

School Readiness Study



Parent and Teacher Assessment of Academic Preparedness

Thousands of young children leave Bright Horizons NAEYC-accredited early education programs each year and head off to a wide array of elementary school settings. How well are these Bright Horizons “graduates” prepared to enter kindergarten or first grade? The “ready for school” question is of key concern to parents, teachers, and society, and it therefore affects the daily lives of thousands of children in their new school settings.

To supplement the positive anecdotal evidence received from our annual parent satisfaction surveys, Bright Horizons conducted a systematic study to assess children’s preparedness for entering elementary school as perceived by the children’s parents and elementary school teachers. The findings indicate that both parents and teachers believe that Bright Horizons graduates are well prepared for the academic, social, and behavioral expectations of the first year of elementary school.

Methodology

The parents and teachers of 1,043 Bright Horizons graduates were surveyed during the fall of the child’s first year in elementary school — either kindergarten or first grade. Each child in the study had attended one of 37 Bright Horizons programs in 15 states from all regions of the country and represented a cross-section of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The response rate was 36% for families and 29% for kindergarten and first-grade teachers.

Results

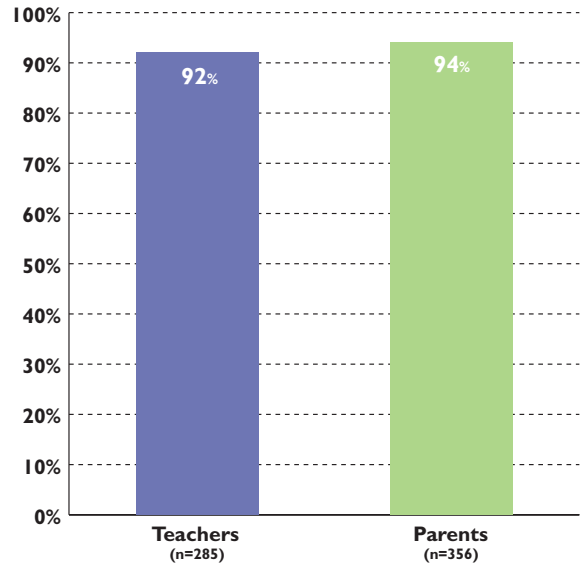
Bright Horizons graduates are poised for school success. Overall, both parents and teachers overwhelmingly concluded that Bright Horizons graduates possess the academic skills, social skills, learning behaviors, and enthusiasm for learning that is needed for success in school. Results indicate that Bright Horizons is doing an excellent job preparing children for the experiences of kindergarten and first grade.

Findings

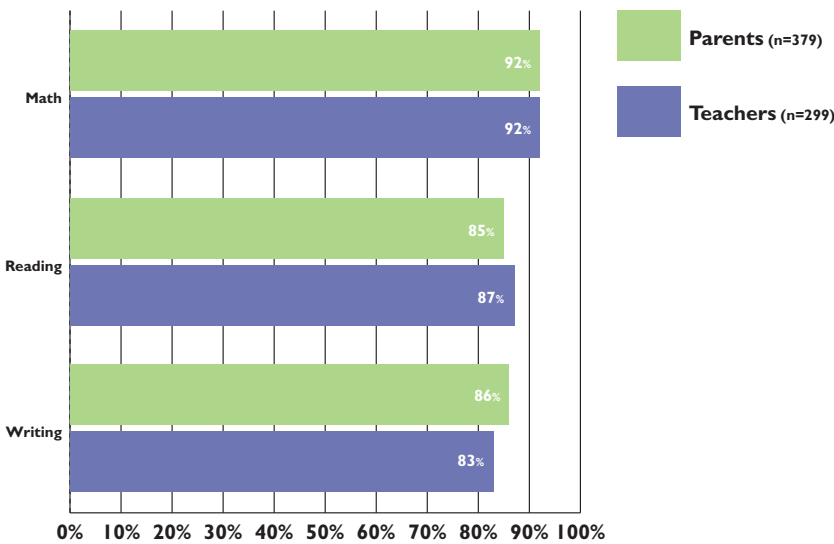
Graduates are well prepared overall.

92% of all teachers of Bright Horizons graduates agree or strongly agree that these children are adequately prepared for kindergarten or first grade.

94% of parents of Bright Horizons graduates now enrolled in kindergarten or first grade agree or strongly agree that their child is adequately prepared for school.



Percent agreement that child is prepared for kindergarten or first grade.



