Picard Center

FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE

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Defining School Readiness Survey

Prepared for

Education's Next Horizon

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Executive Summary

Education's Next Horizon is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated solely to Prek-12 education improvement. Their mission is to help frame the debate for education reform and to connect Louisiana's leadership — education, government, business and community — as a force supporting meaningful school improvement. Their approach is to help "transform policies into results" by building bridges and networks with policymakers, community leaders, and education supporters across the state.

In January 2008, Education's Next Horizon convened a Stakeholder Council comprised of education, government, and business leaders to explore ways to build a high-quality, diverse delivery system in early childhood education. After extensive research, the Early Childhood Education Workgroup of the Stakeholder Council developed and recommended a Louisiana Definition of School Readiness.

The group now seeks the support and input of stakeholders in the early childhood education community about how to strengthen and implement a shared understanding of the concept of "school readiness." The Picard Center for Child Development and Lifelong Learning has partnered with Education's Next Horizon to administer a survey to garner feedback from the public.

Key findings are as follows:
- 46.6% of respondents strongly agreed the definition of "school readiness" reflects their own opinion, and 32% agree with the statement.
- 44.9% of the respondents strongly agreed the "school readiness" guiding principle is an important part of the definition, and 34.7% agree with the statement.
- 58.2% of respondents strongly agree all child care and education communities can benefit from a common definition of "school readiness" to ensure that all Louisiana children are school ready, while 10.2% somewhat agree and 25.9% agree.
- 45.2% of respondents strongly agree the definition of "school readiness" and the indicators helps them to understand what must be done to prepare children for school readiness in kindergarten, while 17% somewhat agree and 31% strongly agree.
- 37% of respondents said they somewhat disagree that based on their role with children; most children are school ready, while 15% strongly disagree. That represents 52% of the respondents. Thus, 48% of respondents agree to some extent that children are school ready.

Introduction

What makes a child ready for school? The education community is moving toward defining "school readiness" in an attempt to quantify what preschoolers need to have early, and sustained educational success. Most of the definitions of "school readiness" are based on the levels of social and emotional development, student cognition and general knowledge, development of language and literacy skills, and physical well-being and motor development. These components are essential in helping to address a child's growth on all levels.

Next Horizons' Early Childhood Education Workgroup set the **Guiding Principle** as:
It is important to note that creating a "school ready" definition is not meant to prevent student entry into kindergarten or to place strict labels on children. This definition should serve: as a guide for appropriate early education curriculum planning; as a support for individualized services and instruction for all children; and to inform public policy.

The following definition was used in the survey:
"School readiness" describes the capabilities of children, their families, schools, and communities that best promote student success in kindergarten and beyond. Each component – children, families, schools, and communities – plays an essential role in the development of school readiness. No one component can stand on its own.

- **Ready Children.** A ready child is prepared socially, personally, physically and intellectually within the developmental domains of literacy, mathematics, science, history and social science, physical and motor development, and personal, social/emotional and creative development. Children develop holistically; growth and development in one area depends upon development in other areas.
- **communicate effectively** with adults and children by:
  - labeling objects and feelings;
  - providing simple descriptions for events;
  - effectively conveying information, desires, needs; and
  - using simple language and grammar to solve problems and to negotiate social interactions with adults and peers.
- exhibit **personal and social/emotional** skills and a sense of self-worth by:
  - feeling secure and valued in their relationships;
  - expressing their emotions and taking pride in their accomplishments;
  - recognizing the consequences of their actions;
  - showing self-control; and cooperating with others, using non-physical ways to resolve conflicts
- display emerging **literacy** skills within the developmental domain of communication by:
  - showing interests in and interacting with books as they are read by adults;
  - answering questions
  - learning to use new words and tell stories;

- recognizing and producing speech sounds, such as rhymes, beginning sounds, and letter sounds;
- identifying the letters of the alphabet;
- learning about print concepts from books, signs, and household objects; and
- engaging in drawing and pretend writing and writing their name, letters, and other printed symbols.
- show an interest and skill in **mathematics** by:
  - counting and using numbers to describe and compare;
  - recognizing and sorting simple shapes and describing their position;
  - identifying simple patterns;
  - making simple comparisons based on length, weight, time, temperature, and size; and
  - using objects in play, experimenting with materials, building blocks and puzzles.
- build early **science** skills by:
  - exploring and showing curiosity;
  - asking and answering questions about nature, why things happen and how things work;
  - identifying patterns and changes in daily life; and
  - making observations based on the five senses.
- learn about **history and social studies** by:
  - interacting with their family, peers, religious, and social communities;
  - recognizing ways in which people are alike and different; and
  - recognizing the relationships between people, places, and time.
- enhance **physical and motor development** by:
  - learning to control their bodies;
  - strengthening their muscles;
  - practicing different movements;
  - participating in regular physical activity; and
  - practicing healthy living and appropriate daily care routines.
- are given opportunities for **creative** endeavors by:
  - participating in music/movement, dramatic expression and visual arts; and,
  - emphasizing the experience rather than the outcome.

