M=4.16$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean ($M=4.00$) for rural teachers. The pre-kindergarten teachers' perception on kindergarten at-risk factors was not significant, $t(73) = 1.905, p=.061$. The mean ($M=3.16$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean ($M=2.83$) for rural teachers. The pre-kindergarten teachers' perception on barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools was not significant, $t(73) = .805, p=.424$. The mean ($M=3.18$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean ($M=3.01$) for rural teachers. The pre-kindergarten teachers' perception on ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools was not significant, $t(73) = -.972, p=.334$. The mean ($M=4.47$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean ($M=4.63$) for rural teachers. The pre-kindergarten teachers' perception on ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs was not significant, $t(73) = -1.955, p=.054$. The mean ($M=4.19$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean ($M=4.50$) for rural teachers.

Table 8

Pre-Kindergarten Teachers' Regional Perceptions

	Region	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Readiness Skills	Urban	56	4.16	.72
	Rural	19	4.00	.57
At-Risk Factors	Urban	56	3.16	.58
	Rural	19	2.83	.81

Table 8 (continued).

	Region	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Barriers	Urban	56	3.18	.81
	Rural	19	3.01	.80
Pre-K Help Primary	Urban	56	4.47	.65
	Rural	19	4.63	.48
Primary Help Pre-K	Urban	56	4.19	.61
	Rural	19	4.50	.50

Next, Research Question 7 was analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference for the kindergarten teachers. Based on the results of Table 9, the region of the kindergarten teachers did not have a significance difference on their perceptions for any of the five sections of the questionnaire. The kindergarten teachers' perception on kindergarten readiness skills was not significant, $t(51) = -.436, p = .664$. The mean ($M = 2.71$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean ($M = 2.81$) for rural teachers. The kindergarten teachers' perception on kindergarten at-risk factors was not significant, $t(51) = -.860, p = .394$. The mean ($M = 3.31$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean ($M = 3.45$) for rural teachers. The kindergarten teachers' perception on barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools was not significant, $t(51) = -1.054, p = .297$. The mean ($M = 3.38$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean ($M = 3.63$) for rural teachers. The kindergarten teachers' perception on ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools was not significant, $t(51) = -.679, p = .500$. The mean ($M = 4.53$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean

($M=4.62$) for rural teachers. The kindergarten teachers' perception on ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs was not significant, $t(51) = -.708, p=.482$. The mean ($M=4.29$) for urban teachers was about the same as the mean ($M=4.40$) for rural teachers.

Table 9

Kindergarten Teachers' Regional Perceptions

	Region	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Readiness Skills	Urban	41	2.71	.71
	Rural	12	2.81	.40
At-Risk Factors	Urban	41	3.31	.52
	Rural	12	3.45	.44
Barriers	Urban	41	3.38	.71
	Rural	12	3.63	.66
Pre-K Help Primary	Urban	41	4.53	.40
	Rural	12	4.62	.41
Primary Help Pre-K	Urban	41	4.29	.50
	Rural	12	4.40	.49

Ancillary Findings

In addition to the seven research questions that were analyzed, there were also some additional findings that were beneficial to this study. In these findings, there was a breakdown of students who attended pre-kindergarten versus those students who did not.

Through a chi-square test, these were analyzed to the students that tested proficient versus those students who did not on the PEAK assessment.

The first set of data that was looked at was the PEAK scores from the 2009-2010 school year. Based on the results from Table 10, there was a significant difference, χ^2 (N=528, $df=1$) = 259.787, $p \leq .001$, between those students who did attend pre-kindergarten and testing proficient on the PEAK assessment. Almost 96% of those students who attended pre-kindergarten tested proficient on the PEAK assessment. Seventy percent of those students who did not attend pre-kindergarten tested nonproficient on the PEAK assessment.

