“Throwing Down the Gauntlet”

Kindergarten Enrollment Practices
Taking Steps at the Beginning of the Journey, Not During

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Who is this Guy?

**Principal** – Catholic elementary schools 28 Years, high school 2 years

**Director of Graduate Studies and Undergraduate Clinical Experiences** - Central Methodist University, Fayette, MO

**Directed on-line leadership graduate education courses** - University of Missouri, Columbia

**Principal** – The Gulinogroup and Fearless Leadership Consulting, Nathan Levy Associate
What Has He accomplished

“Distinguished Educator Awards,” St. Peter Interparish school, faculty members Agnes Forck (2011) and Laura Dampf (2013), from the National Catholic Educators Association

“2013 Innovations in Catholic Education in Curriculum and Instruction in Technology Award” for St. Peter Interparish School by Today’s Catholic Teacher Magazine

“2013 Distinguished Home and School Award” for St. Peter Interparish School by the National Catholic Educators Association

Recipient, University of San Francisco Alumni Society Outstanding Educator in Administration Award

Recipient, National Association of Secondary School Principals Middle Level Dissertation Award
What Has He Published?


“Advisors to the Principal,” Today’s Catholic Teacher, August/September 2011

“How young is too young?”- Jefferson City Magazine, September/October 2008


“To Brave Ulysses,” America at the Millennium a publication by The International Library of Poetry, 1999


"My New Life," A Song for children with disabilities, Middle School Journal
From Me

Not the ‘Expert’

Not an intense learning workshop/class experience

Research, Personal Experiences, Suggestions

To You

Take info and research, digest, and use as needed
“I just try to pull them through.”

Betsy Swift,
Kindergarten Educator
“No Child Left Behind,” etc.

Then, why let them start out behind?
My Concerns…

6 of 21 children

- Seemed not ready for the kindergarten experience

December and they….

- Could not focus (few minutes)
- Still unfamiliar with letters and numbers
- Unable to enter play situations and relate them to kindergarten concepts
  - Fidget - Distracted - slightest change in environment
More Concerns

K Students –
Continually pulled back into the group, though educators actions, words and activities were age appropriate

Students (Grades 1 through 8) –
Five to twenty students in each grade of 60 - struggling or not interested in learning
Even More Concerns

No formal readiness testing process

No parent information meetings regarding school readiness

No counseling to assist parents of children who were not ready for the formal school experience

Were we alone in this lack of screening and support?

So began research....
Findings

Kindergarten age entry dates

- Inconsistent among the states
- Missouri - 5 years of age by July 31 (more on this)
- Six states - cut-off dates of 5 years of age between December 1 and January 1
- Thirty-five states - cut-off dates of 5 years of age between August 31 and October 16
- Three states - cut off dates before August 15
- Six states - leave entrance age question to local districts
Even More Concerns

School Accountability & Student Ach.
• topics of paramount significance

Higher Standards & Expectations placed on financially or resources strapped education systems
• Unrealistic

Lack of Consistent and Reasonable Enrollment practices supported by research
• Makes greater the realities of unrealistic accountability and achievement standards
The Research

“Early success in school lends to higher levels of achievement through the years.”

(Alexander & Entwistle, 1988)
Eight important areas - affect transition to school (And consequences):

**Knowledge** – Identify numbers and letters

**Social** – Appropriately interact with educators/peers

**Skills** – Hold pencil, etc.

**Disposition** – Attitude toward school

**Rules** – Expectation of behavior and action

**Physical** – Age and health

**Family Issues** – Family interaction with school and changes in family life

**Education Environment** – What happens at school

**NOT** – 5 years old by a particular date!
More Research Findings

“We feel, on the basis of research...., that we are tempted to say that EVERY child under the age of five years, six months should wait a year before starting Kindergarten.”

(Uphoff and Gilmore, 1990)
“An increasing number of studies suggest - matters such as school entrance age and the nature of programs... may have different effects on males and females. ...early formal academic instruction tends to yield greater negative long-term effects on males.”

(May, 1995:Brent, et al., 1996)
The Research

“We do get children who have been exposed to a wide range of preschool and daycare situations, but it really doesn’t matter as long as the children are old enough – almost six with boys and at least five and a half with girls.”

(Victoria Martino – co-founder, Mountain View Academy, 2003 recipient of the ‘No Child Left Behind’-Blue Ribbon School Award)
Ms. Martino continues…..

“Pacesetters in my class are the children that have the cognitive development and the ability to listen to something for ten minutes and stay on track.”

“When children are ready to learn, they are self-motivated, learning is easy and the love it.”

“It would rather have an average student that is very mature than a very bright student that is immature.”
She Continues . . .

“The only way that maturation develops is over time.”

“I encourage parents to give their children the gift of time at this young age.”
More Research

“If every child entering Kindergarten were at least 5 years, three months old by the time school begins, most of them would be developmentally ready for the demands and expectations of school.”