Percent agreement that child entered kindergarten or first grade adequately prepared overall, and in the areas of reading, writing and math.

Parents and teachers agree on children's academic preparedness.

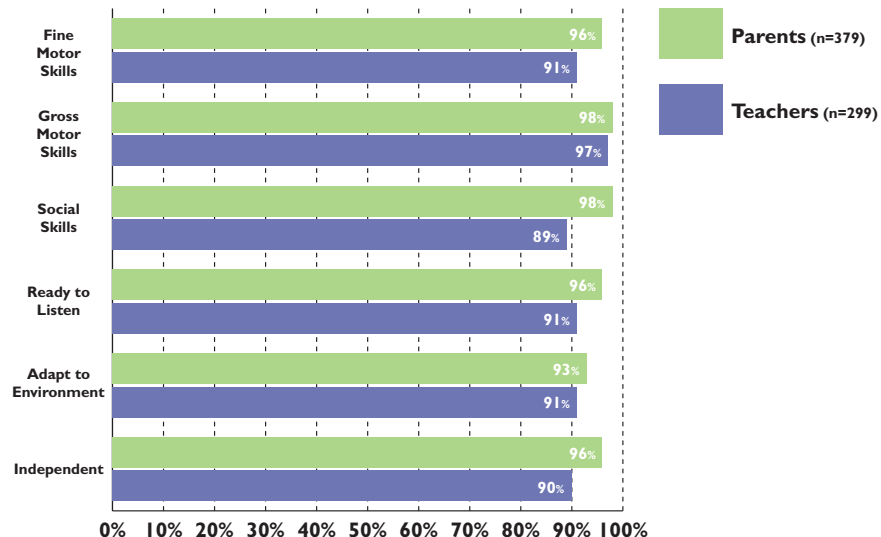
Parents and teachers are in agreement about children's readiness for math — 92% of both groups believe that Bright Horizons graduates enter kindergarten or first grade prepared for math.

While teachers are slightly more positive than parents about children's readiness for reading (87% versus 85%), parents are slightly more positive about children's preparedness for writing (86% versus 83%).

Graduates enter school well prepared in other important areas.

90% or more of both parents and teachers agree that children are well prepared with the motor skills, adaptability, and independence required for success in school.

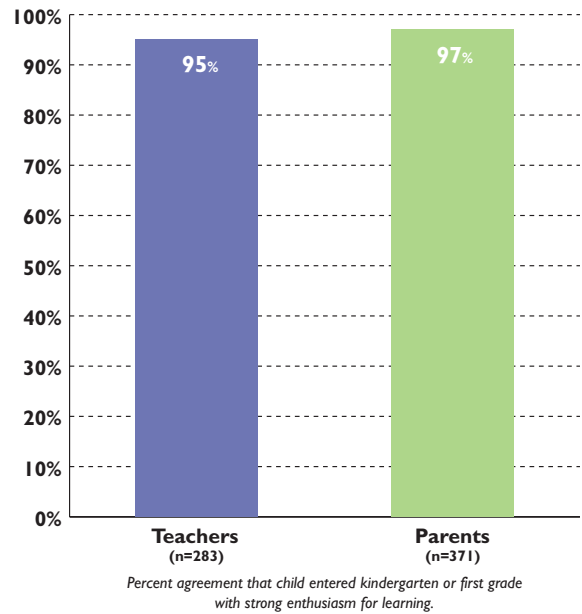
In addition, 98% of parents and 89% of teachers agree that children are prepared in terms of social skills. Similarly, 96% of parents and 91% of teachers view children as ready to listen.