- **Ready Families.** A ready family has adults who understand that they are the most important people in the child's life and take responsibility for the child's school readiness through direct, frequent and positive involvement and interest in the child. Adults are empowered and equipped to recognize their roles as the child's first and most important teachers, providing steady and supportive relationships, ensuring safe and consistent environments, promoting good health, and fostering curiosity, excitement about learning, determination and self-control.
- interact with their children, helping them to develop listening and communication skills and to express their feelings, needs, and wants. Adults:
  - read to and speak with children regularly and respectfully;

- o appreciate the child's view of the world;
- o encourage exploration of the world in which they live;
- o are trustworthy and dependable; and
- o engage with children with joy, warmth, and comfort.
- encourage and act as the bridge to positive social relationships. Adults:
  - o help children learn to cooperate with others;
  - o help children follow simple directions and complete basic tasks;
  - o foster friendships with other children;
  - o teach children routines and how to respond to rules and structure;
  - o help children learn how to handle disappointments; and
  - o expose children to and help them describe different people, places, and things.
- ensure their child's health and well-being by:
  - o completing all appropriate eye, ear, dental, social/emotional and other medical screenings as well as immunizations.

- **Ready Schools.** A ready school accepts all children and provides a seamless transition to a high-quality learning environment by engaging the whole community to ensure a continuity of care. A ready school welcomes all children with opportunities to enhance and build confidence in their skills, knowledge and abilities. Children in ready schools are led by skilled teachers who recognize, reinforce and extend children's strengths and who are sensitive to cultural values and individual differences.
- smooth the transition between home and school by:
  - o communicating kindergarten standards and other school information to families through activities such as home visits, telephone calls, questionnaires, and kindergarten visitation days; and
  - o forming effective relationships with parents and early childhood programs to share children's prekindergarten experiences and to assess their development.
- support instruction and staff development by:
  - o employing highly qualified teachers;
  - o maintaining appropriate class sizes;
  - o encouraging professional development; and
  - o using best practices in the classroom.
- support teachers as they assess the individual needs of children, design instruction based on these needs, and regularly monitor students' progress.
- partner with communities and families by participating in activities such as:
  - o recreational and enrichment programs;
  - o family literacy activities;
  - o before and after-school care;
  - o open houses; and
  - o communication with other early childhood education programs in the community.
- provide resources and services to address the diverse and individual needs of students and their families including:
  - o educational services;

- o health and mental health services; and
- o social services.
- emphasize the importance of early childhood education by:
  - o regularly reviewing the quality, appropriateness, and alignment of the curriculum across all grades and phases of development; and
  - o regularly focusing on and supporting the quality of teachers' interactions with children at all grade levels.

- **Ready Communities and Stakeholders.** A ready community plays a crucial part in supporting families in their role as primary stewards of children's readiness. Ready communities, including businesses, faith-based organizations, early childhood service providers, community groups, policy-makers and local governments, work together to support schools and long term success by providing families affordable access to information, services, high-quality care, and early education opportunities.
- ensure all children and their families have access as well as the resources necessary to receive high-quality early care and education.
- promote collaboration to reach the most vulnerable children and families through diverse channels of communication by:
  - o supporting effective, innovative strategies; and
  - o building a sustainable, comprehensive, system that maximizes resources.
- educate policy-makers to formulate decisions that are grounded in best practice and evidence-based research.
- provide accessible and affordable family services related to physical health, mental health, and lifelong learning. These services include:
  - o literacy, English language learning, parenting skills, and adult education;
  - o home visiting programs;
  - o basic health care and nutrition services, including prenatal care;
  - o mental health counseling;
  - o early identification and treatment for children with disabilities and other special needs;
  - o drug and alcohol counseling;
  - o family court services; and
  - o child-abuse prevention.
- promote public assets such as parks, libraries, recreational facilities, civic and cultural venues and other opportunities to provide a better quality of life for families, encourage early learning opportunities, and foster community participation.
- regularly assess the status of children, families, schools, and community resources with regard to their role in school readiness and use these assessments in program planning and resource allocation.
- recognize, support, and sustain high-quality early care and education as a vital component of economic growth and development.
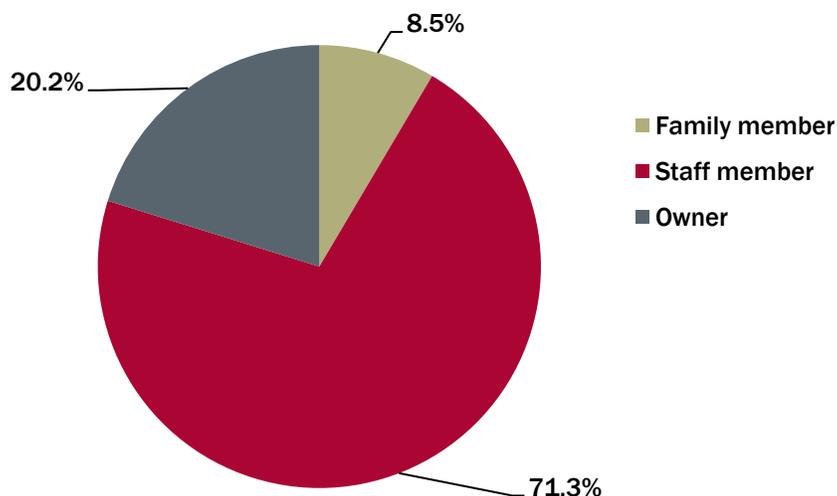
Profile of Survey Respondents

