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What is This?
balancing the readiness equation in early childhood education reform

Christopher P. Brown
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ABSTRACT
As policy-makers continue to implement early childhood education reforms that frame the field as a mechanism that is to ready children for elementary school success, questions arise as to how the multiple variables in the readiness equation, such as the child, family, and program, are affected by these policies. The instrumental case study presented in this article looks at this dilemma by examining how a collection of prekindergarten stakeholders in the United States aligned their academic performance expectations for students with their district’s standards-based kindergarten through grade 12 education system. Such an analysis highlights the issues that arise for early educators who are asked to define the ready student within a standards-based education environment. Through this case study, the author makes suggestions for early childhood advocates and educators that can assist them in working with policy-makers and administrators to develop a balanced vision of the readiness equation that takes into account not only children’s academic skills and knowledge but also the capacity of the family, the school, and the community to prepare these children for school success.

KEYWORDS readiness, standards-based education reform, prekindergarten, student achievement, assessment

Policy-makers in the United States (US) are increasingly looking to the field of early childhood education to improve students’ academic readiness so that they will enter their local kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) standards-based education systems ready to succeed. While framing early education as a mechanism to ready students for later school success is by no means a new idea in the US or across the globe (e.g. Farrar et al., 2007; Kiernan et al., 2008),...
these recent early education reforms require early childhood programs and their educators to provide young children with a specific set of academic experiences that both mimic and in turn prepare children for elementary/primary school (Scott-Little et al., 2006; Stipek, 2006).¹

An example in the US of these standards-based early childhood education reforms that are ‘to intentionally contribute to children’s skill and growth in ways that are measurable’ can be found in the Bush Administration’s *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative (Office of the White House, 2002), which is linked to this Administration’s *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act (Pianta, 2007). Part of the *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative directs early childhood stakeholders at the state level to define and align a set of pre-reading, language, and mathematics knowledge and skills with the content and performance standards that define their state’s K-12 education system. These vertically aligned standards-based expectations continue into elementary school through policies such as NCLB, which requires children in grade three to be ready to demonstrate that they have attained this set of specified knowledge and skills on that state’s standards-based exams (Kagan and Kauerz, 2007). In sum, this push by many policy-makers in the US towards creating an aligned standards-based early education system defines readiness through a particular set of learning experiences that children are to engage in so that they will be prepared to attain the academic achievement expectations that await them in elementary school (Brown, 2007a).²

While all early educators want their program to contribute to a child’s success in school, they are concerned that this push by policy-makers towards standards-based early childhood reform could do ‘more harm than good by promoting educational practices that undermine children’s enthusiasm for learning, and, as a result, negatively affect their ultimate academic performance’ (Stipek, 2006: 456). Such unease is particularly evident for early educators who work in programs in the US such as prekindergarten,³ which has been positioned by many advocates and policy-makers at all levels of government as a gateway program that prepares children for academic learning in K-12 education systems (e.g. PreK Now, 2006; Sadowski, 2006).

This article begins to examine how this framing of early childhood education as an extension of the K-12 system affects the readiness equation, which includes not only the child, but his/her family, the teacher, early education program, and the community at large. To do this, it presents an instrumental case study that investigates the work of a collection of prekindergarten (PreK) stakeholders in the US who designed and implemented an assessment tool that defined and aligned the academic performance expectations for their students with those found in the standards-based K-12 school district in which they worked. Such an investigation illuminates the dilemmas and issues that arise for early childhood stakeholders in the US as they address reform initiatives that promote a vision
of the field that is to ready children for later academic success on particular standards-based exams by doing ‘the same thing K-12' education systems do (Pianta, 2007: 6).

This article starts with a review of the literature that examines the issue of readiness in the context of the US, and through this review, an outline of the conceptual framework used to analyze the data is provided. Next, the early education environment in which this study was conducted is described, and an outline of methods used to conduct this study is given. The findings of the study are then presented, and this article ends with a discussion about the impact of this standards-based education reform process on the field of early education. In doing so, it provides suggestions for the ways in which early educators can continue to work towards a readiness equation that frames the process of preparing children for elementary school in a manner that balances the assets the child and her family, the early childhood program, and the community bring to this equation (Meisels, 1999).

**literature review**

Readiness is a complex term that has been defined in numerous ways (Graue, 2006; Kagan, 1990; Meisels, 1999). As Graue (2006) points out, ‘readiness is the answer to many different kinds of questions' (p. 47), and because of this, the purpose of this literature review is twofold. First, using the work of early childhood researchers such as Graue (2006), Meisels (1999), and Scott-Little et al. (2006), it provides a general outline of some of the key frameworks in which this construct is conceptualized in the US. Second, it connects these conceptualizations of this construct to the ways in which early childhood education is currently being operationalized by many US policy-makers and early education advocates. By the end, this literature review will demonstrate how the construct of readiness is conceptualized in this article, and what the question is that this piece begins to answer.

**conceptions of readiness**

Historically, at the end of the 1990s, early childhood education in the US was slowly being brought into the standards-based education reform movement (e.g. Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1995; Falk, 2000). At the same time, early educators were still reacting to the impact of the National Education Goals that emerged at the beginning of that decade. The first goal of this reform initiative, which was to be achieved by the year 2000, was that all students in the US were to start school ready to learn (National Education Goals Panel, 1992). As a result
of this, researchers such as Kagan et al. (1995), Meisels (1995, 1999), Shepard et al. (1998), and Shore (1998) were concerned that this increased emphasis by policy-makers on students entering elementary school possessing a particular set of knowledge and skills would result in inappropriate practices such as the use of assessments for determining whether children were ready for entry into kindergarten.

A key feature in Meisels's (1999) work was a heuristic devise that defined the ways in which policy-makers and early education stakeholders conceptualized readiness within these discussions surrounding both early education policy and practice. Meisels (1999) identified four conceptions of readiness: the idealist/nativist, the empiricist/environmental, the social constructionist, and the interactionist. These four conceptions of readiness each frame the readiness equation in a particular way, and as such, the role early childhood education in preparing young children for success in elementary school carries a different value within each equation.