(Linda Pass Halverson, National Lecture Staff, Gesell Institute of Human Development)
Additional Risk Factors

Half of today’s preschoolers - affected by at least one of the following.... & 15% of them are affected by three or more

- **Mother** - less than high school education
- **Family** - below official poverty line
- **Mother** - speaks other than English as primary language
- **Mother** - unmarried at time of child’s birth
- **Only one** - parent present in the home

(Zill, et al., 1995)
Additional Risk Factors

Kindergarten Population
- More diverse

Schools
- Expected to provide appropriate activities and instruction to ensure that each child begins school positively
  
  (Zill, et al., 1995)

In a perfect world honorable, but........
Realities

Class sizes - Too large (over 15)

Facilities not adequate - Room size

Funding lacking
  - \( \frac{1}{2} \) Day or NO programs

Educator preparation for the task - ?

Some Children - not ready for school (kindergarten) experience
Problem in Public Education is Poverty
Elaine Weiss (National coordinator, Broader Bolder Approach to Education (BBA). Promotes a comprehensive, evidence-based set of policies to allow all children to thrive.), November 6, 2013, The Washington Post

A new study - explosive growth in student poverty

Rather than raising standards, and testing students more, the biggest change we need to address is that of our student body.

The October 2013 Southern Education Foundation study indicates clearly that poverty is more important than ever.
Fifty years ago - educated mostly working-class kids and up, and we did not expect those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder to graduate.

Now - educate all students, including the very poorest and otherwise disadvantaged. Expect them all to graduate.

Unfortunately - a large and growing proportion of students live in poverty and even concentrated poverty, have a disability, and/or are learning English as a second language.

Need a totally new set of policies to address that 21st century reality.
In 2000 - students eligible for free or reduced-price meals = half of the student body in four states.

In 2011 - over half of public school students are poor in 17 states.

Reality - demands a set of education reforms different from those on which policy has fixated of late.

With no set of supports that enable all students to acquire basic literacy, problem-solving and communications skills, kindergarten teachers must tailor their instruction to an ever-broader range of academic capacities and behavioral challenges.
Too many students will be doomed from a very early age to remedial education and dim prospects of life success.

Need to ensuring a meaningful “floor” – in terms of school readiness, physical and mental health, and nutrition – on which children can stand in order to viably learn.
Many More Students Are Living In Poverty Than 9 Years Ago - And in many states, school funding systems are shortchanging poor students.

Rebecca Klein, Education Editor, The Huffington Post, 08/24/2015

Students in America’s schools are much, much poorer than they were nine years ago.

2006 - 31 percent of America’s students attended schools in “high-poverty” districts

2013 - jumped to over 49 percent
Means - nearly half of the nation’s children between the ages of 5 and 17 attend schools in communities where a large chunk of families are struggling to get by.

EdBuild - new organization that advocates for more equitable state school funding

Research - low-income students typically need more resources

School funding formulas - in many states are rigged against helping them (legislators)

Government – Formerly a source of leadership and innovation around issues of economic prosperity and upward mobility.

- Now we’re a country disinclined to invest in our young people.
- Political will - to change state school funding systems seems to be lacking

Folks who happen to be making these decisions,... their kids aren’t the ones in low-income schools
Graduate Student Comments

3 Years & 9 classes
- None ever commented against waiting

“Our daughter could have entered as she had just turned five.

She was academically ready, but socially and physically, behind.

We waited until six and are thankful, she matured.”
“As a first grade teacher and I look at my students this year:

Every one in the ‘Title I Reading’ program and the ‘Read Recovery’ program have June and July birthdays.

I think this tells us something.”
“I have noticed the same thing with the students in my classroom. They are the youngest students in the class.

If they had started school a year after, I wonder if they would need so much support to keep their heads above water.

I seriously doubt it.”
“Excellent point.

I wonder if avoiding the cost of child care another year was worth having the child labeled a special services student.

Not that all could have been helped by an additional year, but I will be willing to bet many of them would have.”
“My daughter’s birthday was March.

She was academically ready to start school, however looking back, I think it would have done her a world of good if we waited to send her to school when she was six.

She was not ready socially and as she got older, she hung around with kids younger in school.”
“...every child that we retained in Kindergarten this year at... was born after May 25, and the majority of our Kindergartners that were referred for remedial summer school were born after January 1.

From our building, 24 kids were referred, and only 3 of the 24 were born before January 1st.”
More Data

“The greatest growth of the brain occurs in the first few years of life, and that’s when we spend the least on education...”

(Thornburg, 2004)

So... Let’s provide support to parents through organized (school district) developmental readiness programs, preschools, & early education services
Then.....

Less funding - needed for subsequent remediation

It may follow – fewer frustrated or isolated students, and negative behavior problems

Which cost to monitor and repair through the years
When Student are Not Ready

Students, Parents and the Schools - exposed to ongoing stresses of...

- Retention decisions
- Poor grades
- Unhappy students who fail to thrive
- Guilt-ridden and/or angry parents
  - blame the school and/or change schools
  - spread hurtful rumors to cover their decisions
AfterDigesting the Data

Suggested to my School Board - increase the entry age to 5.5 years of age by Jan. 31 over 6 years

- Not accepted - two local Catholic Schools of similar size
  - fear of competition or parish swapping developing

The Missouri Contradiction
Steps We Could/Did Take

Contact all parents of possible students......

