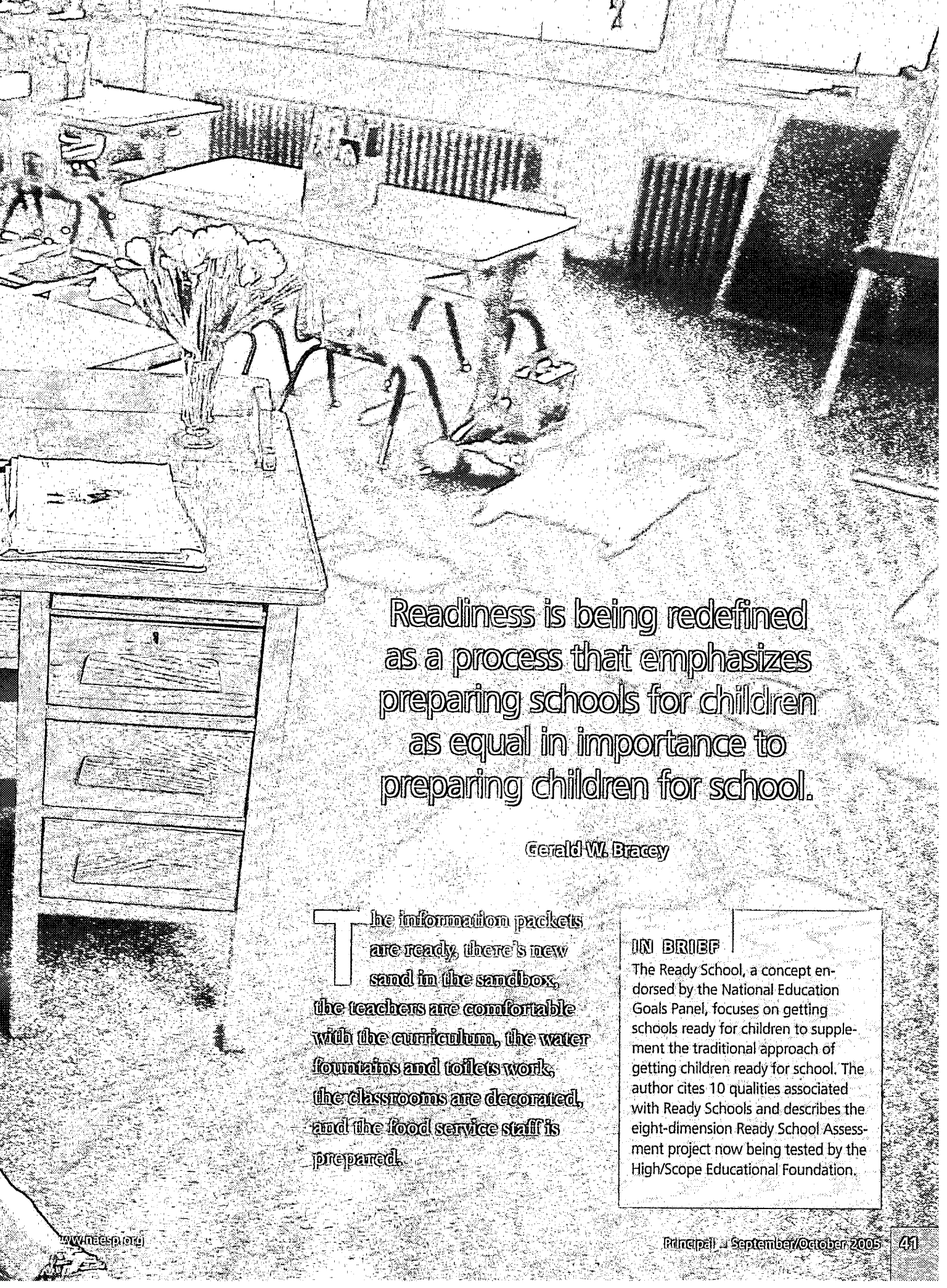




# Is Your School Ready?



Readiness is being redefined as a process that emphasizes preparing schools for children as equal in importance to preparing children for school.

Gerald W. Bracey

**T**he information packets are ready, there's new sand in the sandbox, the teachers are comfortable with the curriculum, the water fountains and toilets work, the classrooms are decorated, and the food service staff is prepared.

#### IN BRIEF

The Ready School, a concept endorsed by the National Education Goals Panel, focuses on getting schools ready for children to supplement the traditional approach of getting children ready for school. The author cites 10 qualities associated with Ready Schools and describes the eight-dimension Ready School Assessment project now being tested by the High/Scope Educational Foundation.

# Readiness Indicators

But is your school ready for a new year?

Perhaps. Perhaps not.