A total of 293 respondents took the survey, and the following information provides data on the group:
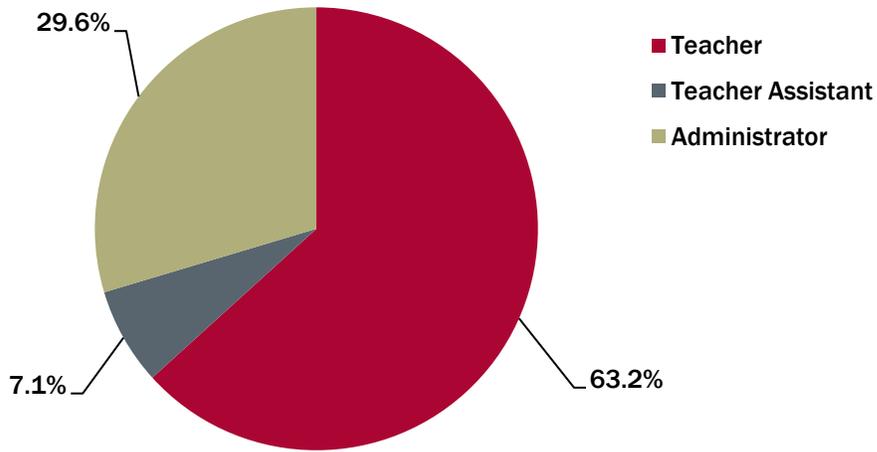
- The survey respondents included 92 child care staff members, 11 child care family members, and 26 child care owners.
- A total of 160 public school teachers responded to the survey, along with 18 teacher assistants and 75 administrators.
- Among nonpublic education officials, 18 teachers responded to the survey, 4 teacher assistants and 45 administrators.
- There were 108 nonprofit officials who took part in the survey, and 26 for-profit officials.
- Among those in the health care industry, 8 physicians, 5 nurses, three persons from the Nurse Family Partnership program, and 15 public health officials responded to the survey.
- A total of 67 state government officials responded to the survey, along with 10 federal employees and 18 local government employees.
- Also, 12 people who classified themselves as other took part in the survey.

Note: Due to the possibility of multiple profile answers from one respondent, the overall "n" may exceed the actual number of respondents (n = 293).
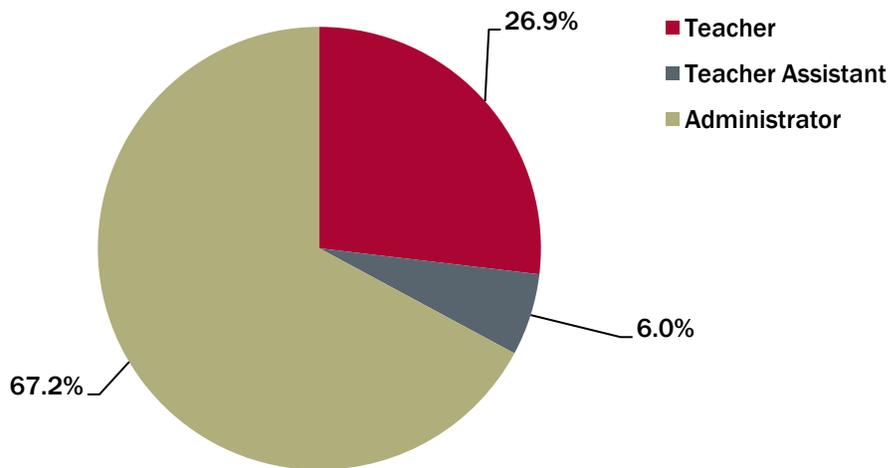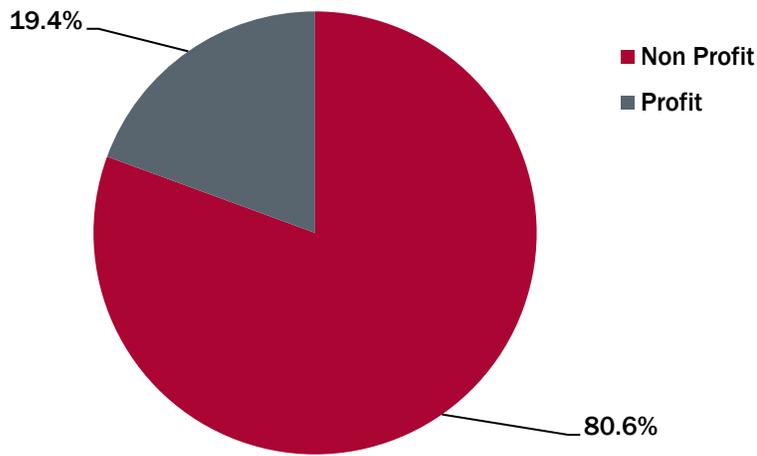
Figure 1. Child Care Industry survey respondents