Table 10

2009-2010 Students Attending Pre-Kindergarten Proficiency Levels

Proficiency		No Pre-K	Attended Pre-K	Total
Non-Proficient	Count	84	17	101
	% within	70.0%	4.2%	19.1%
Proficient	Count	36	391	427
	% within	30.0%	95.8%	80.9%
Total	Count	120	408	528
	% within	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The next set of data that was looked at was the PEAK scores from the 2010-2011 school year. Based on the results from Table 11, there was a significant difference, χ^2 (N=518, $df=1$) = 184.595, $p \leq .001$, between those students who did attend pre-

kindergarten and testing proficient on the PEAK assessment. Almost 98% of those students who attended pre-kindergarten tested proficient on the PEAK assessment. Almost 51% of those students who did not attend pre-kindergarten tested non-proficient on the PEAK assessment.

Table 11

2010-2011 Students Attending Pre-Kindergarten Proficiency Levels

Proficiency		No Pre-K	Attended Pre-K	Total
Non-Proficient	Count	66	9	75
	% within	50.8%	2.3%	14.5%
Proficient	Count	64	379	443
	% within	49.2%	97.7%	85.5%
Total	Count	130	388	518
	% within	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary

The purpose behind this study was to find out if there were differences between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers perception on kindergarten readiness. In addition, the researcher wanted to gain knowledge of whether or not children who attended pre-kindergarten were able to begin their educational careers ready to learn. The study sought to find out how pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perceptions were on whether or not children were where they should be as they enter kindergarten. If a significant difference between their perceptions existed, what changes can be made to help bridge the gap in their perception, so all children come to kindergarten prepared to learn?

Conclusions

Through all the different data that were analyzed for this study, many conclusions can be made about from the research. Each research question formed its own conclusions. Research Question 1 stated: Is there a difference in kindergarten readiness test scores between those students who went to a pre-kindergarten program versus those students who did not attend a pre-kindergarten program? It can be concluded by analyzing the data from both the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years that those students who attended pre-kindergarten were able to score much higher on the PEAK assessment. The main focus was to find out whether or not pre-kindergarten had a major impact on kindergarten readiness; and based on the data, it can be concluded that attending pre-kindergarten made a significant difference in both school years analyzed.

Research Question 2 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward kindergarten readiness skills as they enter kindergarten? It can be concluded that pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers have a difference in perception with how ready kindergarteners are upon arrival to kindergarten. The pre-kindergarten teachers believed that students were leaving them much more prepared for kindergarten than the kindergarten teachers believed. The kindergarten teachers believed that many of the students entering kindergarten were not ready.

Research Question 3 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward at-risk factors on kindergarten readiness? It can be concluded that pre-kindergarten teachers feel students were less “at-risk” upon arrival to kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers were not as optimistic about the “at-risk” factors and believed students were more in danger of being “at-risk” than the pre-kindergarten teachers.

Research Question 4 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools? It can be concluded that pre-kindergarten teachers did not feel that there were as many barriers or obstacles in the way than the kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten teachers were not as confident about potential barriers that may get in the way for kindergarteners as they arrive to kindergarten.

Research Question 5 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways pre-kindergarten programs can help primary schools? It can be concluded that pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers agreed when it came to how a pre-kindergarten can help a primary school.

Research Question 6 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers toward ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs? It can be concluded that pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers agreed about how primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs.

Research Question 7 stated: Is there a difference between the perceptions of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers who are from an urban population versus rural population? It can be concluded there was not a difference in perception between urban and rural pre-kindergarten teachers. The same can be concluded about the perception between the urban and rural kindergarten teachers; they had no significant difference in perception.

As for the Ancillary Findings, it can be concluded that both school years analyzed had a significant difference for those students attending pre-kindergarten. For those students who attended pre-kindergarten in the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school year, it can be concluded that there was almost a perfect correlation that these students were going to test proficient upon the arrival of kindergarten.