Did you convene a committee to meet over the summer to plan transition activities for incoming students, including individual, small-group, and whole-group activities?

Did you and your teachers contact feeder preschool programs about kindergarten registration?

Did your teachers visit parents who will be sending students to your school for the first time?

Is your faculty *thoroughly* familiar with the curriculum materials they will be using in reading, mathematics, and other areas of instruction?

If you can answer “yes” to these questions, your school might qualify as a Ready School.

## What Is a Ready School?

One can think of the Ready School concept as part, or perhaps the flip side, of school-ready children. It emerged from the deliberations of the National Educational Goals Panel while examining the primary goal of the 1989 Education Summit: “By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.”

Historically, the concept of readiness as expressed by American educators has always had the child as its focus. We asked if children were ready for school and used readiness tests to determine what young children could and could not do. In his popular book on readiness, *Ready to Learn*, Ernest Boyer focuses almost exclusively on the state of the child, although he does acknowledge that “while we get all children ready for school, we must, of course, get schools ready for children” (Boyer 1992).

In the early 1990s, though, early childhood educators like Yale’s Sharon Lynn Kagan (1994) began to speak of getting the school ready for the child. In fact, the National Education Goals Panel considered the concept of the Ready School sufficiently important to form a subcommittee, the Ready

The Ready School Assessment, developed by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, uses 128 indicators in eight areas. Representative indicators for each of the areas follow.

### **Leaders and Leadership** (14 Indicators)

The principal communicates a clear vision for the school as a “ready school” that is committed to the success of every child.

All K–2 teaching staff have both academic training and classroom experience in early childhood education.

### **Transitions** (17 Indicators)

Before school starts, a committee actively plans and coordinates transition activities for incoming children.

Feeder early childhood programs are contacted about registration and school entry before school starts.

### **Teacher Supports** (11 Indicators)

Professional development programs offer teachers a variety of teaching strategies.

Teachers have three or more hours per week for planning, team meetings, or to work with colleagues.

### **Engaging Environments** (22 Indicators)

Classrooms are clean and in good repair.

Classroom print materials include all of the following types: storybooks; non-fiction; picture; reference; and magazines.

### **Effective Curricula** (17 Indicators)

Procedures are in place for monitoring fidelity of implementation of all language arts materials and methods (repeated for mathematics and other curricula areas).

School identifies underperforming children and promptly intervenes.

### **Parents as Teachers** (19 Indicators)

Parents have varied and flexible opportunities for involvement in school-wide events and activities.

Teachers consistently and effectively utilize multiple methods of school-to-home communication to provide parents with ongoing information about school programs and children’s progress and problems (e.g., newsletters, bulletin boards, notes, journals, telephone calls, e-mail, Web sites, computerized messages, parent resource rooms, home visits, and face-to-face interaction).

### **Respecting Diversity** (20 Indicators)

There are many materials in the classroom that introduce a variety of cultural backgrounds and experiences.

The majority of language-minority students receive a challenging, age-appropriate curriculum.

### **Assessing Progress** (8 Indicators)

Assessments are aligned with all areas of school curriculum.

School has in place systematic formal methods for assessing progress toward school goals.

Schools Resource Group, headed by Kagan and Asa Hilliard of Georgia State University (Shore 1998).

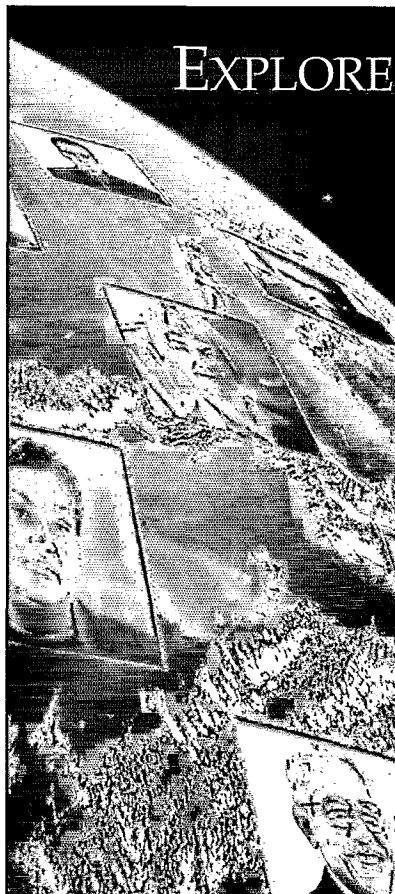
The Resource Group identified 10 qualities—it called them “keys”—associated with ready schools:

1. Ready schools smooth the transition between home and school.
2. Ready schools strive for continuity between early care programs and elementary schools.
3. Ready schools help children learn and make sense of their complex and exciting world.
4. Ready schools are committed to the success of every child.
5. Ready schools are committed to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacts with children during the school day.
6. Ready schools introduce or expand various approaches that have been shown to raise achievement.
7. Ready schools are learning organizations that alter practices and programs if they do not benefit children.
8. Ready schools serve children in communities.
9. Ready schools take responsibility for results.
10. Ready schools have strong leadership.