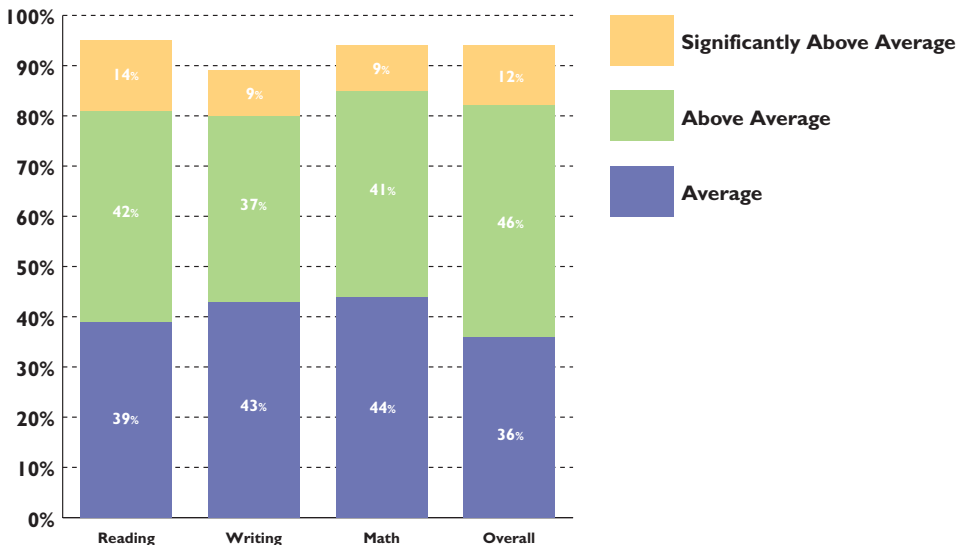
Percent agreement that child entered kindergarten or first grade adequately prepared within these areas.

Graduates are enthusiastic about learning.

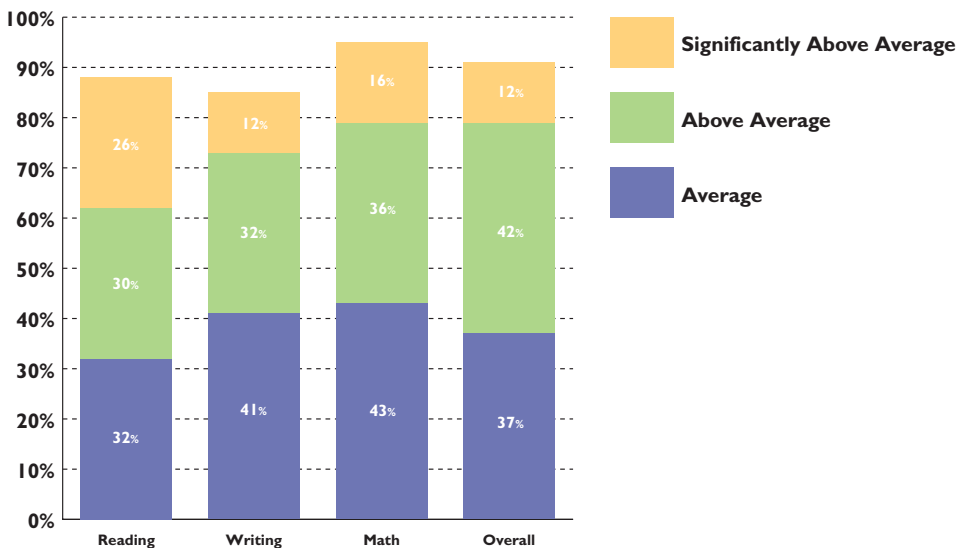
95% of all teachers and 97% of parents agree or strongly agree that the child entered school with a strong enthusiasm for learning.



KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS (n=215)



FIRST GRADE TEACHERS (n=81)



Percent reporting overall readiness is average, above average, or significantly above average as compared to whole class.

Graduates compare favorably to other kindergarten and first grade students.

94% of kindergarten teachers and 91% of first grade teachers rate Bright Horizons graduates as average to significantly above average in their overall school readiness, as compared to other students in the class.

More than half of the kindergarten and first grade teachers rate graduates as above to significantly above average in reading, as compared to the whole class. And 50% of kindergarten teachers and 52% of first grade teachers rate graduates as above to significantly above average in math.

Conclusions

- Parents and teachers say that Bright Horizons Family Solutions programs are doing a very good job preparing children for school in social and academic areas, including fostering children's enthusiasm for learning, thereby enforcing a solid foundation for success in school.
- Many teachers assert that Bright Horizons graduates are better prepared than other kindergarten and first grade students overall, and particularly in math.
- While the results of this study show that Bright Horizons graduates have a solid foundation for success in school, Bright Horizons realizes there is a need for continued measurement and formal evaluation of its graduates' school readiness to provide the data that will help improve our educational program. Bright Horizons will continue to conduct ongoing studies to ensure it is providing the very best education for young children.

Comments

In addition to the quantitative data gathered in the study, anecdotal reports from teachers and parents indicate that graduates of Bright Horizons programs are well prepared for elementary school.