Discussion

According to Foster (2007), it was important for students to come to kindergarten prepared, because students' learning required students to go through overlapping higher levels of things through the first 2 years of school. Those students who did not come to school prepared were not able to comprehend all the necessary skills by the end of first grade, thus, hindering their ability to move on to other developmental stages. If children were given more exposure to the types of skills that were required of them, then children would have a better chance at succeeding. In regards to this study, the children who were

not given that early exposure prior to entering kindergarten did not test as well as those students who were given that exposure in pre-kindergarten. There was a significant difference in PEAK test scores for this children who attended pre-kindergarten. These children were more likely to be able learn these concepts expected out of them, whereas, the children who did not attend pre-kindergarten may struggle.

According to Guernsey (2009), much of what children did when they enter kindergarten was spent gauging the children's knowledge. Instead of building of students' prior knowledge, teachers were spending valuable time trying to find out where each child stood academically. Many children were overwhelmed with all the testing and hampered the children's view of the school being a place of learning. Many primary schools and pre-kindergarten programs were not communicating with each other on what children can or cannot do academically upon arrival to kindergarten. In regards to this study, there was not a difference in perception between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers, based upon how they can help prepared each other. Both the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers believed that the there should be more communication to help better serve each other. They both believed this would better help the transition of students from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten, making it easier for the students and the teachers.

According to Ashford (2007), pre-kindergarten programs needed to collaborate with the local school districts and align the curriculum, so children can transition into kindergarten smoothly. In regards to this study, the local school district and the local pre-kindergarten programs do not have these barriers in place. The pre-kindergartens and primary schools work together to help every child come to school prepared. This was

evident in the 2009-2010 school year, where approximately 96% of the students who attended pre-kindergarten tested proficient on the PEAK assessment upon arrival to kindergarten. This was also evident in the 2010-2011 school year, where approximately 98% of the students who attended pre-kindergarten tested proficient on the PEAK assessment upon arrival to kindergarten. It was through collaboration and the ability to not have any barriers in the way of the pre-kindergarten programs and primary school that helped these students become more successful from the onset of their educational careers.

There can be many factors that determine why many children come to kindergarten unprepared. Many children come to school not knowing that they can be classified as “at-risk” just because of their background, where they grew up, gender, race, or by not going to pre-kindergarten. It was these “at-risk” factors that have statistically shown children to not be prepared for school.

According to Logue (2007), at an early age more boys than girls were being expelled. When these children were expelled from school at a young age, it hurt the child’s behavioral and academic readiness.

Lay and Stokes-Brown (2009) proclaimed that African Americans and Latino students were more likely to have disciplinary problems take remediation classes. According to Harry and Klingner (2007), there were a disproportionate amount of minorities placed into special education. Daley and Carlson (2009) declared that this had been happening for decades. African Americans were more likely to be labeled as being mentally retarded and having emotional disturbances than those who were non-African American children.

According to Ou and Reynolds (2006), early childhood education allowed children to be better prepared for kindergarten and their academic career, but it can also have significant long-term effects on these children. Students who had early childhood education had “higher reading and mathematics achievement test scores, fewer grade retentions, more years of education, greater likelihood to attend a 4-year college... higher rate of high school graduation... and higher adult earnings up to age 27” (Ou & Reynolds, 2006, p. 176).

With the ramifications of all these “at-risk” factors, this study sought to find out if the perceptions of these “at-risk” factors were differing among the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten teachers believed that these “at-risk” factors were more of a contributor to why children come to school unprepared, than did the pre-kindergarten teacher.

Espinosa (1997) stated that many kindergarten teachers believed that students were coming to kindergarten unprepared. In regards to this study, it coincides with the findings of the research. Many kindergarten teachers believed students were not coming to school adequately prepared to learn. Also, these teachers did not necessarily blame the pre-kindergarten programs, yet they believed much of the lack of readiness came from the parents being not being available in the household.

