

Ready for School? Perspectives from Child Development, Parenting, and Policy Experts

Brief Report

Submitted to the Executive Committee for the Graduate Field Committee in Developmental Science

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Brief Summary of the Workshop:

This one-day workshop took place on March 3rd, 2017. The program consisted of five invited talks followed by question and discussion periods, and concluded with a student poster session. The theme of the workshop was “Ready for School? Perspectives from Child Development, Parenting, and Policy Experts,” and invited talks covered a range of topics, including early childhood policy and programs in the state of Maryland, the use of technology in preparing children for school, how parents and teachers contribute to children’s school readiness, and what systematic and structural changes need to be made to support low-income children and families. The poster session included posters related to the workshop’s theme, presented by graduate students from both UMD and UMBC.

The speakers were:

- Rolf Grafwallner, Program Director for Early Childhood Initiatives, Council of Chief State School Officers
- Sara Anderson, Learning Sciences and Human Development, West Virginia University
- Rachel Barr, Psychology, Georgetown University
- Brenda Jones Harden, Human Development and Quantitative Methodology, University of Maryland
- Natasha Cabrera, Human Development and Quantitative Methodology, University of Maryland

Workshop participants included the five invited speakers, three graduate student workshop leaders, and more than 30 audience members throughout the day. Thirty-two people registered for the event; of the registered participants, 50% were graduate students, 23% were faculty, 9% were postdoctoral fellows, 6% were undergraduate students, and 12% held other positions (including guests from other organizations, post-baccalaureate research assistants, etc.). Participants came from a variety of academic disciplines,

including Psychology, Human Development, Sociology, Hearing and Speech Sciences, Public Health, and Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education.

Outcomes and Goals Achieved:

The workshop was centered on four main goals:

1. Develop a broader, more interdisciplinary understanding of school readiness.
2. Examine how parents, teachers, schools, and policies function to support school readiness in young children.
3. Learn about the methodologies researchers from different fields use to study school readiness.
4. Foster dialogue to promote interdisciplinary approaches to school readiness.

Speakers were each given 30 minutes for their presentations. Speakers were invited to describe their current research programs, or in the case of Dr. Grafwallner, his involvement with early childhood education programming and policy, and how they inform the study of school readiness. Talks included discussions of early childhood education at the state and federal level, the effect of media on learning in early childhood, how parents' support children in their transition to school, the reasons behind fadeout of some early childhood education programs, and how two-generation programs may be helpful in targeting school readiness for children and families in poverty. A 15-minute question and answer session followed each presentation to allow for audience participation and engagement with the speakers. This time was useful in both clarifying and expanding on the presentation material, and allowed for a cross-disciplinary conversation on the contributions of parents, schools, and policies on school readiness. Furthermore, this discussion time was so fruitful and engaging that it had to be cut off after each speaker for the sake of maintaining the schedule. Feedback from participants on the workshop evaluation suggests that the speakers were well received, effectively communicated their work, and presented a range of perspectives on school readiness. In particular, attendees appreciated the smaller size of the workshop, which allowed for more questions from the audience and provided the opportunity for cross-disciplinary discussion.

Suggestions for Future Workshop Organizers

Based on our experience, we would make the following suggestions:

General Suggestions

- Cross-check the proposed workshop date with the University and Department calendar as well as any invited speakers' university calendars before setting a date. Between recruitment days, new student orientations, and spring break the calendar can fill up quickly.
- Keep administrative coordinators in the loop from the initial stages of the planning process; they are fantastic assets to making the workshop run smoothly.
- Spend time researching and brainstorming the invited speaker list as well as back up speakers.

- Consider including an interactive panel or small group discussion component. Our post-workshop participant survey suggested that allotting time for a panel discussion could have been interesting and informative since the atmosphere was so engaging.

