

School Readiness: Insights from Low-income, African American Mothers

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Abstract

Research has shown that low-income, African American children are disproportionately at risk for not being ready for school. Children who are unprepared for kindergarten are at risk of lifetime disadvantages (e.g. school dropout, antisocial behavior, premature parenting). Research also suggests that perceptions of school readiness vary and that families and schools may have different viewpoints on what constitutes school readiness. The purpose of the research is twofold: First we examine to explore parents' perspectives of what school readiness means. Second, we examine what parents are doing to promote their children's readiness for school. The study draws upon a series of in-depth interviews with low-income, African American mothers of preschool age children transitioning to kindergarten. Caregivers were sampled from families using a Head Start program in an inner-city neighborhood in Chicago. An interpretive approach guides the analysis of the interviews. N-Vivo, a qualitative data analysis program, will be used to aid in analysis and interpretation, as well as data displays and memos. These strategies will allow us to identify key themes and patterns among parents. The study of school readiness will make substantive and applied contributions. More specifically, the research will add new knowledge on school readiness from the perspective of parents, and elaborate on existing knowledge. Our findings will be particularly relevant for preschools and elementary schools. These findings will determine effective ways for schools and families to collaborate to enhance children's readiness for school.