

# JournalNews

## New Miami students improve on assessment test

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HAMILTON — Students in the New Miami Local School District are showing steady improvement on Kindergarten Readiness Assessment for Literacy test scores.

In 2008, test results indicated that 50 percent of the district's kindergartners were ready for school, 50 percent were not, said Superintendent Melissa Kircher. In 2007, only 30 percent were ready.

The KRA-L is composed of six activities for assessing specific skills in three areas — oral language, phonological awareness and print awareness, according to the Ohio Department of Education Web site.

These skill areas — key predictors of success in learning to read — are answering when and why questions, repeating sentences, identifying rhyming words, producing rhyming words, recognizing capital and lowercase letters and recognizing initial sounds.

“The purpose is to catch children early on so that we can get them on grade level,” said Lisa Usselman, ODE Office of Early Learning and School Readiness.

Test scores from the KRA-L give educators a jump-start on analyzing methods that will enhance student literacy skills.

“It's what we do with our students when they get here,” Kircher said. “Once they get in here we try to give them all the experiences that make them successful through their school years, such as all-day kindergarten, which the district has offered for 15 years.”

The years from birth through preschool set the foundation for much of what children will learn in kindergarten, first and second grades and beyond.

“Our push has been to get our kids in early childhood programs like Head Start and preschool, which New Miami has offered for the last year with funding from an entitlement grant from the state.”

In May, Kircher testified before the Ohio Senate Finance and Financial Institutions Committee on the importance of preschool and all-day kindergarten.

Recent data of the first class of 4-year-olds that attended kindergarten this year shows improvement in all academic areas, especially early literacy skills, Kircher told legislatures.

The average score for kindergartners in the Hamilton City Schools — which also offers preschool programs — was 17.62 out of a possible 29. In most cases, according to the ODE Web site, “these children will successfully accomplish indicators of literacy described in the English Language Arts standards for kindergarten through regular classroom activities, with some degree of additional assessment and instruction that target the areas of difficulty.”

In 2007, the average student score was 17.30.

“Much more data — along with the KRA-L — is used to individualize instruction and/or provide instruction for small groups of students with like needs,” said Kathy Wagonfield, principal of Ridgeway Elementary School.

And while the kindergarten year is filled with learning, students who arrive with prior knowledge can hit the ground running, Wagonfield said.

“The most important thing is for the parents and families to be active with the children, read with their children and set those family goals to have their children ready for kindergarten,” said Jon Graft, director of preschool services for the Butler County Educational Service Center.