An idealist/nativist conception of readiness frames this construct as being ‘a within-the-child phenomenon’, and a child is ready for school depending upon ‘a function of maturational processes inherent in [each] child’, which leaves little room for the role of environment in explaining a child’s readiness (p. 50). This readiness equation focuses solely on the child, and in using Kagan’s (1990) notion of being ready to learn, a child is ready to learn when his/her ‘level of development is ready’ (p. 272).

Turning to the empiricist/environmental conception of readiness, Meisels (1999) states that such a framework views ‘readiness [as] something that lies outside the child’ (p. 52). Kagan's (1990) idea of being ready for school falls under this construct, and as such, ‘readiness for school indicates that the individual . . . will be able to be successful in a school context’ (Carlton and Winsler, 1999: 338). This readiness equation emphasizes that the child needs to engage in a particular set of experiences to be ready for school. Through the empiricist lens, early childhood education is framed as an apparatus that provides the child with these skills, knowledge, and experiences he/she needs to be ready for elementary school.

The social constructionist framework views readiness as a fluid construct that is defined by the social setting in which the child resides, and as such ‘looks to the setting for its definition of readiness’ (Meisels, 1999: 49). This means that the readiness equation is dependent on the social context in which the child operates, and as such, a child can be ready in one community and not another. For instance, Graue's (1993) examination of the practices of kindergarten across three different communities in the US led her to contend that ‘meanings of readiness were locally developed and used’, and as a result of this, the purpose of kindergarten was determined by the local ‘actors’ within each social context (p. 248).
Finally, the interactionist perspective frames readiness as a ‘bidirectional concept’, meaning that readiness is co-constructed ‘from the child's contributions to schooling and the school's contribution to the child’ (Meisels, 1999: 49). Much of the current research in early childhood education in the US (e.g. Scott-Little et al., 2006) and across the globe (e.g. Kiernan et al., 2008) is framing the readiness equation through a lens that aligns with this conception of this construct. Researchers do this because they worry that framing readiness through a nativist or empiricist perspective ‘implies a single dimension and single standard of development and learning’ (Kagan et al., 1995: 6). A single standard ‘presents the problem [of readiness] as residing within the child, with the determination of readiness being the duty of the school systems’ (Carlton and Winsler, 1999: 338).

The interactionist lens mirrors the position taken by the US practitioner-based early childhood education organization NAEYC (2004), the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which makes the case that this construct ‘must be flexibly and broadly defined' and ‘includes much more than children's readiness' (p. 1). Furthermore, Scott-Little et al. (2006) extend Meisels's idea of the interactionist approach and NAEYC's idea of flexibility by making the case that one's conception of readiness should include a child's developmental domains and a recognition that ‘the particular skills and knowledge children bring to school are a function of the “readiness” of the environments where they have been before starting school and the “readiness” of the school where they enroll' (Scott-Little et al., 2006: 155). Such a view of readiness framed this construct as being ‘complex, multidimensional, and process oriented', which in turn means a more detailed conception of this construct (Graue, 2006: 51).

While these four conceptions of readiness reflect the educational and political debates that have been occurring in the US over the last several decades (e.g. Graue, 1993; Meisels, 1987, 2007; Shepard and Smith, 1986), they by no means represent the totality of understandings of this construct in the US (e.g. McAllister et al., 2005) or abroad (e.g. Farrar et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2003). Furthermore, the work of critical researchers such as Bloch (1992), Cannella (1997), and Grieshaber (2008) have demonstrated that this or any construct within the field of early childhood education should be questioned and examined to understand its underlying conceptions of such things as power or the framing of the child, family, and practitioner. For instance, critical researchers' work has demonstrated how conceptions of appropriate practice (e.g. Lubeck, 1998) or constructs of children or childhood (e.g. Brooker, 2004) can be used to exclude rather than include the very children and families that policy-makers and early educators are trying to address in their early education reforms.

While these critiques as well as the varied conceptions of the construct of readiness are invaluable for the early education community so that its members can understand, address, and respect the variability that exists among children, their families, and early education programs, Meisels's (1999) heuristic device
outlined in the above guided the analysis of data presented in this study. These four conceptions of readiness provide a useful tool for examining how early education policy in nations like the United States is conceptualized.

policy and readiness in the US

In the US, policy-makers typically frame early childhood programs as mechanisms that can improve students’ success in school (e.g. Mehaffie and Fraser, 2007), and thus, the construct of readiness and the readiness equation are reduced to discussions centered on academic achievement. This is not to state that early childhood in the US is simply being framed as a program that improves student performance, but reforms such as the current Bush Administration’s Good Start, Grow Smart initiative, which put in place directives to establish early learning standards that clearly define the knowledge and skills children are to possess when they leave early educations programs, are altering the landscape of the field (Neuman and Roskos, 2005). Scott-Little et al. (2006) summarize the effect of this reform initiative by stating that, ‘as states develop early learning standards they are, in effect, defining the skills and knowledge viewed as important for later success in school’ (p. 155). For Scott-Little et al. (2006), this ‘de facto’ conceptualization of readiness that emerges in this reform process ‘could translate into a concept of readiness that focuses primarily on the child and minimizes the importance of the other elements of school readiness which play an important role in the degree of success children experience in school’ (pp. 167–8). Their concern as well as the concern of others (e.g. Pianta, 2007) is that this emphasis on the academic skills students are to acquire will deemphasize the bidirectionality of this construct and will weight the readiness equation solely through the variable of the child.

Therefore, this article begins to unpack how policy-makers and early education stakeholders' framing of early education as a medium for improving student performance through standards-based early education reforms affects the goals and direction of early childhood education programs in contexts such as those found in the United States. Through the examination of this instrumental case study, this piece identifies the components within the readiness equation that are valued within this push towards academic achievement, what parts are absent from this equation, and what this means for early childhood educators and the learning communities in which they work, which includes the children and their families.

context

The case that is central to this article took place in a prekindergarten program located in the state of Texas. Texas's PreK program, like many of the other 37 states
in the US that offer some form of publicly funded preschool, was designed by the state's policy-makers to serve students that deemed being at-risk for school success (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006). In Texas, children qualify for the program if they are age four by or on 1 September and meet the following requirements: unable to speak or comprehend the English language, educationally disadvantaged, homeless, or have a parent who is an active member of the armed forces (Texas Education Code, Chapter 29.153).

