introduction

The Maryland State Department of Education, in partnership with the Ready At 5 organization, knows that our children need to be well prepared and cared for so they are ready to learn before they start school. We believe that early childhood programs and schools need to be able to provide a support structure that is well coordinated and results-oriented. This belief is confirmed by research, which shows the earlier children begin having meaningful and enriching experiences and interactions, the more likely they are to have meaningful and enriching experiences and interactions throughout their lives. For this reason, the Maryland State Department of Education has collaborated with a wide variety of early care and education programs, parent advocacy groups, and local agencies to develop a common understanding of what children will be expected to know and do once they enter kindergarten so early childhood programs and schools can provide the experiences and interactions necessary to help children be successful.

An important tool in communicating this common goal and belief is the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR). The MMSR is a research-based and strategic framework for how families, the early care and education community, and teachers can work together to help our earliest learners enter school ready to learn. The MMSR has five components which define standards for curriculum and instruction; assessment of young children's learning; effective communication between early childhood programs and families; and ways to successfully help children make the transition from early childhood to school.

The core belief of the MMSR is to provide those entrusted with working with our young children the knowledge and resources to help each individual learner become ready for school.

Think of MMSR in terms of school readiness like a group of children working on a puzzle—some may be working on the edges; some are grouping the same color(s); and some are looking at the image on the box, trying to put all the bits together. A positive result for the puzzle group is that they worked with each other to fit all the pieces of the puzzle together. Using the MMSR results, families and early childhood program and school providers work together to help prepare a child to successfully move on from kindergarten.

The Maryland State Department of Education defines school readiness as:

"… the state of early development that enables an individual child to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences. As a result of family nurturing and interactions with others, a young child in this stage has reached certain levels of social and emotional development, cognition and general knowledge, language development, and physical well-being and motor development. School readiness acknowledges individual approaches toward learning as well as the unique experiences and backgrounds of each child. "

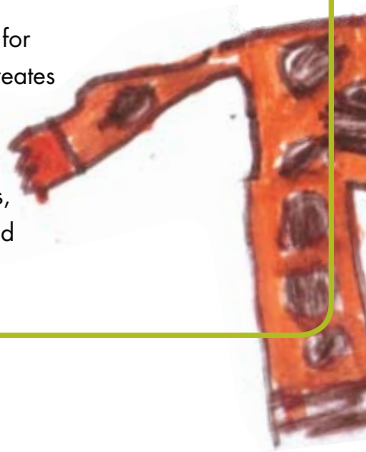
The Maryland State Department of Education knows a child is ready for school success through the assessment component of the MMSR. Each year since 2001, Maryland's kindergarten teachers have evaluated each incoming kindergarten student using the MMSR Kindergarten Assessment. This assessment is a customized version of the Work Sampling System®, a state-of-the-art assessment system for young children, which is grouped in seven domains.

The Seven Domains are:

- Personal and Social Development
- Language and literacy
- Mathematical thinking
- Scientific thinking
- Social studies
- The arts
- Physical development

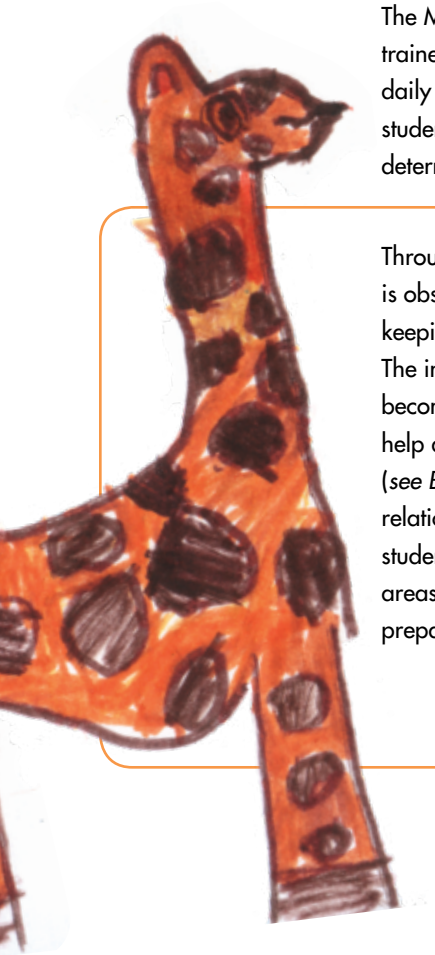
What does school readiness look like?

- **Personal and social development:** The child gets along with others; follows rules; and starts, works on, and finishes an activity.
- **Language and literacy:** The child talks and listens to others; speaks clearly; understands stories; loves books; identifies letter-sound connections; and begins to write letters and words.
- **Mathematical thinking:** The child sorts things by color and shape; can count; recognizes simple patterns; and can describe shapes.
- **Scientific thinking:** The child starts to understand rules and reasons for them; likes to explore natural and physical phenomenon; talks about how things are alike or different; and is able to observe and describe properties of objects (texture, weight, temperature, etc.).
- **Social studies:** The child talks about him/her self, family, and/or the community; recognizes that people are similar or different; and understands why there are rules.
- **The arts:** The child learns skills and appreciation for drawings and paintings, dance, and music; and creates "make-believe" characters and scenes.
- **Physical development:** The child runs, jumps, and/or climbs; uses buttons and/or zippers; traces, draws, and uses scissors; and uses good health and safety skills (i.e. washes hands, etc.).