Washington (2001) proclaimed that pre-kindergarten teachers had mixed feelings about the readiness of kindergarteners. In regards to this study, it would contradict the findings of the research. Compared to the kindergarten teachers, the pre-kindergarten teachers believed that students were ready to enter kindergarten. The reasoning behind

the pre-kindergarten teachers having mixed perceptions on kindergarten readiness was also because of the lack of parental involvement in the household.

According to Espinosa (1997) and Washington (2001), it seemed to be the parents who held more of the responsibility of why many children were coming to school unprepared. It was concluded that pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perceptions may not be the same, but they did agree that in order to help these children become better students, the parents need to become more accountable in the household.

Limitations

The current research's limitations would be that this study was limited to only one school district. The perceptions gathered in this study do not reflect the perceptions of all pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Also, it was not known for what length of time the children were enrolled in a pre-kindergarten program. The only knowledge known about each student was if they were enrolled or not enrolled upon the entrance to kindergarten in their respective year.

Recommendations for Policy or Practice

With so many students in today's educational world beginning kindergarten unprepared, what harm would it do to have some of the extremely low-achieving be delayed another year before entering kindergarten? Many students may be at or above grade level upon entering kindergarten. There also may be some students slightly below grade level, but what about those students who are obviously too far behind upon arrival to kindergarten? These children need some intense intervention that is not offered in a regular educational classroom. Many children with interventions in a regular education classroom would not benefit as much as it would for children to delay their kindergarten

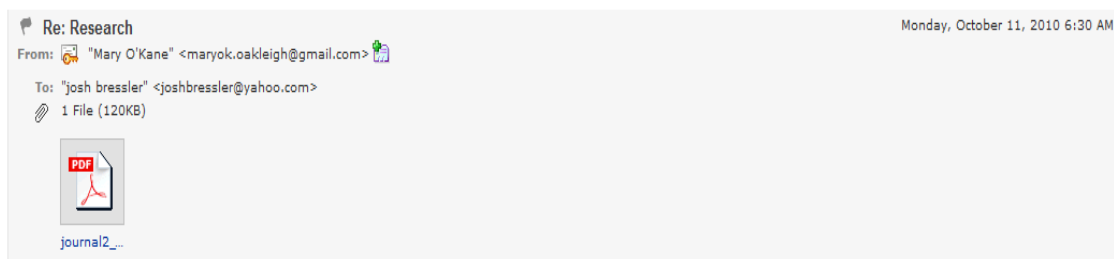
entrance another year. These children need to be able to go to some publicly funded intense intervention if they were to start of kindergarten extremely low. This would help these children in the long run of their educational careers.

Recommendations for Future Research

In addition to the current study, how much difference does it make for a pre-kindergarten program to keep in contact with its local school district about curriculum to help better prepare children for kindergarten readiness? Would there be a statistical difference in test scores between pre-kindergarten programs who keep in contact with the local school district versus those pre-kindergarten programs that do not. Further research to answer this question could have major implications on how pre-kindergarten programs help prepare their students for kindergarten.

Since there are so many children who come to kindergarten unprepared, they are placed into some sort of intervention early on in their educational careers. What impact are these interventions having on these children? In the perfect world, these children who are placed in these interventions would be turning these low test scores around. Is this really taking place or are many of these children being placed into special education classes or actually placed in regular education classes and excelling as well as the other children? Further research to answer this question could have major implications on what may or may not be needed to be changed in many schools' intervention strategies.

APPENDIX A
LETTER OF PERMISSION



No problem Josh,

That is fine, if you could please acknowledge it as per the details of my PhD Thesis that would be great.

Please find attached one of the early papers on the findings which might be useful. The full version of my thesis is on the CECDE website where you found the questionnaire.

Best of luck with the research!

Best wishes,

Mary

On Sun, Oct 10, 2010 at 10:14 PM, josh bressler <joshbressler@yahoo.com> wrote:

Dr. Mary O' Kane,

I am a doctoral student attending the University of Southern Mississippi located in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA. I am working on my dissertation on early childhood education kindergarten readiness. I was doing some research online and found the questionnaire located on the link below. Is it possible to get permission to possibly use this questionnaire for my research?