Some of these are indicators we would expect to find in any good school. But principals and their faculties would have to devote hours of discussion and interpretation to get from the keys to a list of recommended actions that teachers, principals, and parents might take in order to know if their school is ready and to help make it ready.

### Making Ready Schools a Reality

North Carolina was one of the first states to attempt to develop a Ready School plan when it appointed a team to study the transition to kindergarten. While much of the team’s work followed the traditional pattern of examining how ready the children were for school, its report in 2000 included a section on the Ready School and



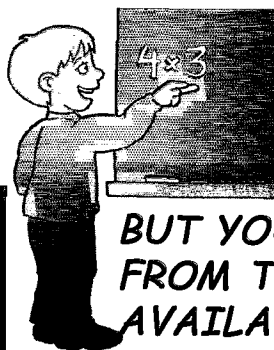
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presented a 23-item Ready Schools Self-Inventory checklist.

The authors strongly suggest that "a team including the principal, kindergarten teachers, parents, and other personnel involved with children's transition to kindergarten should work together to complete the inventory and develop strategies to ensure that the school is prepared to receive all children." The full report, including the checklist, can be found at [www.fpg.unc.edu/~SchoolReadiness/SRFullReport.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~SchoolReadiness/SRFullReport.pdf).

The work in North Carolina and at a number of other locations builds on the conceptual and research work of Robert C. Pianta of the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) at the University of Virginia. The NCEDL researchers focused on family-school connections, child-school connections, peer connections, and community connections (Pianta and Cox 1999).

More recently, other states have

## "One can think of the Ready School concept as part, or perhaps the flip side, of school-ready children."

begun to explore the Ready School concept. Vermont conducted school readiness surveys of its teachers and principals, gathering information about four domains: smooth transitions; instruction and staff development; partnership with community; and resources.

In 2002, the Harvard Family Research Project produced a summary of promising practices relating to how schools might involve families in preparing for the transition to kindergarten. The Harvard research team

identified 11 such practices, including periodic contact with children and their families prior to school entry, partnering with local parent-teacher associations, and developing support groups for parents as they and their children cope with the transition (Bohan-Baker and Little 2000).

In January 2003 the National Early Childhood Transition Center, funded by the Office of Special Education in the U. S. Department of Education, opened its doors for business. Headquartered at the University of Kentucky, the center is a cooperative effort, also involving the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Louisiana State University, Oregon State University, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, whose mission is "to examine factors that promote successful transitions between infant/toddler programs, preschool programs, and public school programs for young children with disabilities and their families."

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## Eight Dimensions of Readiness

The most extensive project to describe and assess school readiness is the Ready School Assessment (RSA) project of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. Working with a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, the High/Scope staff consulted for a year with experts on the transition to school and reviewed the transition research literature. It devoted the 2004–2005 school year to field-testing an assessment instrument that centers on eight dimensions of school readiness: Leaders and Leadership; Transitions; Teacher Supports; Effective Curricula; Engaging Environments; Parents as Teachers; Respecting Diversity; and Assessing Progress (High/Scope 2004).

The RSA uses a set of indicators for each of the eight dimensions. At each school, a team representing the administration, faculty, parents, and community check whether the actions stated in the indicator occur never, seldom, sometimes, often, or always (see sidebar).

In some states, the readiness emphasis continues to be more on the child, not the school. For example, in 2004 Washington state announced “the first-ever statewide guidelines for kindergarten readiness...” The guidelines covered five domains: physical health; well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; cognition and general knowledge; and language and communication.

While these guidelines are important, they ignore half of the equation. Other states are paying increasing attention to that other half because early education faces increased pressure to emphasize academics more than in the past. Even Head Start now requires standardized testing of four-year-olds.

It is not clear how ready the kids coming to school for the first time will be for these new demands, but the shift illustrates the need for schools to be ready for them. □

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## WEB RESOURCES

The final report of the National Governors Association Task Force on School Readiness is available at [www.nga.org/cda/files/0501TaskForceReadiness.pdf](http://www.nga.org/cda/files/0501TaskForceReadiness.pdf).

An introduction to the High/Scope Ready School Assessment is provided by the Council of Chief State School Officers at [www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/SRNeill.ppt](http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/SRNeill.ppt).

Vermont’s development of a community assessment of school readiness is described at <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v4n2/murphey.html>.

associate of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan. His e-mail address is [gbracey1@verizon.net](mailto:gbracey1@verizon.net).



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