Figure 2. Public Education survey respondents

Legend:
- Teacher
- Teacher Assistant
- Administrator

29.6%
7.1%
63.2%

Figure 3. Non-Public Education survey respondents

Legend:
- Teacher
- Teacher Assistant
- Administrator

26.9%
6.0%
67.2%

Figure 4. Community survey respondents

Non Profit — 80.6%
Profit — 19.4%

Figure 5. Community survey respondents

Nurse Family Partnership — 9.7%
Physician — 25.8%
Nurse — 16.1%
Public Health — 48.4%
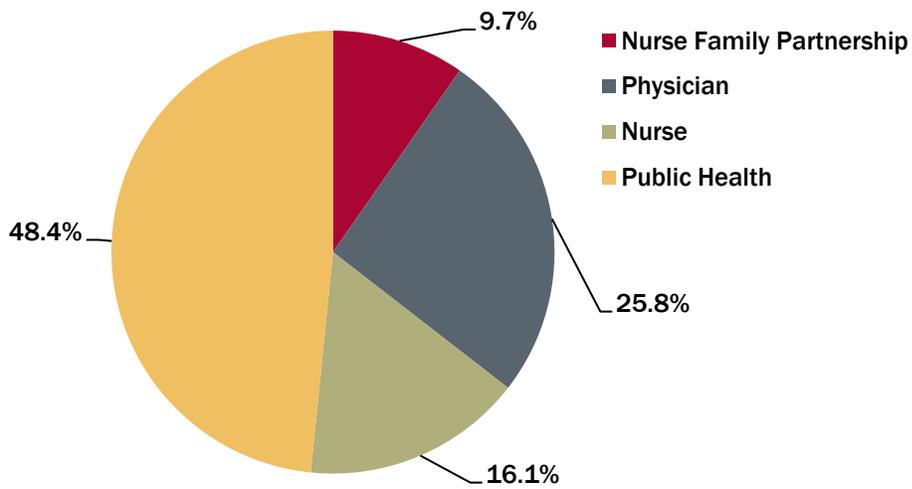
Figure 6. Government survey respondents

18.9%

10.5%

70.5%

- State
- Federal
- Local
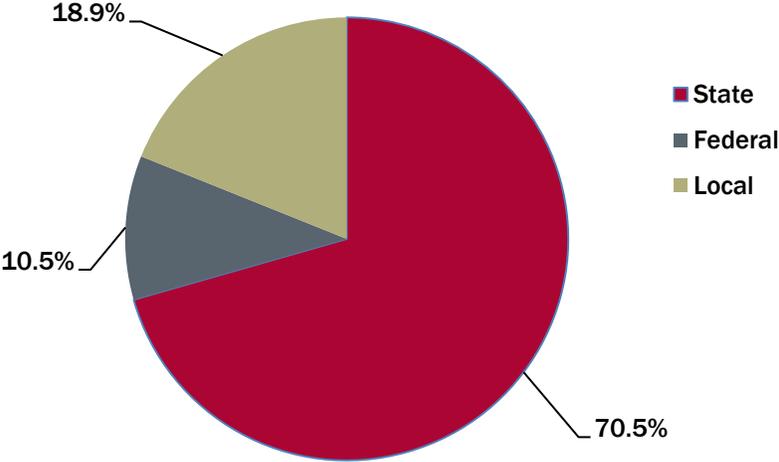
Survey Results

Figure 6. Definition of "school readiness" reflects my own opinion

Legend:
- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

4.8%
2.4%
46.6%
32.0%
14.3%
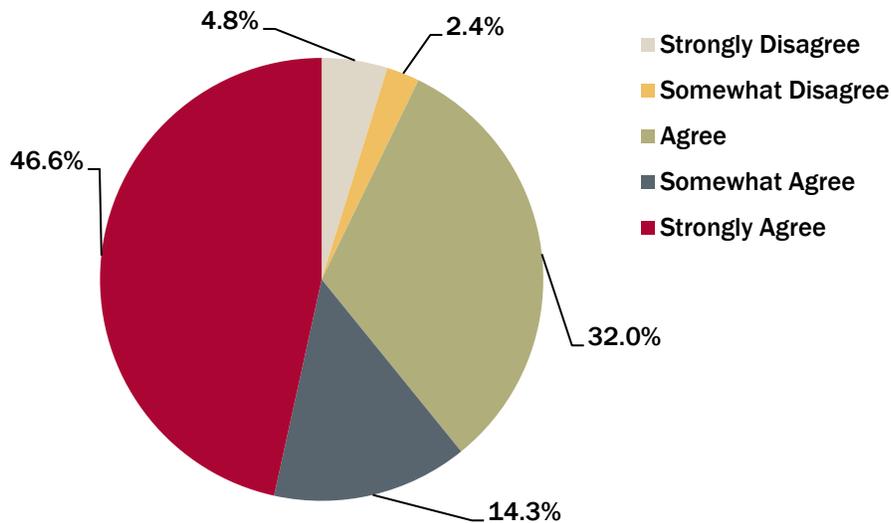
The majority of respondents (92.9%) agreed that the definition of "school readiness" reflects their own opinion, while 7.2% somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

Figure 7. School readiness guiding principle is an important part of the "school readiness" definition