Budget Expectations (\$1,000 total)

- **Venue and Equipment:** \$0. 1310 Tawes is particularly well-suited for workshops of this kind, as it has all necessary space and equipment, at no cost to the workshop organizers. However, the space should be reserved well in advance of the workshop date to ensure its availability.
- **Catering and Food:** In light of the dietary restrictions of many attendees, we chose to serve a range of breakfast options and prepackaged sandwich boxes for lunch. In total, it cost about \$800 for breakfast, lunch, coffee, and afternoon refreshments for 30-40 people.
- **Travel Expenses:** \$15 per parking pass for out-of-town speakers to park in Union Lane Garage for the day, plus potential cost of mileage/car rental and gas (or other transportation) for speakers commuting from out of town.
- **Flyers:** \$0 for black and white copies. Note that if you plan to print flyers in color, some departments require funds to print more than a few.

Suggested Timeline

5 months prior to the workshop

- Set up bi-weekly meetings for the planners.
 - You can always cancel them if you don't need to meet, but it's great to have something on the calendar!
- Determine who to invite as a speakers; email invitations
 - Consider a wide variety of speakers. Panel discussions were especially effective due to the differences in perspectives and approaches.
 - Consider how the day will be organized. We attempted to open the day with an angle towards policy and programs to contextualize the academic research that came afterwards.
- Determine organizational roles
 - We found it helpful to divide our speakers amongst the three of us as well as divide up any tasks. When it came to writing documents, we all took on a section and worked independently before collaborating on the editing/revision process.

4 months prior to the workshop

- Finalize the date for the workshop
- Begin exploring possible venues

3 months prior to the workshop

- Book venue
- Reserve any audio/visual equipment if needed
- Set up participant registration site
 - We used Google Forms to make a site for registration

- We asked for:
 - First and last name
 - Email address
 - Position/occupation & Department
 - Attending (Yes or No)
 - Dietary Restrictions

2 months prior to the workshop

- Remind speakers about date and time
- Create advertising materials and begin advertising
 - We put up fliers (8.5 x 11) in the following departments: Psychology, and Human Development,, as well as throughout Stamp Student Union
 - *Note: Some departments require permission to post fliers on the wall. Be sure to contact the proper administrator before posting fliers.*
 - We advertised using the Developmental Science, Psychology, and HDQM email listservs
 - We contacted the academic coordinators for their help in publicizing to other relevant UMD departments (Sociology, CHSE, TLPL, HESP, and Family Science)
 - We also sent our advertisement to relevant departments at other universities including UMBC, American, Georgetown, and Gallaudet.

One month prior to the workshop

- Continue to advertise/register participants
- Determine the exact schedule of speakers

Two weeks prior

- Remind speakers of date/time and ask about A/V needs (adapter, etc.).
- *Asked speakers for the name of their talk and biographies*
- Book catering
 - We used Jason's Deli.
- Assemble workshop materials
 - We created a pamphlet for participants that included the schedule for the day and short biographies of each speaker as well as a thank you to the Graduate Field Committee for Developmental Science
- Coordinated with the English department's technological staff to ensure that they would be available in the chance that technical difficulties arise on the day of the conference.
- Determine appropriate room set up.
- Obtain parking codes for the speakers that are driving to College Park.

Four days prior

- Finalize registration. Send email reminders to those who registered
- Confirm all room and catering reservations

- If using room with built in projector/presentation tools, we suggest investigating and ensuring that you know how everything works
- Practice all transitions
- Begin to anticipate any problems or challenges that may arise.

Day of and during workshop

- Keep to your set schedule.
 - One graduate student was in charge of keeping the workshop to schedule by monitoring the time and moderating the discussion panels.
 - We used signs indicating 10 minutes, 5 minutes and 1 minute remaining for talks and for questions and answer periods.
 - Because of the engaging nature of the question and answer session, some speakers went over their allotted time. We would encourage graduate student coordinators to stick to the schedule and feel comfortable ending the Q and A session if it's time.

Following the workshop

- Send out thank you emails to the participants, speakers, and any administrative staff who assisted through the process.
- Help facilitate connections between speakers and participants, if requested.