MMSR Kindergarten Assessment

The MMSR Kindergarten Assessment differs from what we typically think of as a test in that each domain defines specific skills and abilities, or indicators, a teacher should look for to determine whether the child has successfully learned the specified skill or ability. The Maryland State Department of Education has trained kindergarten teachers how to document their daily observations, collect work samples of their students, and use age-appropriate guidelines to determine if children are proficient in these skills.



Throughout each school day, the kindergarten teacher is observing students in a wide range of activities and keeping a record of each student's skills and abilities. The information collected from the observations becomes the basis for individualized support that will help a child develop more complex skills and abilities (*see Building Blocks*). This kind of teacher-student relationship is designed to focus on identifying a student's strengths and weaknesses and supporting the areas of weakness so a child can become fully prepared for the school years to follow.

Building Blocks

In a typical kindergarten classroom, you may see a group of children playing with building blocks. Using the MMSR Kindergarten Assessment, a teacher could be looking for the following skills in their students:

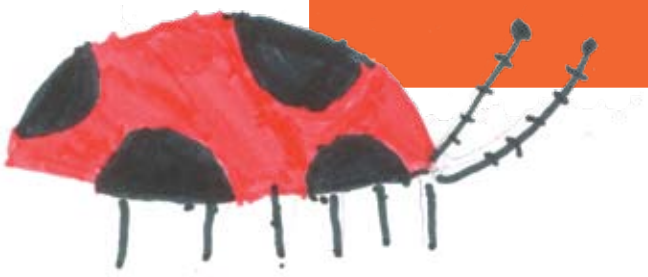
- Interacting and cooperating with others in the group (social and personal)
- Talking and sharing ideas with others in the group (language and literacy)
- Sorting blocks by color and shapes, or creating patterns with the blocks (mathematical thinking)
- Using an assortment of shapes in building a structure or stacking the blocks to see when the tower might fall (scientific thinking)
- Using the blocks to create a pretend fire station, doctor's office, or grocery store, and adding costumes (social studies)
- Creating pictures and signs with crayons, markers or paint (the arts; physical development [fine motor])

MMSR Kindergarten Assessment

While teachers use the MMSR Kindergarten Assessment information for instructional purposes, they also create an evaluation at the end of the first quarter of the school year and submit the data to the Maryland State Department of Education. The Maryland State Department of Education collects and analyzes the information submitted on all students and subgroups of children and produces the Entering School Ready to Learn Report. The report is given to the early childhood community, such as child care or Head Start, each year to help inform programmatic decisions about early learning for children before they come school.

The MMSR makes good sense as it effectively helps families, the early care and education community, and teachers build a child's skills and knowledge in the early years, but the MMSR also makes good cents. Referring again to The Science of Early Childhood Development report, "When we fail to provide children with what they need to build a strong foundation for healthy and productive lives, we put our future prosperity and security at risk."

The RAND Corporation, a California-based research institute, found in their study that "early childhood intervention programs have been shown to yield benefits in academic achievement, behavior, educational progression and attainment, delinquency and crime, and labor market success…."



Strong, effective early childhood education programs, like the MMSR, yield positive results in terms of school readiness and are essential for continued strong academic performance in the school years that follow. In fact, the benefits of early childhood education programs reach well past childhood and school. In his book ***The Sandbox Investment: The Preschool Movement and Kids-First Politics***, *New York Times* journalist David Kirp wrote "Economists…perceived [preschool] as the best strategy for maintaining America's competitive position in the world market..." In today's world, not having strong early childhood education programs ensures that we will not prosper as a nation in the future.

The MMSR Kindergarten Assessment is a customized version of the Work Sampling System®, a state-of-the-art assessment system for young children. The assessment is broken into the seven MMSR domains with indicators of learning expectations for each domain. Teachers, care givers, and parents can help build a child's skills and abilities in each domain through a variety of simple activities. The pages that follow provide a snapshot of what the MMSR Kindergarten Assessment looks for in each domain and what kind of activities help children learn the skills and knowledge in that domain.

MMSR Seven Domains

- Social and personal development
- Language and literacy
- Mathematical thinking
- Scientific thinking
- Social studies
- The arts
- Physical development

personal and social development

Indicators

- Shows initiative and self-direction
- Follows classroom rules and routines
- Uses classroom materials purposefully and respectfully
- Interacts easily with one or more children

What does personal and social development look like?

The child gets along with others; follows rules; and starts, works on, and finishes an activity.