Legend:
- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

4.8%
0.7%
44.9%
34.7%
15.0%
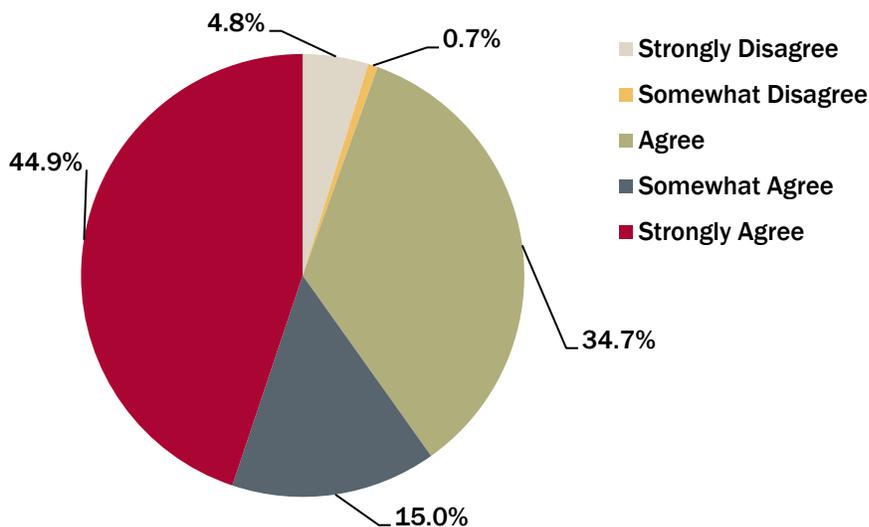
The majority of respondents (94.6%) agreed the "school readiness" guiding principle is an important part of the definition, while 5.5% somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

Figure 8. All child early care and education communities can benefit from a common definition of "school readiness to ensure that all of Louisiana's children are school ready
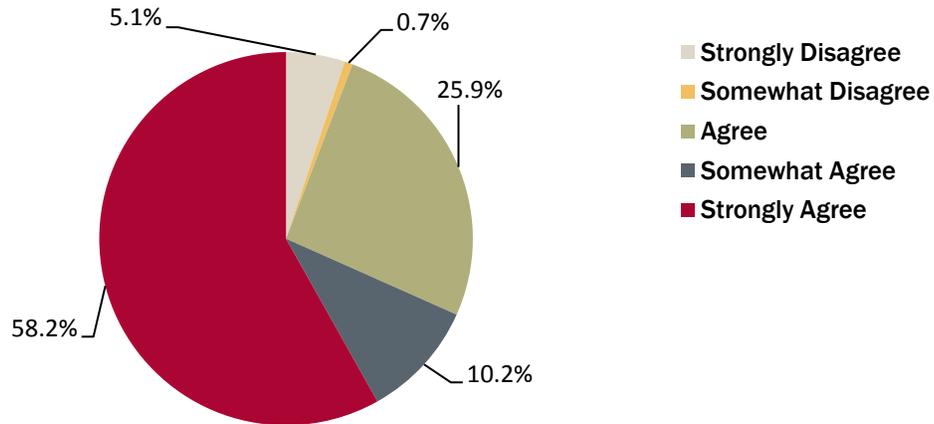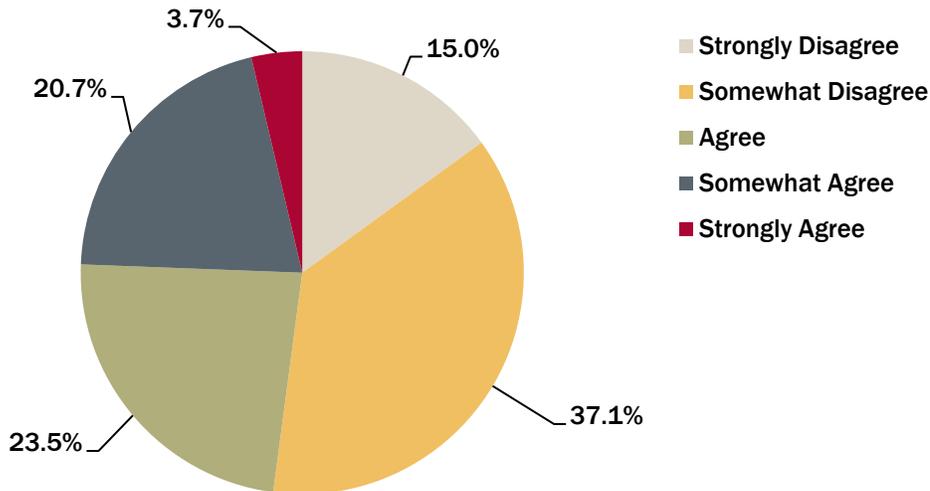

The majority of respondents (94.3%) agreed all child early care and education communities can benefit from a common definition of "school readiness to ensure that all of Louisiana's children are school ready, while 5.8% somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