Present parents information (data driven) regarding the formal school experience and expectations of our (your) school, in October the year before their entry!

Provide support to parents to help them prepare their children for formal schooling

Assess ALL children as to his/her readiness for our (your) formal school exp.

We have a strong reading program – ready for one school exp., not necessarily mean ready for all
Prepare - Sharply focused readiness assessment
Include challenging portion - identify advanced students

**Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral**

We assess in March (team of 2)

- Counsel parents re: strengths and areas of growth
- If readiness questioned, we reassess May (different team of 2) and again in August, and again first of August
- Either children are ready, not ready, or...
- If or..., parents sign off on the decision to Kindergarten...
- We decide to first grade...
Data and Support to Parents

In October meeting

- Data of formal school experience
- Expectations of our (your) school
- Pros and cons of entry (strongly encourage waiting when we or they note significant concerns or delays)
- Readiness questionnaires often and personal support when requested

Convenience and cost savings are not in the best interest of the child. “..quicker entry back to workforce or a savings on day care expense... can come at a greater long-term expense.”

(Fournier, 1999)

Hold a second group (or individual) meeting in early February
When a Child is Not Ready...
Waiting – Gains or Losses
(Fournier, 1999)

**Cognitive:**

Calmness vs. stress over learning

Time to explore other skills vs. practice of skills not ready to learn

Above or average grades vs. average or below average grades
Social:

Possible inaccurate labeling for learning problems

Increased time to spend as family vs. increased work and practice needed at home

Time to associate with age-appropriate peers

Through the years be expected to demonstrate social competency at a level of children older
Emotional:

Opportunity to develop confidence, relish success and experience the inner desire to achieve – critical to motivation vs. being insecure, etc.

Possibility of being leader vs. follower

Ability to connect with peers without being overwhelmed or fearing rejection
Physical:

The youngest may be the smallest throughout entire school life

Athletically - Another year of maturity protects the integrity of the joints, ligaments, and tendons
Steps We Took Led to….

A number of families with children born March-July have chosen to wait.

Greater number of students are experiencing early success in school, noted by fewer ‘needs improvement’ marks on report cards and fewer special conferences with parents.
And, Led to....

A greater degree of positive self-esteem for more students, noted by less conflict resolutions by K – 2 educators, our counselor or assistant principal (and my observation)

Very Few - 5th through 8th grade students on probation or suspension from extra curricular activities (A wonderfully drastic change)

Fewer referrals for special services, noted by counselor and administrative team

Increased achievement test scores
## Achievement Test Scores

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<th>Read</th>
<th>Lang.</th>
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## Rankings vs. 37 Diocesan Schools

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<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2009 - 2012

Ranked from one to five in total battery of achievement tests

Almost NO time spent working with students re: behavior and social problems

Transfer students not participating in our enrollment process
Suggestions for Action

Establish 5.5 years of age by opening day of school to enter Kindergarten

Assess ALL eligible children - provide clear-cut information and counseling to parents regarding...
- The formal school experience of your school
- The strengths and areas of concern of their child
Establish and maintain school district (your school) supervised pre-schools

Staffed by professionals knowledgeable of developmentally based school readiness programs

With the goal of preparing children for the kindergarten curriculum of the district (your school)
Adhere to manageable Kindergarten sizes of 15, max. 20

Develop a Morning Mentor (M&M) program where older students (4th – 8th grades) help younger (K & 1) students who are in need of basic skill practice.

Have an occupational therapist periodically observe Pre K-2 students to ensure proper pencil gripping and handwriting.
Become more knowledgeable of the research re: kindergarten readiness and share the research with administrators and school board members

Encourage school leaders to think outside the box and study the research themselves
The decision to move to first grade must be made based on the performance in kindergarten and the needs of the child.

Parents of K students must be well-informed regarding the expectations of first grade, and the pros and cons of allowing a child to move on who is not ready,...... if it is a parental decision only.

Whenever possible, the school educators and administrators should decide.....
Contextual Relevance

Each district (school) develops a program and expectations appropriate to its community.

School entry age should be based on appropriate research and the daily realities of school, not just based on a date on the calendar established for other reasons.
Summary

If:

We spend $$ on the front end of schooling by designing, implementing, and assessing education practices based on sound research...

Then:

Schools will be able to appropriate fewer $$ for student remediation and behavioral issues throughout the years
The saved $$ could be spent on learning experiences for all students

We will have greater student success in school, increased student self-esteem, and higher achievement test scores....

And, fewer children.....

just might not be left behind!
“Every Child in England is entitled to 12½ hours of free nursery school education per week from the beginning of the term after they turn three until the beginning of the term in which they start school.”
“It is clear from the results present in this report that cognitive outcomes are affected by date of birth...”

“Further, these disparities remain significant at ages 16-18, so that date of birth may be influencing decision whether to stay in education or enter the labor market.

*When You are Born Matters: The Impact of Date of Birth on Child Cognitive Outcomes In England*

ISBN: 978-903274-51-4
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