<http://www.cecde.ie/english/pdf/Research%20Students/Mary%20O'Kane/O'Kane.%20App%203.pdf>

Thanks so much,
Josh Bressler

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Mary O'Kane, BSc, MPhil, PhD
Associate Lecturer in Psychology
Tutor in Early Childhood Education

APPENDIX B

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE PERMISSION



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 Tel: 601.266.6820
 Fax: 601.266.5509
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **10110204**

PROJECT TITLE: **Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers' Perception on Kindergarten Readiness**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **11/01/2010 to 11/01/2011**

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Josh Bressler**

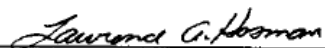
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **02/07/2011 to 02/06/2012**



 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 HSPRC Chair

2-8-2011

 Date

APPENDIX C

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION (PROGRAM DIRECTOR)

November 3, 2010

Dear Program Director,

My name is Josh Bressler, and I am a doctoral student at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting research for my dissertation on the perceptions of pre-kindergarten teachers and kindergarten teachers on students' kindergarten readiness. These perceptions will be measured by their responses to a questionnaire that they will voluntarily fill out. Each one of the teachers will remain anonymous. The focus of this questionnaire will be on: readiness skills, at-risk factors on kindergarten readiness, barriers between pre-kindergarten and primary schools, ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs.

There will be a cover letter that will go out with each questionnaire to explain the purpose of the questionnaire, which will take approximately 10-15 minutes. The approximately months that this questionnaire will take place will be between January and February of 2011.

Please indicate below whether you give me permission to carry out this research at your pre-kindergarten program. Also, by signing below, you are acknowledging that you are the program director of the pre-kindergarten listed above.

____ Yes, you have my permission to carry out this research at my pre-kindergarten program.

____ No, you do not have my permission to carry out this research at my pre-kindergarten program.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION (SUPERINTENDENT)

November 3, 2010

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Josh Bressler, and I am a doctoral student at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting research for my dissertation on the perceptions of kindergarten teachers on students' kindergarten readiness. These perceptions will be measured by their responses to a questionnaire that they will voluntarily fill out. Each one of the teachers will remain anonymous. The focus of this questionnaire will be on: readiness skills, at-risk factors on kindergarten readiness, barriers between pre-kindergarten and primary schools, ways primary schools can help pre-kindergarten programs.

In each of the elementary schools, the principals of each school will be contacted for instruction to help with the delivery and collection of the questionnaire. There will be a cover letter that will go out with each questionnaire to explain the questionnaire, which will take approximately 10-15 minutes. The approximately months that this questionnaire will take place will be between the January and February of 2011.

In addition to gaining permission for the questionnaires, I am also seeking permission to access data from the Pascagoula Early Assessment for Kindergarten. The data from the PEAK scores will be used to determine if there is a difference between PEAK scores for those students who attended a pre-kindergarten program and those who have not attended a pre-kindergarten.

Please indicate below whether you give me permission to carry out this research.

____ Yes, you have my permission to carry out this research in our school district.

____ No, you do not have my permission to carry out this research in our school district.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

KINDERGARTEN QUESTIONNAIRE

Kindergarten Readiness Questionnaire

Please check the response that best describes your situation.

DEMOGRAPHICS

How long have you been a teacher? ___1-5 years ___6-10 years ___more than 10 years

What is your age group? ___20-35 years ___36-50 years ___older than 50 years

Ethnicity: ___Caucasian ___African-American
 ___Hispanic ___Asian Other _____

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

How would you classify the population of your school? ___Urban* ___Rural**

*Urban – Areas located in the city with a high population density

** Rural – Areas located in the open country with a low population density

PERCEPTION OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS SKILLS

Please circle the number that indicates over the course of your career the percentage of students equipped with the following skills upon arrival to kindergarten.