Figure 9. The stated "school readiness" definition helps to understand what must be done to prepare children for school readiness in kindergarten
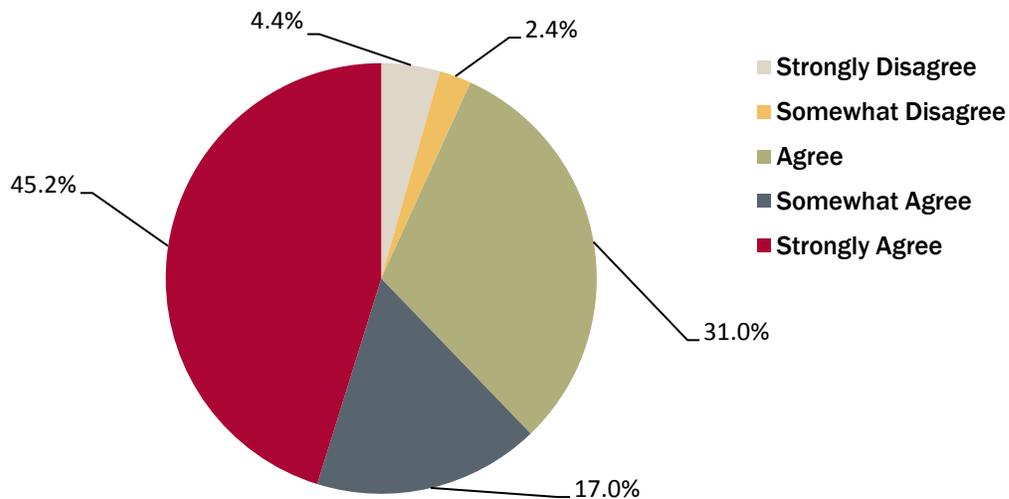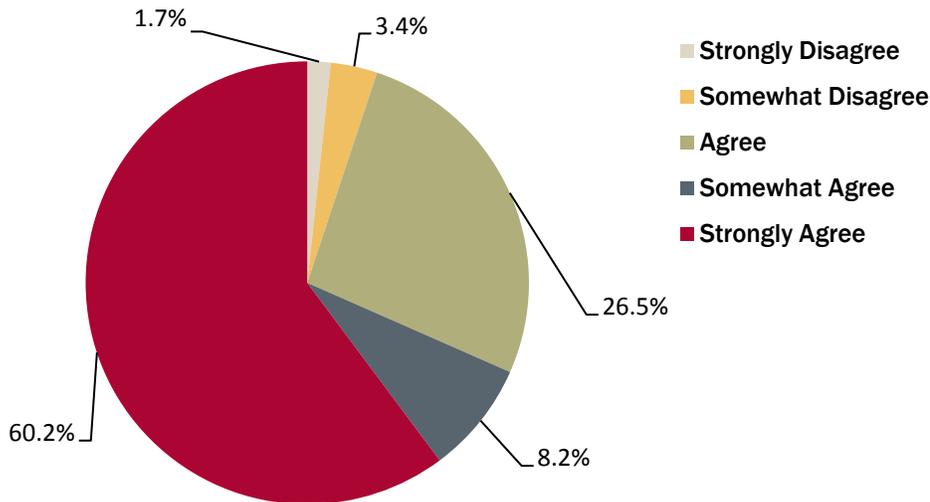

The majority of respondents (93.2%) agreed the stated "school readiness" definition helps to understand what must be done to prepare children for school readiness in kindergarten, while 6.8% somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

**Figure 10. Based on respondents' role with young children, they believe most children are school ready**

The majority of respondents (52.1%) somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that based on their role with young children, most are school ready, while 47.9% agreed, strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement.

Figure 11. The definition and indicators should include that there are things every family, regardless of financial status, can do to help children be school ready
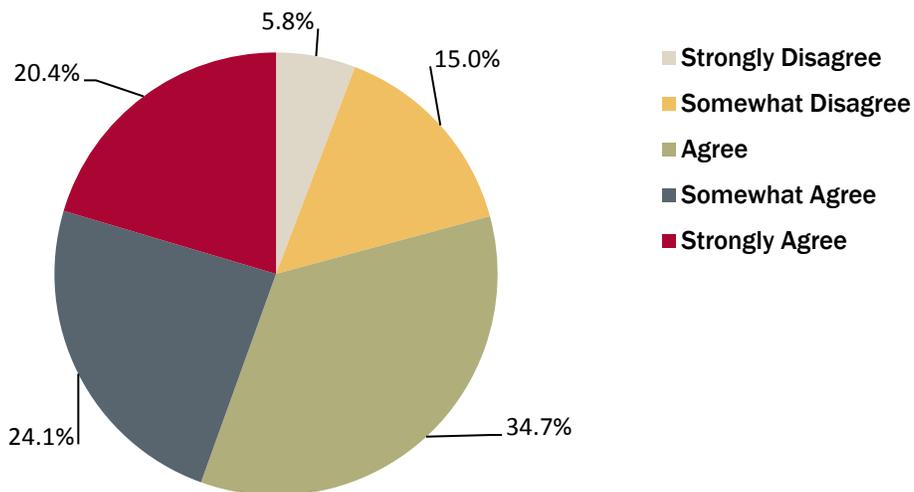

The majority of respondents (94.9%) agreed, somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that regardless of financial status, a family can does things to help children be school ready, while 5.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement.