Parents' Comments

- *"Bright Horizons did a great job in encouraging and cultivating my child's creativity, curiosity, imagination, and desire to learn."*
- *"Bright Horizons gave my child a very well-rounded learning experience to prepare for school. Social and emotional development, as well as the beginning concepts for reading, writing and math were well taught."*
- *"Preschool was very effective in developing my child's social skills. It also enhanced his desire to explore, experiment, and learn through experiences."*

Teachers' Comments

- *"So far, all the children I've had that attended Bright Horizons have been extremely prepared for the academic portion of first grade. These children seem to be a step or two ahead of the others in terms of reading readiness and math/counting skills."*
- *"Bright Horizons does what I like to see a preschool do: promote independence; provide an environment that encourages empathy and kindness; apply consistent consequences or rewards depending on behavior; and practice following directions and listening skills."*
- *"I believe that [Bright Horizons] did a good job preparing my student for elementary school. She has great social and academic skills and has a "thirst for knowledge." The preschool played a role in elementary school success, but so does the commitment of the child and parents..."*

Perspectives on School Readiness

We are certainly pleased at the results of the school readiness study. Our *World at Their Fingertips* curriculum, including our *Ready for School* component, is designed to ensure that every child is prepared for successful entry into school, and the study results validate our efforts. However, it is important to put these results and the whole “ready for school” issue into perspective.

Parents have a heightened concern about their child’s experience in the preschool years, often because there is so much in the news about the quality of education in schools, particularly public schools, and the importance of school readiness.

While there is widespread agreement about the importance of early education, there is a difference between the consensus views of professional educators and developmental psychologists, and the anxiety-producing messages that parents receive. Preparing for school is a serious responsibility — but it is only one aspect of preparing children for the remainder of schooling and life.

The professional consensus considers that:

- Development is *not* a race. When it comes to developmental milestones, earlier is not necessarily better.
- Early education should be comprehensive, not narrowly focused on academic concerns.
- Young children learn by hands-on, minds-on exploration and discovery, guided by teachers who prepare rich learning environments, provoke children’s questions, and mentor children.

In contrast, the messages that many parents receive today are:

- “*There’s no time to waste,*” “*Give your child an edge,*” and “*Don’t be left behind!*”
- Children mostly need the 3 R’s in order to be ready for kindergarten.
- Young children need more direct instruction and to focus on acquiring information.

What should a parent look for in a program preparing children for kindergarten and laying a foundation for school success? Based on all the research, our answer at Bright Horizons is that children need a world at their fingertips with rich, experiential language and numbers, mentoring adults to help them acquire new skills, and a supportive environment that builds their drive to approach school, academics, and the life beyond with confidence and enthusiasm.

Factors of School Readiness

What constitutes readiness? In a recent initiative by 17 states partnering to determine Indicators of School Readiness, five factors were identified as most important:*

1. **Overall physical well-being and motor development:** Children possessing age-appropriate fine motor skills that involve coordinating eyes and hands to complete tasks such as stacking blocks, putting together puzzles, connecting building toys, drawing, or writing typically experience success in school.
2. **Social and emotional development:** Children who interact positively with other children typically also do well in a school setting. The skills children learn in early care programs such as taking turns, sharing, listening to others, developing empathy, and functioning as part of a group, help with school success.
3. **Approaches to learning:** The ability to follow through on multi-step directions (“Get some crayons, take them to the writing table, and have a seat”) is another school readiness indicator. This is one indicator of a larger cluster of positive approaches to learning including cooperativeness, persistence, independence, curiosity, and creativity.
4. **Cognition and general knowledge:** An observant, inquisitive mind that examines, asks questions, labels, notes similarities and differences, and solves problems is another important indicator of school success.
5. **Language development and literacy:** A significant expressive (talking) and receptive (understanding) vocabulary is important, as is the ability to recognize the letter-sound relationships.

Certainly we all want children entering the threshold of school to be ready for whatever awaits them there. But as parents, we also want children who are great learners full of questions, lovers of life and all of its possibilities, and good friends and citizens. Our programs meet each child with the high expectation that he or she will become a capable, confident learner, friend, and decision-maker — establishing a foundation for the child to succeed in school *and* in life.



Jim Greenman
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Education and Program Development

* Findings from the *National School Readiness Indicators Initiative – A 17 State Partnership*. (February 2005). Sponsored by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Kauffman Foundation, and the Ford Foundation. Prepared by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.



Bright Horizons Family Solutions is the world's leading provider of employer-sponsored child care, early education, and work/life solutions.

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