The prekindergarten program itself is located in an urban school district. This district, which serves over 80,000 students in grades PreK through 12, supplements the state's funding for half-day PreK programs so that its 300 PreK teachers can work with their 5000 PreK students for a full day of school (Texas Education Agency, 2004).

In 1997, this school district implemented district-wide report cards for each grade level that identify the levels of students' performance in relation to the state's content and performance standards. Currently, Texas's content standards, known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, are mandated for students to learn in grade K through 12. The state's policy-makers did not mandate content standards for PreK because the program is not compulsory for all four-year-olds. Rather, the Texas Education Agency (1999, 2008) issued voluntary PreK Guidelines that are to assist educators in aligning their curriculum with Texas's Essential Knowledge and Skills. In terms of academic performance, beginning in grade 3 students must demonstrate they have attained these content standards on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills standardized exams. Moreover, in grades 3, 5, and 8, students must achieve a particular level of performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test to be promoted to the next grade level, and in grade 11, students must achieve a particular level of performance to graduate from high school after completing grade 12.

As policy-makers at the local, state, and federal levels of government placed a greater emphasis on student performance through such things as the implementation of the federal government's NCLB Act, district stakeholders identified the PreK report card as a poor indicator of students' academic readiness for success in elementary school. On the report card, students' levels of academic achievement are identified in the content areas of pre-reading/concepts of print, oral language, writing, listening, mathematics, social studies/science health using a four-point performance scale. Students are rated a 1 in a particular academic area if they need improvement, a 2 if they possess a basic understanding, a 3 if they are skilled, and a 4 if they are advanced. PreK and kindergarten teachers, principals, and district administrators were confused about which skills were being measured in each of these academic areas and what that score meant for each of the four nine-week reporting periods.

To reconcile this problem, Lucille Ackers, the district administrator in charge of PreK, decided in the spring of 2004 to create a task force that would design...
an assessment tool for the report card. The task force was to develop an assessment tool that would inform the district's PreK teachers how to assess and score student performance in each academic and personal development category (see Figure 1 for example of how the tool assists teachers in assessing students' understanding of patterns in the academic category of mathematics). Beginning with the 2005–06 academic school year, all of the district's PreK teachers were required to use the tool to score student performance for the PreK report card, and the tool has remained a part of the PreK program. Additionally, the tool has not been technically normed to measure such things as inter-rater reliability by the district or an outside agency (Heubert and Hauser, 1999; National Research Council, 2008).

methods

The data examined in this article come from an instrumental qualitative case study that investigated the impact of standards-based reforms on a PreK program that was aligning its student performance expectations those found in their larger K-12 standards-based education system (Stake, 1995, 2005). In examining this process through the formulation and implementation of the district's PreK assessment tool, the construct of school readiness emerged as a significant feature of this research study, and it is how these PreK stakeholders conceptualized this construct that is central to this article. By analyzing the impact of these early childhood standards-based reforms on this PreK program and its stakeholders' conceptions of readiness, this piece considers what this might mean for the future of the field (Stake, 2005).

data generation

Data generation for this study occurred through interviews and document analysis from the fall of 2005 to the summer of 2007 (Yin, 2003). Using a snowball sampling system (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002), members of the PreK assessment task force (n = 6), principals (n = 5), PreK teachers (n = 5), and district administrators (n = 5) were interviewed about the formulation and implementation of the district's PreK report card assessment tool (see Table 1 for a list of all participants). In some instances, stakeholders were interviewed on multiple occasions (n = 7) over the course of this study.

In each interview, informants were asked to discuss such issues as their knowledge about the formulation and implementation of the PreK assessment tool, and how they saw it affecting the practices of PreK teachers, students, and their families. They were also asked to describe such things as what they saw being the goals for the children participating in the program, the goals of the PreK program itself, how this assessment tool aligned with these goals, and how they saw this tool affecting the academic achievement of the district's PreK students.
**Mathematics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patterns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overarching idea:</strong> Recognizing patterns and relationships among objects helps children to form generalizations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tasks/student samples/evidence of understanding:**
Work sample of patterning using thematic-unit related materials (i.e., geometric shapes, holiday ornaments, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student outcome</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs improvement</td>
<td>The child is unable to identify, reproduce, create, or extend a simple pattern. (i.e., “red, blue red, blue”)</td>
<td>The child can perform one of the following objectives with simple patterns (AB, ABB): o Identify them (“red, blue”) o Extend them o Create them</td>
<td>The child can perform two of the following objectives with simple patterns (AB, ABB): o Identify them (“red, blue”) o Extend them o Create them</td>
<td>The child can perform all of the following objectives with simple patterns (AB, ABB): o Identify them (“red, blue”) o Extend them o Create them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. The child recognizes and reproduces simple patterns of concrete objects (i.e., a string of beads that are yellow, blue, yellow, blue.)