Figure 12. Based on the definition of "school readiness," most schools are ready to teach all children, regardless of economic status
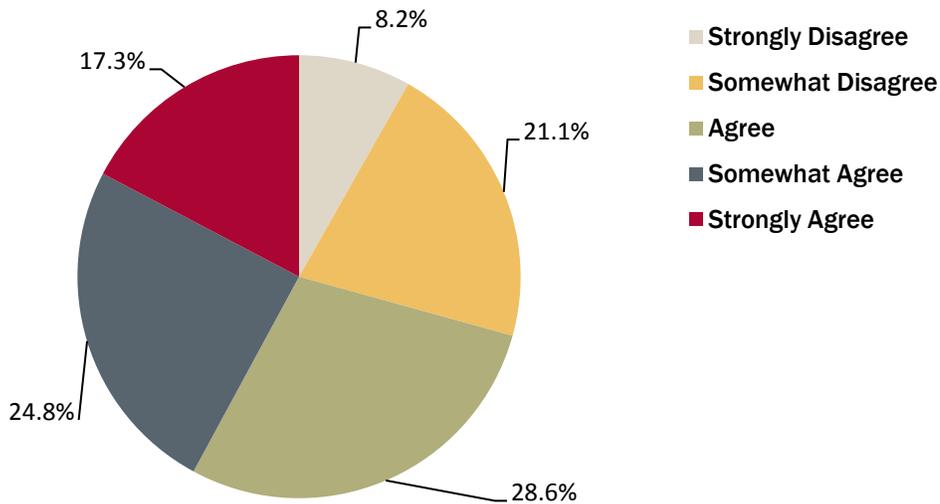
The majority of respondents (70.7%) agreed, somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that Based on the definition of "school readiness," most schools are ready to teach all children, regardless of economic status, while 29.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement.

Figure 13. Does my community support the readiness of all children?

The majority of respondents (79.2%) agreed, somewhat agreed or strongly agreed their community supports the readiness of all children, while 20.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement.

Figure 14. Communities have a responsibility to help families, child care providers and educators with school readiness and this definition will help communicate that

1.7% 2.7%

43.2%

34.4%

18.0%

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree
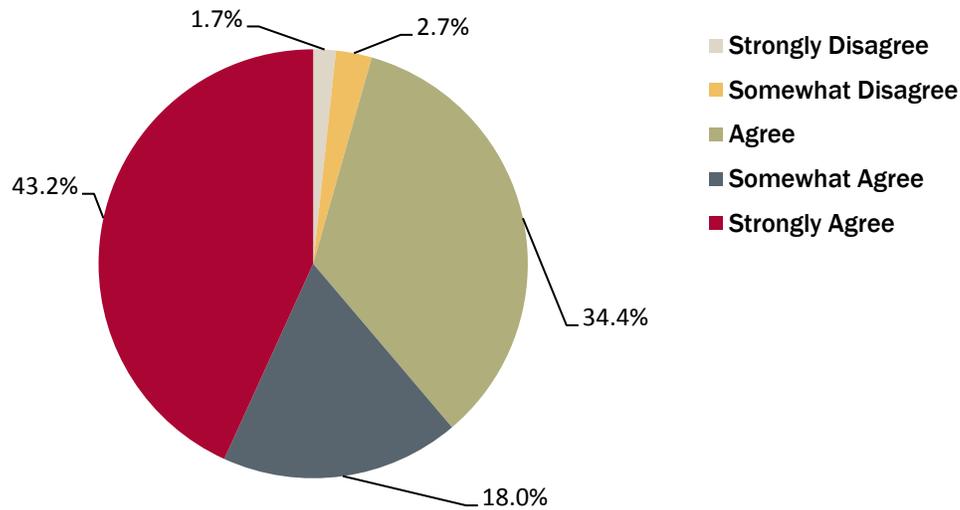
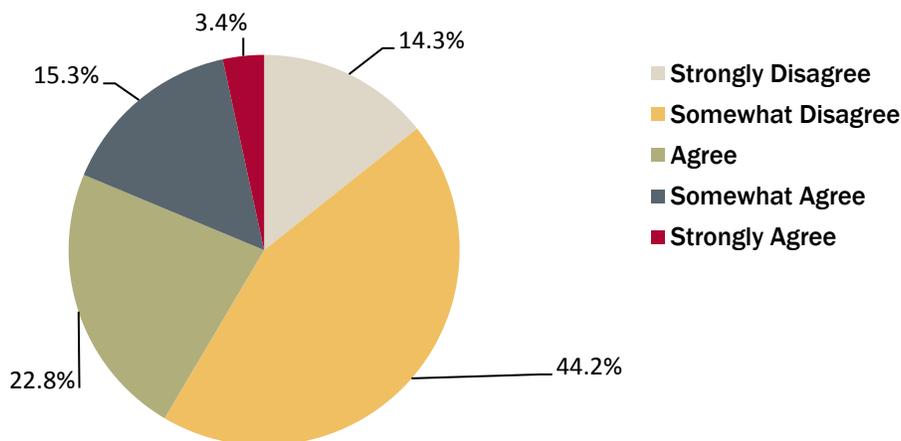The majority of respondents (95.6%) agreed, somewhat agreed or strongly agreed their community supports the readiness of all children, while 4.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement.

Figure 15. Using the definition of "school readiness," most Louisiana families successfully prepare their young children for school entry

3.4% 14.3%

15.3%

22.8%

44.2%

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

The majority of respondents (58.5%) strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that using the definition of "school readiness," most Louisiana families successfully prepare their young children for school entry, while 41.5% strongly agreed, somewhat agreed or agreed with that statement.

