



NO TIME TO WASTE: INDICATORS OF SCHOOL READINESS – MATERNAL EDUCATION

- Persons with a high school diploma (or equivalent) experience more opportunities and financial success than those without.
- Unemployment rates also drop with higher levels of education. In the first quarter of 2004, the unemployment rate for persons 25 years or over with less than a high school diploma was 8.7% compared to 5.0% for high school graduates and 2.9% for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.ⁱ
- “[R]egardless of race or ethnicity, higher educational attainment equates to higher earnings.”ⁱⁱ
- According to the 2000 Census, the median earnings for Virginia females with less than a high school diploma are \$16,768 or 24% less than a high school graduate. The median earnings for a high school graduate are \$21,932 or 40% less than the median earnings for females with a bachelor degree.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Persons who do not graduate from high school are less likely to earn a wage that will enable them to be self-sufficient without the need for public or private assistance.

A mother’s educational level, financial self sufficiency, single parenthood, and English as a second language...what do these have in common? These descriptors are the four risk factors identified in the report by National Center for Education Statistics titled *The Condition of Education 2004* as being associated with poor early reading and math skills and general knowledge among children entering kindergarten.^v

Children in families with a single risk factor fare better than those in families with multiple risk factors. “While children with one risk factor do not fare as well as those with none, children who have two or more risk factors exhibit greater achievement lags, poorer health, more problem behavior, and less positive approaches to learning than do children with a single risk factor.”^{vi}

What is the likelihood of having more than one of these risk factors? The answer is pretty good since these factors are often interdependent. A person’s education and status as a single parent is negatively correlated to financial self-sufficiency. A woman who does not graduate from high school can expect to earn 44% less over her lifetime than a woman who has earned a bachelor’s degree.^{vii}

Is any one of these four risk factors more important to a child’s school readiness? The authors of *The Condition of Education 2004* note that further examination would be necessary to determine if one risk factor carries more significance than another. However, “[s]ome researchers have theorized that the number of risk factors in a child’s background may be more important than the nature of the particular risk or risks (Meisels and Wasik 1990). Others believe that low parental education or family income are [sic] far more significant than growing up in a single-parent family or having parents whose primary language is not English (Scott-Jones 1996).”^{viii}

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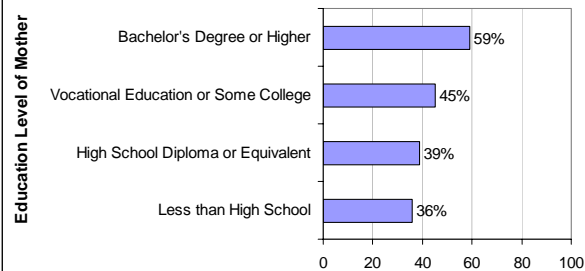
“[T]he economic benefits of getting a GED or high school degree are clear: A Virginia worker with a GED or a diploma makes more than twice the income of a worker without one.”^{iv} *The Honorable Mark Warner, Governor of Virginia*

How does a mother's education affect a child's school readiness?

Researchers have known for some time that the level of a mother's education is associated with her child's academic achievement and academic difficulties.^{ix} The effects of a mother's education on her child may be both direct and indirect.^x Direct effects include increased exposure to language-rich environments including reading and storytelling as well as positive mother-child interactions. Indirect effects include the benefits a child receives from a mother's improved employment or earnings. Frequent reading to young children improves their early literacy skills including increased vocabulary, and recognition of letters and other characteristics of written language. As illustrated in *Figure 1*, the likelihood that a child will be read to every day by a family member increases as a mother's educational level increases. Children who possess early literacy skills prior to entrance into kindergarten are more likely to experience academic success.

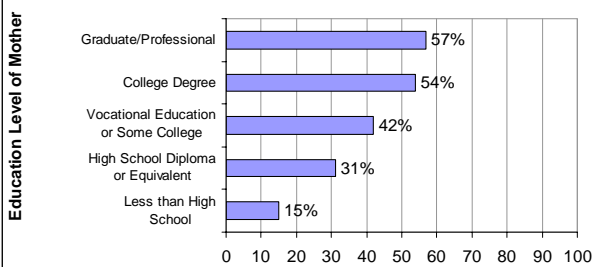
Mastery of basic skills related to early literacy and cognitive development is impacted by a mother's level of education. *Figure 2* references four measures - the ability to recognize letters, count to 20 or higher, write his or her name, and read or pretend to read - used to indicate signs of emerging literacy. These measures were derived from the 1999 National Household Education Survey.

Figure 1. Percentage of First-time Kindergarteners Read to Every Day by a Family Member, by Maternal Education



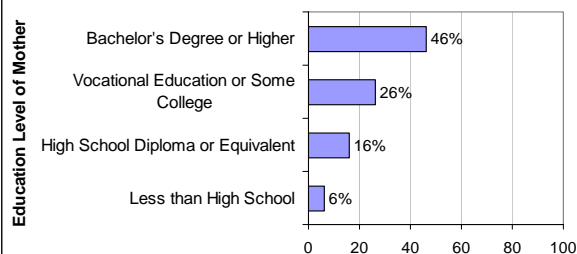
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (Fall 1998). Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K). Available online on December 9, 2004 at <http://nces.ed.gov/quicktables/Detail.asp?Key=300>.

Figure 2. Percentage of Children Ages 3 to 5 with Three or Four Cognitive/Literacy School Readiness Skills, by Mother's Education



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Available online on December 9, 2004 at <http://nces.ed.gov/quicktables/Detail.asp?Key=254>

Percentage of First-time Kindergarteners Scoring in the Highest Quartile for Reading, by Maternal Education



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K), Fall 1998. (Found at <http://nces.ed.gov/quicktables/Detail.asp?Key=297>, 2004).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. A child's enrollment in a quality early care and education program will help break the cycle of low academic achievement.
2. Children and their families benefit from quality early care and education programs that provide comprehensive services.
3. Children would benefit from public assistance programs that encourage mothers to increase their education rather than directing them to jobs that fail to pay enough to lift the family out of poverty.

ⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2004). Available online on 12/09/04 at <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/suppl/empsit/cpseed3.txt>.

ⁱⁱ Jennifer Cheeseman Day & Eric C. Newburger (July 2002). The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings. Current Populations Reports, P23-210, U. S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau (2000). Available online on 12/09/04 at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/earnings/call1vafemale.html>.

^{iv} State Pulse (2004). Available online on 12/09/04 at <http://www.statepulse.com/Virginia/2004/05.13.04.gov.pr.asp>.

^v National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education (2000). Available online on 12/09/04 at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2000/essay/e07.asp>.

^{vi} Id.

^{vii} Jennifer Cheeseman Day & Eric C. Newburger (July 2002). The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings. Current Populations Reports, P23-210, U. S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.

^{viii} National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education (2000). Available online on 12/09/04 at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2000/essay/e07.asp>.

^{ix} Magnuson, K.A. & McGroder, S.M. (2002). The Effect of Increasing Welfare Mothers' Education on Their Young Children's Academic and School Readiness. Joint Center for Poverty Research. JCPR Working Paper 280. Available online on 12/09/04 at <http://www.jcpr.org/wp/WPprofile.cfm?ID=322>.

^x Id. While past research has established positive correlations between mothers' educational attainment and children's school readiness, direct causal relationships are unknown. Recent research by Magnuson and McGroder establish a direct, causal relationship.