23. The child begins to predict what comes next when patterns are extended.
In addition to interviews, field notes from the PreK team leader meetings (*n* = 5), the PreK teacher-training day that occurred at the beginning of the 2005–06 school year, and PreK assessment task force meetings were analyzed (*n* = 6). Additional data sources include the district's PreK report cards, the PreK assessment tool, Texas's PreK Guidelines, and the district's semi-annual evaluation report of the PreK program (2005–06).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role within the district</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Valdes</td>
<td>Administrator directly under the superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Alba</td>
<td>Former classroom teacher who co-chairs the elementary school principal's committee on early childhood education and supervises an elementary school campus with over 400 students and no prekindergarten (PreK) programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Dixon</td>
<td>Former special educator who co-chairs the elementary school principal's committee on early childhood education and supervises an elementary school campus with over 600 students and three PreK programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Luis</td>
<td>Former classroom teacher who supervises an elementary school campus with over 300 students and six PreK classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Shaver</td>
<td>Former classroom teacher who supervises an elementary school campus with over 1000 students and seven PreK classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal White</td>
<td>Former classroom teacher who supervises an elementary school campus with over 600 students and six PreK classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ackers, Lucille</td>
<td>Assessment task force member and an English as a Second Language PreK teacher with 15+ years of classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple, Leah</td>
<td>Administrator who oversaw the district's PreK program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boland, Susan</td>
<td>Assessment task force member and a PreK teacher with 10+ years of classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Teri</td>
<td>The district’s PreK professional development coordinator and a former PreK teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortiz, Angela</td>
<td>Assessment task force member and a PreK teacher with 10+ years of classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrug, Molly</td>
<td>A district administrator who has been evaluating the effectiveness of the PreK program for 15+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Louise</td>
<td>An administrative supervisor in the district’s special education department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevenson, Kris</td>
<td>Assessment task force member and a PreK teacher who has taught both PreK and Head Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner, Yolanda</td>
<td>A PreK administrator and former PreK teacher who works as liaison between the community and the district’s PreK program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walla, Nancy</td>
<td>Assessment task force member and a Bilingual PreK teacher with 15+ years of classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Fisher</td>
<td>A Bilingual PreK teacher with 12+ years of classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Mason</td>
<td>A PreK teacher with five years of classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Sanchez</td>
<td>A Bilingual PreK teacher with 5+ years of classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Smith</td>
<td>A PreK teacher with 15+ years of classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Whitman</td>
<td>A PreK teacher with 15+ years of classroom experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
data analysis

Following methods of traditional qualitative inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Erickson, 1986; Miles and Huberman, 1994), the observations and interviews were coded. Using these codes, a set of themes were derived from the analysis of the relevant data (i.e. the theme of readiness), which were read against the text for contradictory evidence (Graue and Walsh, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Upon establishing a core set of themes, a narrative text was developed that outlined how PreK stakeholders within this district conceptualized readiness (Graue and Walsh, 1998). This narrative text was analyzed using the constructs of school readiness outlined in the literature review to understand how stakeholders addressed this issue of readying students for the district's standards-based K-12 program through creating an assessment tool that defined and aligned the academic performance expectations that their students were to achieve by the end of PreK (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002).

To increase the reliability and validity of this article, the methodological strategies of triangulation across data sources (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Stake, 1995) and member checking (Yin, 2003) with various stakeholders at key points in the data collection process were employed. Furthermore, an earlier draft of this article was shared with four members of the assessment task force: three teachers and one administrator (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). One teacher and the administrator sent back comments both stating that this piece provides an accurate portrayal of the issues that arose through the implementation of the assessment tool. For instance, the PreK administrator stated, 'this is a powerful article, and as a matter of fact, I would like to share your final product with (the name of assistant superintendent who oversees the PreK program)'.

results

the need for a uniform measure of kindergarten readiness

The purpose of the assessment task force that was central to this study was to create an assessment tool that aligned their academic achievement expectations of their program with those found in their district's standards-based K-12 program. In doing this, the task force members strived to create what Nancy Walla, a task force member with over 15 years experience as a bilingual PreK teacher, termed a ‘developmentally appropriate assessment tool’. In creating such a tool, the task force wanted to establish an aligned conceptualization of the skills and knowledge students were to demonstrate in order to achieve a particular score on the PreK report card. The comments of Principal Alba, a former teacher with 12 years experiences in middle school, highlight this need for such clarity in defining the ready student. The principal stated:
A PreK teacher will say, ‘This kid’s ready for kindergarten, he’s just a little bit behind.’ You ask the teacher, ‘What do you mean a little behind?’ She’ll respond, ‘Well, their reading skills are off a little bit.’ You ask, ‘What do you mean?’ She’ll say, ‘They don’t know some of their words.’ You ask, ‘What words do they not know that are critical for moving on?’ It gets to the point where you just want to go, ‘What is your expectation?’ because that expectation could be different from Jo Schmo next door. So having a common tool in place helps us get that picture.

According to this principal, the purpose for the assessment tool and the task force was to create a uniform understanding of what it meant for a child to be ready for kindergarten.

This concern over knowing what it meant for a student to be ready for kindergarten spoke to a larger issue the district’s PreK stakeholders faced when discussing their students’ academic achievement. Being ready for kindergarten is the first step in ensuring that all of the district’s students were on a ‘specific trajectory’ to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test (Brown, 2007b). As noted in the above, the TAKS test is a high-stakes test for students in grades 3, 5, 8 and 11. Additionally, students’ TAKS scores are used as performance indicators for their schools as defined by district, state, and federal policy, in particular for the annual yearly performance requirements put forward by the federal government’s NCLB Act. This ‘test-driven perspective’, which is the result of the top-down pressure on improving student performance from various governing agencies, led many of the district’s PreK policy-makers, administrators, and teachers to frame their understanding of readying children for elementary school through the PreK teachers’ ability to prepare their students for the third grade TAKS tests (Meisels, 2007).

For instance, Dr Valdes, an administrator directly under the superintendent, noted that to being ready for the TAKS test in third grade ‘begins with the whole socialization piece in PreK. If they’re not socialized and emotionally ready, they won’t be there in first, second or third, and then by the time they get to third, the teacher is so busy with the discipline piece and emotional piece that the cognitive piece is behind.’ While Dr Valdes vision of readiness addresses the ‘other dimensions’ of child development, this administrator still positioned these skills as critical experiences that children are to acquire along specific points on their trajectory through schooling in order to be prepared for the third grade TAKS test (Stipek, 2006). Furthermore, as Molly Shrug, a district administrator who has been evaluating the effectiveness of the PreK program for over 15 years, highlighted the impact of students’ third grade TAKS test scores on the PreK program by stating that because ‘the TAKS start[s] at third grade, [and] we started looking back down at the grades and finally realized how important PreK is for the disadvantaged children who come in lower than a lot of kids in their language...
and development. Many of the district's stakeholders' visions of readiness were defined through a specific set of skills that exist beyond the immediate skills and knowledge of their students, and by third grade, these children must internalize them in order to not only avoid their own retention in grade three but also to prevent their scores from negatively impacting the performance rating of their school and the district.