Survey Comments

Respondents made the following comments:

- This is an excellent piece of work. My concern is that the typical person including most teachers will not see the worth of this. Marketing this is going to be crucial.
- Provide more allocations for preschool programs.
- Commitment from both the family and schools.
- I do feel this is a good definition.
- The age of 4 by September 30 does not mean a child is ready for Pre-K and therefore, the next year, ready for Kindergarten. This is an issue that needs to be addressed…a certain date does not work for all children…each child is unique and different and develops and matures at different times.
- Interest in books, writing, math, reading, etc. also asks questions in regards to those areas, seems bored with same activities, wants to make new friends and socialize with others
- How can we possibly reach all student needs when you have those no matter what? They are not ready for school and do not allow you to meet the needs of the other students in your classroom! I am unable to get the rest of the class school ready.
- I think that the document does an excellent job of defining school readiness.
- Your definition of school readiness is great. However, many families do not know what to do to be ready for school. Lack of education and parenting skills are a major problem among low income, uneducated families. I would like to see all families that receive government assistance take mandatory parenting classes.
- The budget and financial cuts that early childhood receives defeats the purpose of all described in the definition to better the industry. Economic shortfalls in the industry preclude any strides from occurring and cause barriers in the progress of growth. Education specifically early education should be top priority, why government and the powers that be do not get this is beyond me.
- Good definition and good survey.
- Parents need to spend time and talk with their children on an everyday basis, and this would increase the child's ability to be successful in school.
- I think some of the indicators, such as being able to identify letters and numbers before kg, is okay as long as it is not 100% mastery. Also the definition of Ready Communities is too vague.
- More school readiness workshops for parents and all who are responsible for the care of young children would be most beneficial to all. The sooner we all get information on preparing young people for school the better prepared we all are for teaching our future leaders.
- There is much work to be done with educating parents as to the importance of having their children school ready. With a common definition, I feel that all stakeholders of a community will be better able to realize the day when all children regardless of economic status, arrive at school ready to learn. When we speak a common language, the more we can affect a positive change in the community.
- More training for the individuals who are responsible for the day to day care of our young children.

- I believe that due to the fact that most programs are based on your finances, some children are not ready for kindergarten. I think that LA 4 and Head Start should be open to all children, regardless of how much money their parents make.
- I feel that more input regarding school readiness is needed from teachers, teacher assistants, and administrators who are presently involved in early childhood education.
- It should also include identifying the responsibility of the family and school in assisting the child as he/she tests social and physical limits. This testing or exploration must be seen as part of normal development. The adults have a great responsibility to show children the limits and natural consequences and not react negatively to this exploration.
- We need a stronger school - home connection. I just went to a conference where a presenter suggested a bag with a book theme and an activity that pulls the two together.
- More programs to show parents the actual difference that staying involved in their child's education can make
- WE HAVE BEEN NEEDING THIS TYPE OF SURVEY FOR A LONG TIME.
- Not only does every family have some ability to help with school readiness, regardless of economic status, but also has the responsibility to help with it.
- n/a
- Excellent definition! Hopefully parents will read and use as a guide.
- Provide child care while having parenting classes (when children are birth to four) to prepare families by teaching them tools and gain ideas and knowledge to prepare them on how to have school ready children.
- I agree with the definition. There are so many things parents can do at home to prepare children for school, regardless of income.
- Make parents more responsible for caring and providing the needs of their children.
- Involve the grassroots level in this exercise.
- Restore cuts to education, especially early education (LA 4).
- Early childhood programs are greatly need in the state of Louisiana. Children are our future right here in this state. The future student can start leading as soon as possible.
- Cultural Competency needs to be included in staff professional development.
- I personally feel more after school programs should be offered, because so many children do not have anyone at home to help with homework. So many of the children come from one parent homes and they are latch key children.
- State monies should not be cut back in this most critical area of child development.
- It sounds perfect to me.
- It seems you have addressed the critical components that children need to be successful in school. It starts at birth to prepare them to be successful and unless we address that piece of it, the children are not being prepared. We also need to look at demographics, poverty, and attitude as to our children being successful. Our young children and the community programs (child care programs) that serve them are not valued or respected by "school administrators". Apparently they do not realize that children are prepared for school from birth. It doesn't start when they enter formal education at Kindergarten age.

- Promote universal preK
- Great Job!
- I certainly prefer the term "school ready" over "ready to learn"
- Preventing budget cuts to early childhood education will help Louisiana define school readiness.
- This community needs more outreach programs for children 2-4. Many of these parents are very young and need skills to prepare their children for school.
- Because of the diverse cultures in Louisiana I believe school readiness must also speak to respecting and valuing those cultures early in a student's life. Arts and cultural organizations in each community are the best at delivering that information and have succeeded in many cases to interface with schools systems to bring such opportunities to students and educators. The section under "creative endeavors" should be expanded as it is the creative economy that our future workers will have to be prepared to compete in for jobs. All else will be outsourced!
- As a preschool teacher, the pressure to "prepare" students for Kindergarten sometimes causes a rush through some of the most basic skills. If we continue to let education push down, we don't give the students that foundation to build their skills.
- Since "school ready" is addressing children from infancy to 4 years old, what might help distill all the attributes under each of the headings (Children thru Community), is to identify which age range is applicable to an attribute. This may make is simpler for the user (customer) to understand and implement.
- After school programs for parents and workshops