Activities to do with a child to help in this domain

- **Age 0-2**
  Hold the child in front of the mirror and make different faces. Encourage the child to do the same.
- **Age 3-4**
  Let the child have a party and invite friends, which can be real children or stuffed animals. Set out plates and cups, and serve special treats.
- **Age 3-4**
  When a friend or relative is sick, help the child make a get well card.
- **Age 3-4**
  When reading to the child, stop and ask how he/she thinks a character in the story feels. Ask what the child might do or feel in the same situation.

language and literacy

Indicators

- Gains meaning by listening
- Demonstrates beginning phonemic awareness
- Speaks clearly and conveys ideas effectively
- Shows some understanding of concepts about print
- Comprehends and responds to fiction and non-fiction
- Uses letter-like shapes, symbols, letters, and words to convey meaning

Activities to do with a child to help in this domain

What does language and literacy look like?

The child talks and listens to others; speaks clearly; understands stories; loves books; identifies letter-sound connections; and begins to write letters and words.

- **Age 0-2**
  Read to the child, even in a store or walking down the street.
- **Age 3-4**
  Have the child pick a book then ask him/her to draw a picture from the book on paper with crayons. Or ask the child to describe a scene from a favorite book, then draw the scene on paper with crayons.
- **Age 3-4**
  When reading a book, make the sounds of what is happening in the book. For instance, the vroom of a car or splash of water. Have the child make the sounds with you.
- **Age 3-4**
  Have the child pick out letters from a word. For instance, ask the child to say the first letter on a cereal box or book title.

work sampling system®

mathematical thinking

Activities to do with a child to help in this domain

- **Age 0-2**
  Give the child different shapes to play with (squares, triangles, circles, stars, hearts, etc.).
- **Age 0-2**
  Count with the child whenever possible (walking up or down stairs, on fingers and toes, etc.)
- **Age 3-4**
  Have the child group shapes together and then count how many are in each group.
- **Age 3-4**
  Give the child a measuring spoon or cup and let him/her put water from one bowl to another.

Indicators

- Begins to use and explain strategies to solve
- Shows understanding of number and quantity
- Recognizes, duplicates, and extends patterns
- Recognizes and describes some attributes of shapes

What does mathematical thinking look like?

The child sorts things by color and shape; can count; recognizes simple patterns; and can describe shapes.

scientific thinking

Activities to do with a child to help in this domain

Indicators

- Seeks information through observation, exploration, and descriptive investigations
- Uses simple tools and equipment to extend the senses and gather data
- Identifies, describes, and compares properties of objects
- Observes and describes characteristics, basic needs, and life cycles of living things

What does scientific thinking look like?

The child starts to understand rules and reasons for them; likes to explore natural and physical phenomenon; talks about how things are alike or different; and is able to observe and describe properties of objects (texture, weight, temperature, etc.).

- **Age 0-2**
  Read a fabric book or touch-and-feel book with your child.
- **Age 0-2**
  Let the child bang on different sized plastic containers with a wooden spoon.
- **Age 3-4**
  Take a walk with the child and let him/her collect things they find interesting in a bag. At home, take the things out of the bag and let the child tell you about them.
- **Age 3-4**
  Go on a leaf or flower hunt with the child. Ask the child about the different shapes, sizes, colors, and textures of the leaves or flowers.

work sampling system®

social studies

Indicators

- Identifies similarities and differences in people's characteristics, habits, and living patterns
- Describes some people's jobs and what is required
- Begins to be aware of technology and how it affects life
- Demonstrates awareness of the reasons for rules

What does social studies look like?

The child talks about him/her self, family, and/or the community; recognizes that people are similar or different; and understands why there are rules.

Activities to do with a child to help in this domain

- **Age 0-2**
  Play a body part game or peek-a-boo with the child.
- **Age 0-2**
  Hold the child in front of the mirror and make different faces. Encourage him/her to do the same.
- **Age 3-4**
  Play games with the child and help him/her learn the rules of the game.
- **Age 3-4**
  Look at or make maps with the child.

the arts

Indicators

- Participates in group music experiences
- Participates in creative movement, dance, and drama
- Uses a variety of art materials to explore and express ideas and emotions
- Responds to artistic creations or events

What does the arts look like?

The child learns skills and appreciation for drawings and paintings, dance, and music; and creates "make-believe" characters and scenes.

Activities to do with a child to help in this domain

- **Age 0-2**
  Sing to or play different kinds of music for your child.
- **Age 0-2**
  Play Clap, Snap, Stomp with your child.
- **Age 3-4**
  Draw, paint, or color with your child.
- **Age 3-4**
  Dance with your child.

physical development

Activities to do with a child to help in this domain

Indicators

- Moves with balance and control
- Uses eye-hand coordination to perform tasks effectively
- Performs self-care tasks competently
- Shows beginning understanding of and follows health and safety rules

What does physical development look like?

The child runs, jumps, and/or climbs; uses buttons and/or zippers; traces, draws, and uses scissors; and uses good health and safety skills (i.e. washes hands, etc.).

- **Age 0-2**
  Roll a ball back and for with the child.
- **Age 0-2**
  Teach the child to jump.
- **Age 3-4**
  Teach the child how to wash his/her hands.
- **Age 3-4**
  Have the child use safety scissors to cut shapes out of paper.