Thus, the need for this tool was not only to establish a uniform understanding of kindergarten readiness, but it also created an indicator of whether children were prepared for later student performance requirements. Both understandings of the tool frame the readiness equation through an empirical lens that views students as needing particular experiences to be ready not only for success in elementary school but also on the third grade TAKS test.

formulating the assessment tool

While these empirical visions of being ready for school center on the TAKS test, it was not the only conception of readiness that influenced the development of this assessment tool. Rather, in creating this tool, many of the district's PreK stakeholders went beyond policy-makers' conceptions of readiness as achieving particular levels of academic performance, and in doing so, their understanding of this construct contained traces of numerous framings of readiness. For example, Terri Jones, the district's PreK professional development coordinator, a former PreK teacher, and task force member noted:

Because the expectations have changed with first grade, kindergarten is now what used to be considered first grade. So this has really changed PreK from being a place of catch-up to being a place that prepares kids for school because there a lot of things that children can't do when they enter kindergarten. To be ready for kinder, they have to have a large vocabulary for reading and then also basic pre-literacy skills, because by the end of kindergarten, it's the expectation in this district that they are emerging from kindergarten as a reader.

Terri's statement exemplifies the complexity of the readiness equation that this assessment task force wanted to address when defining the academic skills that their PreK students were to possess when entering kindergarten. On the one hand, Terri's statement reflects a vision of performance that is 'directed towards future possibilities rather than past deficiencies' (Meisels, 1999: 49). On the other, such possibilities had to align with standards-based performance expectations of the district's K-12 program, which expects children to enter first grade as readers. Moreover, Terri extends the state policy-makers' framing of the program. It is not only an intervention program, but it also 'prepares' students for kindergarten, which means that students have to acquire a specific set of skills to succeed in kindergarten. These skills include what Principal White,
who supervises six PreK classrooms, noted as 'the pre-reading, pre-math, and motor skills that they need, and the social skills that they need for attending school, being engaged in work, and getting things accomplished'. So in looking forward in these students' academic careers, these stakeholders view the PreK program as a mechanism that adds a detailed set of skills to the variable of the student in the readiness equation, which creates a particular type of student – one who is ready to get 'things accomplished' such as learning to read.

Nancy Walla adds to this conception of the purpose of PreK preparing students for elementary school by stating that PreK provides children with, 'the whole foundation of their schooling. We [as PreK teachers] set the foundation for their other schooling, so early childhood education is to prepare them for their education for the next thirteen years.' Nancy's statement expands this construct of readiness so that it goes beyond academic skills, and in turn, readying a student for school in fact prepares them for their entire academic careers. This idea of PreK impacting a child's entire career mimics much of the current research (Schweinhart et al., 2005) and political dialogue (Committee for Economic Development, 2002; Lynch, 2004) that frames early childhood education as worthy investment for various governing agencies because it increases a child's chances of succeeding in life. Such an investment promises a return on these governing institutions' initial funding of these programs, and thus, it further inscribes the empiricist conception of PreK as being a mechanism to that readies children for academic success in school (Polakow, 1992).

Many district stakeholders picked up on this connection between PreK and its impact on a child's academic career. For instance, Kris Stevenson, a task force member and PreK teacher, stated:

I think here in PreK we have the opportunity to impact the rest of their lives on all levels, because we're teaching the whole child. We're teaching and stimulating intellectual development, social and personal development. You're cultivating cognitive development, so you're in a place where the child, their physiology and neurology is still malleable. So we get to play with that and play with what I hope are the best parts of our human nature, because that's what I think we're cultivating and that crystallizes when they're seven or eight, then that's what remains. If it's something negative, that's uninspired, that's unworthy, or incompetent or afraid, then that's what crystallizes.

While Kris describes the role of the district's PreK program as one that addresses all aspects of children's development, researchers such as MacNaughton (2004) worry that Kris's conception of children as learners who become complete by the age of 'seven or eight' fails to address the 'changeability, diversity, and complexity' that exists in their growth and development over their entire lifetime (p. 100). So while Kris frames the early education process as one that develops the whole child, children become whole as learners by the time they are in elementary school. Such an understanding of the program exemplifies how readiness is not a static construct, but in Kris's statement, there are traces of what Meisels's (1999)
terms a maturationist perspective in that the students become particular types of learners by age eight and the impact of later schooling on them as learners is insignificant.

Adding to these PreK stakeholders’ multiple conceptions of the readiness equation was an understanding by many that their program was a place that also provides their students’ families with a set of skills and experiences that are to ready them for elementary school. For example, Nancy Walla stated that PreK is a place ‘to prepare the parents and get them to where they’re motivated and excited about the possibilities for their children in school’. PreK was what Nancy termed ‘a foundation to learning’ for the child and her family. Yolanda Turner, a PreK administrator and former PreK teacher, added, ‘I think our role is also to help the whole family in PreK, not just the child. A lot of times for whatever reason with PreK, there’s a lot of families and children that lack a lot of academic experiences, so we want to help parents with that no matter what their needs are.’ While informing families about the purpose of any education program is important, the need for these conversations within this program were framed in a manner that was unidirectional rather than creating ‘a reciprocal relationship’ between the school and the family (Meisels, 1999: 49). So while the family is a part of this readiness equation, it is a variable that needs the PreK program to increase its value as well.

While these complex visions of readiness by district stakeholders tended to provide a forward looking vision of children’s growth and development, they still defined the readiness equation in such a way that the child and the family are lacking particular attributes for success in school, which included their likelihood of performing well on the third grade Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test. As a result of this, the purpose of the program is to add experiences and knowledge to these two variables within the readiness equation so that they both succeed in school. As this task force put in place its assessment tool that aligns the academic achievement expectations of PreK with the K-12 program, it did so in a context that emphasizes an empiricist vision of readiness that is linked directly to policies that focus on improving student achievement.

putting an assessment tool that defines the readiness equation for this district in place

Against this backdrop of policy-makers’ calls for improved students performance and district stakeholders' desires for a horizontal and vertically aligned conception of academic achievement, the task force members, who themselves framed the readiness equation in a myriad of ways, developed the PreK assessment tool. For many, their hope was that the tool would capture and illuminate a complex picture of the child’s knowledge and skills. For instance, Nancy Walla stated:
I am hoping that PreK teachers will see the benefit of performance-based assessment, and they'll get a more global picture of children instead of a one-day, 15-minute interview that they use to base the scores on. I'm hoping it will help teachers see the children's strengths and weaknesses, I'm hoping that it will help parents, and quite frankly from a professional view, I hope in some way that we can hold No Child Left Behind at bay from PreK.