1=0%-20%

2=21%-40%

3=41%-60%

4=61%-80%

5=81-100%

Independence and self-help skills	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to listen and sit still	1	2	3	4	5
Problem-solving skills	1	2	3	4	5
Speak clearly	1	2	3	4	5
Communicate effectively	1	2	3	4	5
Positive reading experiences (e.g., read to by others, enjoys books)	1	2	3	4	5
Social skills (e.g., take turns, get along with others)	1	2	3	4	5
Basic concepts (e.g., know numbers, letters)	1	2	3	4	5
Fine motor skills (e.g., cut paper, write)	1	2	3	4	5
Express appropriate emotions (e.g., happy, sad, anger)	1	2	3	4	5

PERCEPITON OF AT-RISK FACTORS ON KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with each of the following groups of children who are at risk in general terms for being ready for kindergarten.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Children who have not been to some type of pre-kindergarten program are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children from minority groups are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children from urban areas are more at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten than children from rural areas.	1	2	3	4	5
Children with special needs are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children with low self-esteem are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children with behavior problems are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children who find it difficult to listen or sit still are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children who come from a single-parent family are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Boys, rather than girls, are more at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5

BARRIERS BETWEEN PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with some of the barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools that can affect kindergarten readiness.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Cultural differences between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Differences in curriculum of pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Differences in training/professional preparation for pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of communication between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
The number of “feeder” pre-kindergarten programs and “receiving” primary schools makes coordination difficult.	1	2	3	4	5

The decision for children to start school based on age rather than individual preparedness is a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
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PERCEPTIONS ON WAYS PRE-KINDEGARTEN PROGRAMS CAN HELP PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with some of the activities pre-kindergarten programs should do to better prepare students to be ready for the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Pre-kindergarten programs should discuss with the children what will be expected in primary schools.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should arrange classroom visits to primary schools.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should incorporate academic skills into pre-kindergarten curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should encourage independence in children, responsibility for self and belonging.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should use classroom-type rules (e.g., stand in line/wait your turn).	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should undertake evaluations (strengths/weaknesses) of each child to pass on to kindergarten teachers at the primary schools.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should establish ongoing communication with the “receiving” schools’ teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should hold discussions with parents about readiness of children who plan on starting kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should devise a written “transition plan” outlining practices put in place to smooth the transition to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5

PERCEPTIONS ON WAYS PRIMARY SCHOOLS CAN HELP PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with some of the activities primary schools should do to better prepare students to be ready for the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Primary schools should send letters to parents prior to the start of kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
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Primary schools should arrange parent meetings prior to the start of kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should arrange home visits prior to the start of kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should arrange for the children to visit prior to the start of kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should establish communication with pre-kindergarten teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should visit pre-kindergartens and observe children.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should review pre-kindergarten evaluations of children.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX F

PRE-KINDERGARTEN QUESTIONNAIRE

Kindergarten Readiness Questionnaire

Please check the response that best describes your situation.

DEMOGRAPHICS

How long have you been a teacher? ___1-5 years ___6-10 years ___more than 10 years

What is your age group? ___20-35 years ___36-50 years ___older than 50 years

Ethnicity: ___Caucasian ___African-American
 ___Hispanic ___Asian Other _____

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

How would you classify the population of your school? ___Urban* ___Rural**

*Urban – Areas located in the city with a high population density

** Rural – Areas located in the open country with a low population density

PERCEPTION OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS SKILLS

Please circle the number that indicates over the course of your career the percentage of students equipped with the following skills once they have left your program.