Nancy's statement reflects a common desire by task force members to assist PreK stakeholders in learning about the preparedness of the whole child (Pianta, 2002). While such a vision captures the 'teachable things' that those who operate in the empiricist perspective crave (Graue, 2006: 47), the task force wanted a tool that extended PreK stakeholders' understanding of academic achievement, and in doing so, they wanted this image of readiness to the prevent the current drive towards improved performance from overtaking their program.

When the assessment tool was implemented district-wide in the fall of 2005, many stakeholders felt that it lacked what Jane McWhorter, a bilingual PreK teacher with 11 years of teaching experience, defined as being 'rigor'. She, and numerous PreK stakeholders, conceptualized rigor around the level of performance a child is to achieve in order to be skilled (score = 3) or an advanced (score = 4) in each academic area. Jane noted that the expectations for performance were 'too low'. Principal White also questioned the rigor of the performance expectations. The principal stated, 'The rubric gives kids credit for doing things that basically anybody can do.' Principal White worried that the assessment tool would create problems for school personnel because their PreK students would be identified as being more prepared for the K-12 system than she believes they actually are. Jane McWhorter echoed this sentiment by noting that 'All of our kids would have been at the highest level of performance at the end of the first nine weeks.'

During the summer of 2006, the task force addressed stakeholders' concerns over the rigor of the tool. According to Angela Ortiz, an assessment task force member who has taught PreK for over 10 years, as the task force rewrote the assessment tool, 'we agreed to make the 4 [advanced] and 3 [skilled] more rigorous in all subject areas'. The amended tool was implemented during the 2006–07 school year, and for the most part, the district's PreK stakeholders were comfortable with it. In fact, this process led to the task forces annually adjusting the tool in the summer to address any concerns that arise from fellow PreK teachers, elementary school principals, and district administrators.

the readiness equation that emerges from this compromise

Adjusting the assessment tool to address this issue of rigor reflects the overall need for this rubric to speak to multiple audiences about this issue of readiness. Each audience framed the readiness equation in different ways, and thus, the task
force amended tool so that it incorporated these understandings into the academic knowledge and skills it assessed and the scores that were given to students for their performance. Thus, the question becomes what type of readiness equation emerges from a tool that has to speak to these various PreK stakeholders who want to align this programs' academic achievement expectations with those found in their district's K-12 standards-based education system.

For administrators and policy-makers within the district, they wanted the assessment tool to guide teachers' instruction so that they would provide PreK students with the knowledge and skills needed to be ready for kindergarten. For instance, Dr Valdes stated, 'I think the assessment tool is to date, one of the best things because it at gives teachers some direction.' Principal Dixon, who co-chairs the elementary school principal's committee on early childhood education and oversees three PreK classrooms, added, 'I think it's a really good instrument for teachers to wrap their mind around what's expected of PreK.'

Not only did these administrators want the tool to inform teachers about what is important to cover in their instruction, they wanted it to produce data about how the students were performing. As Angela Ortiz stated:

The district is happy with the tool, and I don't know how much it's the districts fault as much as the state testing, but they are very much into numbers and to children producing. It's accountability. I think that's the big talk with the school board and the superintendent, and so this helps with that accountability.

The tool not only provided teachers and families with guidance as to what the performance expectations are in PreK, but it also spoke to the larger issue of accountability that frames the entire Texas public education system. Thus, these policy-makers and administrators framed the sum of this readiness equation almost solely through the child's level of academic achievement. The PreK program carried some value in this equation, but that value is far less significant in determining whether a child is ready.

From the practitioner perspective, the readiness equation that emerged from this process was not received in the same manner as it was at the district level. For instance, task force members accepted the amended tool, but many were still apprehensive about how this issue of rigor affected the image of the ready prekindergartener that emerged from this tool.

At the beginning of the editing process, all members of the task force were comfortable with the fact that the initial tool erred on what Kris Stevenson termed the 'side of the child.' Kris elaborated:

Another task force could have erred on the side that damages a child's confidence, and not just a child's confidence but a family's confidence in their children's intellectual abilities and capacity. Where we are as PreK teachers and the PreK program is that this is the very first time in the lives of these children where this sort of evaluation is being done of their intellectual ability, and if it's too difficult an instrument then what message are the families receiving about their children?
Task force members were concerned was that by telling children and their families that the student is not ready for kindergarten as soon as they entered PreK that they and the program could turn off these families from school, which in some ways taps into Kris's earlier concern over how early learning experiences affect the trajectory of a child's development. Even with these concerns in mind, Kris did think that the rigor of the tool needed to be increased. Kris justified this need for increased rigor by stating:

I think that the students can do better and we can ask a little bit more of them because that is too an aspect of teaching with love. Providing the children with an environment that is nurturing and intellectually rigorous, and anything less than that is not loving them to the best of our ability.

Yet, other task force members, such as Nancy Walla, felt that the amended achievement expectations were still too high for the students. Nancy commented:

It's almost going to be that you have to be GT [gifted and talented] to get a four, and that goes against what my feelings are about parents' involvement and the students being successful at least one year. At four years old, they should be told how wonderful they're doing. Instead of always hanging a carrot in front of their faces telling them they have to do more. They're only four years old. They need time to just be children.

In this statement, Nancy positions PreK as a place where children are to be protected from the high-stakes testing policies that are embedded in Texas's education system. Her concern, which is similar to Kris's, is that if children are marked as failures in PreK then they might never be successful in the K-12 system. While Nancy's discomfort with the amended tool is significant within this process of determining whether students are ready for kindergarten, the amended tool still framed readiness as a construct that exists primarily in the child – the child is not ready for failure or some children are ready for kindergarten and others are not.

Some of the district's PreK stakeholders recognized that this empiricist vision of schooling might create a 'results-oriented' dynamic in which state or district policy-makers could put in place a series of gate-keeping devices along every point of children's academic careers, and as such, some children could be deemed not ready to enter PreK (Meisels, 2007). For instance, Terri Jones commented that this emphasis by PreK stakeholders that each child attain a specific level of performance in relation to a particular set of knowledge and skills could lead to a scenario in which, 'You to have to create this new grade level for three year-olds to come in and be able to handle what were expecting of four-year-olds.' While traces of the nativist perspective are in this statement, Terri's concern is that the empiricist emphasis on children acquiring a particular set of knowledge and skills at age four will lead to early childhood stakeholders questioning whether
children are ready for PreK. This questioning of readiness that is present in Terri's comment emerges from this process of high-stakes standards-based reform found in Texas, and it creates a scenario in which these empiricist policies cause early childhood stakeholders to frame children and their families through their 'past deficiencies' rather than looking towards 'future possibilities' (Meisels, 1999: 49).

On a more practical level, task force members were also concerned about the readiness equation that was emerging through the tool and how it affected the immediate practice of the district's PreK teachers. Lucille Ackers stated:

Another negative that came out of this process that I did not expect is how some teachers take the rubric as is and not use it as a guide. Instead, they use it as a bible too much, which is something that I did not expect. I had hoped that they would use it as a guide, and kept it as an instrument to use to help guide their planning and to help them look at their children rather than instead taking it to heart and following everything in it in detail.

Lucille's concerns are twofold. First, she worried that the tool has become the sole determinant of the classroom curriculum for teachers, and as such, it 'will encourage instruction that is not responsive to the individual needs of children' (Stipek, 2006: 456). Moreover, Lucille worried that the assessment tool will emerge as some sort readiness test in which students are determined to be ready for kindergarten only if they meet all of the PreK performance expectations – a de facto high-stakes test (Meisels, 2007).

These statements by task force members demonstrate that they recognized the impact of the tool on the variables that exist within the readiness equation. As such, they struggled to balance the equation so that the value of a child's academic achievement would not be the only variable that determined the sum, which in turn would lead to teachers engaged in the ‘fragmented teaching of isolated skills that are not meaningful or motivating for children’ (Stipek, 2006: 457).

**a missing variable**

When examining the readiness equation that was settled upon by this district, a noticeable variable that was excluded from this process of creating and implementing this assessment tool was the family. District administrators and teachers wanted PreK teachers to use the tool to inform families of the PreK expectations. However, these families were never part of the process in putting the tool together. As Terri Jones stated:

Our document was to give more clarification to the standards that were being reported to the parents, and so if parents are going to be the stakeholders and the recipients of that information, then I think it is important that they should have been part of that dialogue.
In the end, this process of creating, implementing, and editing the PreK assessment tool reflects the impact that early childhood standards-based education reforms in the US can have on early education and the readiness equation that emerges when discussing the issue of elementary school entry. In this case, almost all of the variables outside children's ability to demonstrate particular levels of academic performance carry little value in the sum of the readiness equation. While these PreK stakeholders wanted to frame the purpose of their program around providing children as well as their families with the skills and knowledge needed to be ready for kindergarten, they became bogged down in what skills and knowledge their students were to possess to be marked as performing at grade level, and as such, the other variables in the readiness equation were pushed to the side.

**discussion and implications**

This instrumental case study (Stake, 1995, 2005) exemplifies how this push by many US policy-makers to implement standards-based early childhood education reforms drives the conversation about the ready student in a particular direction. Focusing on academic achievement shaves the conception of the ready student down to a limited set of knowledge and skills, and as such, these reforms create a new set of challenges for early education stakeholders who strive to improve student learning in a manner that frames readiness as a 'broad construct that incorporates all aspects of a child's life that contribute directly to the child's ability to learn' (Meisels, 1999: 62).

In this case, district policy-makers, administrators, and teachers saw the purpose of their PreK program to be readying these students for success in kindergarten by ensuring that the academic skills and knowledge children were to acquire by the end of PreK were clearly defined and aligned with their district's elementary school expectations. Even though this empiricist framing of readiness was one of the many competing visions of this construct found in the work of this district's PreK stakeholders, the implementation of the PreK assessment tool amplified the significance of this conceptual understanding of readiness, and in turn, the tool narrowed the focus of the goals and purpose of this PreK program.

This empiricist-based conception of this program and of other PreK programs in the US (Barnett et al., 2007) mirrors the goals for teaching and learning that are put forward by national reforms such as the Bush Administration's *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative and the federal government's NCLB Act. Through these reforms, policy-makers are seeking ‘expedient solutions to complex problems' (Meisels, 2007: 31). Moreover, this drive to improve the academic achievement of students by reforming early education through such measures as standards-based education policies does not address the ‘intellectual, financial, human,
and social capital' required to create an effective early education system for all children, and thus, researchers worry that the field will be ‘oversold’ in its ability to prepare students for elementary school success (Pianta, 2007: 7).

In trying to move away from policy-makers’ limited focus on a specific set programmatic inputs that are to improve students’ academic performance, Graue (2006) points out that their empiricist framing of the readiness equation neglects their ‘ethical responsibility’ in early childhood education. Graue (2006) makes the case that all early education stakeholders must work towards creating a system of early learning that frames readiness as ‘a contract we have with children, their families, their teachers, and the future. It is a construct that simultaneously looks forward and backward evaluating the adequacy of social, personal, economic, and educational resources afforded by communities’ (p. 51). To foster such a contract, it is essential that early childhood communities across the US and the globe not only analyze the visions of readiness that are linked to many of the reforms that are designed to expand and to improve particular aspects of the field but also consider alternative solutions that go beyond the child being the sole variable of value in the readiness equation.

In terms of the standards-based early education system that was examined in this case study, fostering an ethically driven interactionist conception of the readiness equation requires a redistribution of the value associated to each variable in the equation so that it reflects a more balanced understanding of the contributions of the child, the family, the teacher, the early education program, the community, and so on. Doing so would expand the current standards-based early education reform movement in states such as Texas in numerous ways.