1=0%-20%

2=21%-40%

3=41%-60%

4=61%-80%

5=81-100%

Independence and self-help skills	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to listen and sit still	1	2	3	4	5
Problem-solving skills	1	2	3	4	5
Speak clearly	1	2	3	4	5
Communicate effectively	1	2	3	4	5
Positive reading experiences (e.g., read to by others, enjoys books)	1	2	3	4	5
Social skills (e.g., take turns, get along with others)	1	2	3	4	5
Basic concepts (e.g., know numbers, letters)	1	2	3	4	5
Fine motor skills (e.g., cut paper, write)	1	2	3	4	5
Express appropriate emotions (e.g., happy, sad, anger)	1	2	3	4	5

PERCEPITON OF AT-RISK FACTORS ON KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with each of the following groups of children who are at risk in general terms for being ready for kindergarten.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Children who have not been to some type of pre-kindergarten program are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children from minority groups are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children from urban areas are more at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten than children from rural areas.	1	2	3	4	5
Children with special needs are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children with low self-esteem are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children with behavior problems are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children who find it difficult to listen or sit still are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Children who come from a single-parent family are at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Boys, rather than girls, are more at risk of being unprepared for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5

BARRIERS BETWEEN PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with some of the barriers between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools that can affect kindergarten readiness.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Cultural differences between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Differences in curriculum of pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Differences in training/professional preparation for pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of communication between pre-kindergarten programs and primary schools are a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
The number of “feeder” pre-kindergarten programs and “receiving” primary schools makes coordination difficult.	1	2	3	4	5

The decision for children to start school based on age rather than individual preparedness is a barrier for children becoming ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

PERCEPTIONS ON WAYS PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS CAN HELP PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with some of the activities pre-kindergarten programs should do to better prepare students to be ready for the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Pre-kindergarten programs should discuss with the children what will be expected in primary schools.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should arrange classroom visits to primary schools.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should incorporate academic skills into pre-kindergarten curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should encourage independence in children, responsibility for self and belonging.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should use classroom-type rules (e.g., stand in line/wait your turn).	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should undertake evaluations (strengths/weaknesses) of each child to pass on to kindergarten teachers at the primary schools.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should establish ongoing communication with the “receiving” schools’ teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should hold discussions with parents about readiness of children who plan on starting kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-kindergarten programs should devise a written “transition plan” outlining practices put in place to smooth the transition to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5

PERCEPTIONS ON WAYS PRIMARY SCHOOLS CAN HELP PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement with some of the activities primary schools should do to better prepare students to be ready for the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Primary schools should send letters to parents prior to the start of kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
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Primary schools should arrange parent meetings prior to the start of kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should arrange home visits prior to the start of kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should arrange for the children to visit prior to the start of kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should establish communication with pre-kindergarten teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should visit pre-kindergartens and observe children.	1	2	3	4	5
Primary schools should review pre-kindergarten evaluations of children.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX G

PRE-KINDERGARTEN COVER LETTER

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student working on my dissertation for my PhD at the University of Southern Mississippi. I invite you to participate in the *Kindergarten Readiness Questionnaire*. Your participation is voluntary and your response will remain completely anonymous. The purpose of this study is to compare the perceptions of pre-kindergarten/preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers toward student readiness as they enter kindergarten. This questionnaire is being sent out to participating pre-kindergarten/preschool programs and elementary schools in the Pascagoula School District.

Please take the time to complete this questionnaire, which will take about 5-10 minutes. Once you have completed it, please return it to your program director at your earliest convenience.

Questions concerning the research, at any time during or after the project, should be directed to Josh Bressler at 228-123-1111 or emailed at any time at joshbressler@yahoo.com or jbressler@harrison.k12.ms.us. This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Josh Bressler
PhD Student
University of Southern Mississippi

APPENDIX H
KINDERGARTEN COVER LETTER

Dear Participant:

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Please take the time to complete this questionnaire, which will take about 5-10 minutes. Once you have completed it, please return it to your principal at your earliest convenience.

Questions concerning the research, at any time during or after the project, should be directed to Josh Bressler at 228-123-1111 or emailed at any time at joshbressler@yahoo.com or jbressler@harrison.k12.ms.us. This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

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