First, in regards to early learning standards, which have become a common feature among state-based early education reforms in the US, they should not simply be a list of content and academic skills that center solely on the cognitive development of children (Scott-Little et al., 2006; Stipek, 2006). Rather, they should be ‘quality, age-appropriate, research-based indicators that serve to benefit children's learning and development’ across all of their developmental domains (Neuman and Roskos, 2005: 143). Having early learning standards in place that recognize how young children learn and develop could provide a foundation for early education stakeholders to horizontally align early education programs across contexts so that they are implementing appropriate content standards, performance standards, program standards, curricula, and assessments in a manner that links these programs vertically with their local K-12 system (Kagan and Kauerz, 2007).

A balanced system of early education that is horizontally and vertically aligned would allow for the implementation of instructional practices by early educators that ‘transcend merely imparting knowledge and relies, to a considerable extent, on educators' ability to motivate students to learn’ (Jalongo, 2007: 395). Such a system of early education recognizes that ‘how educators teach and evaluate children, and the social climate of preschool classrooms, can make all the
difference in their learning and well-being’ (Stipek, 2006: 462). A balanced system would avoid creating early environments where children ‘learn how to react’ to their early educators’ instruction ‘by mimicking, reciting, and repeating’ an isolated set of academic skills and instead would encourage early educators to focus on teaching children ‘how to think’ (Neuman, 2006: 31).

To be clear, a balanced system of early education does not eliminate the construct of accountability that is central to standards-based education reform, but rather, accountability is reframed so that it ‘requires an explicitness of purpose, a system of practice, and a recognition that children live readiness every day, regardless of whether it is social, psychological, or cultural’ (Graue, 2006: 54). Additionally, a balanced readiness equation would assist state and local stakeholders, who are more familiar with as well as spend a majority of their time in the K-12 classrooms that must adhere to the requirements set forth by the federal government's NCLB, recognize the significance of the variables of the family, community, and culture in the readiness equation (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009; Jalongo, 2007; Meisels, 1999). This conception of a balanced readiness equation, which strengthens ‘families, early care and education programs, the community and schools’ (Scott-Little et al., 2006: 168), reflects what empirical research demonstrates to be the most effective way to teach children so that they are not only motivated to learn but learn with understanding, which in the end, is what all education stakeholders want their students to achieve (Jalongo, 2007; National Research Council, 2000; Stipek, 2006).

Another avenue of an ethically driven interactionist conception of early childhood education reform that early education stakeholders can pursue appears at the community level. For instance in the US, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's SPARK Initiative13 (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) and the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative (Rhode Island KIDS Count, 2005), which Graue (2006) and others cite (Farrar et al., 2007; Klein, 2006), offer examples of a set of policy solutions that foster an interactionist system of early childhood education. Both initiatives view children's readiness for school as an equation that is based on an interaction between ready families, ready communities, ready services, and ready schools (Rhode Island KIDS Count, 2005). These programs' interactionist-based perspectives foster systems of early education in local communities that address the empiricist's need to prepare young children for later academic success, but they do so in a manner that respects each stakeholder and emphasizes a balanced readiness equation that shares the responsibility for success among all these variables within the readiness equation.

conclusion

As policy-makers in the US and across the globe continue to align early childhood education programs with elementary and secondary education systems that
frame the purpose of the field through an empiricist understanding of readiness, early childhood stakeholders must work with those involved in the policy process to rebalance this uneven readiness equation. The work of the assessment task force in this case study exemplifies the complexity that can emerge if a group of stakeholders were to take up this task of developing a programmatic response that addresses the readiness equation in an ethically driven interactionist manner. Their one assessment tool, which was to display a particular image of readiness, had to address numerous PreK stakeholders whom each held their own ideas about what type of readiness equation this tool should speak to in documenting student performance in PreK. While the task force wanted to create what many of its members termed ‘a developmentally appropriate assessment tool’, achieving such an outcome required them to implement a series of compromises that attempted to attend to their district stakeholders’ multiple conceptions of academic achievement and readiness.

Though the case can be made that this task force’s tool still fosters an empiricist vision of readiness, their work creates the opportunity for conversations to occur about how early childhood education programs can be aligned with larger standards-based K-12 education systems in an ethically driven interactionist manner so that a more balanced readiness equation can be actualized. For those early educators who operate from a ‘critical’ or ‘postmodern perspective’, this example of standards-based reform in the US also illuminates the opportunities that exist for early childhood stakeholders to ‘challenge the ongoing standardization and surveillance of the field’ (Ryan, 2008). Thus, as policy-makers in the US continue to promote standards-based early education reforms to improve the academic achievement of young children, highlighting cases such as this one assists early education advocates and educators in developing strategies to help policy-makers and administrators in understanding not only the need for but how to expand the readiness equation so that it respects as well as improves the performance of all those involved in the early education process.

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notes

1. Content standards define the knowledge and skills that young children are to acquire; performance standards identify the ways in which the child demonstrates that she has acquired this content; and program standards define early childhood program expectations (Bowman, 2006; Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1996).
2. In the United States, elementary school typically begins with kindergarten, and children enroll in kindergarten programs in the academic year that follows their...
fifth birthday. By the end of grade 12, students are typically age 18. Furthermore, the typical academic year in the US starts in September and goes through May.

3. Prekindergarten programs in the US typically serve children the year, or possibly two, prior to kindergarten entry.

4. Texas's policy-makers provide funding to local school districts so that they can operate these half-day programs locally.

5. Children of military personnel who were injured or killed in the line of duty also qualify for the program. Go to [http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/docs/ED/content/htm/ed.002.00.000029.00.htm], section 29.153, to see Texas's policies for PreK.

6. All names in this article are pseudonyms.

7. In this school district, the school day begins at 8 am and ends at 3 pm.

8. In grade 3, students are approximately age eight.

9. In grade 5, students are approximately age 10, and in grade 8, they students are approximately 13 years old.

10. In grade 11, students are approximately age 16. Go to [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter101/ch101a.html] to see the state's policies on student assessment.

11. This sample of stakeholders developed through initial interviews with Leah Apple and Terri Jones, the PreK administrator who chaired the assessment task force. Upon matching informants from their recommendations, other assessment task force members, district administrators, PreK teachers, and principals were interviewed. Stakeholders who appeared on at least two informant's lists were interviewed until data saturation was achieved (Glesne, 1999).

12. NCLB does not require states to implement promotion policies for their students.


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