

Delaware Kindergarten Readiness Pilot Study: Data Collected at Enrollment

September 2012

Jason Hustedt

Rena Hallam

Martha Buell

Wendy Pinder

Ann Thomas

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood
Department of Human Development and Family Studies
College of Education and Human Development
University of Delaware

Funding for this project was provided by the Delaware Department of Education. The conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of this funder.

INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH

As part of the Kindergarten Readiness Pilot Study, researchers at the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC) collected and analyzed kindergarten enrollment forms from school districts and charter schools across the State of Delaware. The project was designed to identify common data elements collected from families upon kindergarten entry. An additional goal was to use the data to make recommendations that could inform the creation of a standardized kindergarten enrollment form for all schools in Delaware.

In June 2011, researchers from DIEEC contacted all school districts and charter schools by phone and requested copies of the kindergarten enrollment forms currently in use. Districts and charter schools submitted materials electronically or by postal mail. Most districts and schools provided additional forms that constitute their entire enrollment packets.

RESULTS

We contacted all 25 school districts and charter schools operating kindergarten classrooms in Delaware during the 2011-2012 school year. Of all the districts and charter schools contacted, only one school district did not provide enrollment materials, resulting in an overall response rate of 96%.

The enrollment materials that were requested and that were submitted are those charter schools and districts provide families when contacted with a request for their kindergarten enrollment forms. With only one exception, all charter schools labeled their forms with the current school year (2011-2012); school districts typically provided forms marked with the revision date on their current materials, with some forms dating back to 1994. Of all the enrollment forms gathered, only one was identified as being specific to kindergarten, with most not designating a specific grade level on the enrollment form. Rather, space is provided for parents or guardians to indicate the child's grade. Unlike the enrollment forms, which appear to be used with new enrollees across a range of grade levels, most of the supplementary forms provided in the kindergarten enrollment packets are labeled as specific to kindergarten students.

Because of the risk that some schools or districts may not have provided us with all possible forms given to parents at the time of enrollment, we included only the *primary enrollment form* from each school and district in our main analysis. This ensured comparability in the forms across school districts and charter schools. Any additional forms that schools and districts submitted were analyzed separately; those results are examined later in this report.

The primary enrollment forms currently used in Delaware gather an average of 28 elements across a broad range of topics related to both children and their families. In general, district forms request more information (an average of 31 data elements) than charter school forms (an average of 24 data elements).

All districts and charter schools require the following basic information at the time of enrollment:

- the child's name
- the child's birth date
- the child's home phone number
- a parent/guardian's name

These four data elements represent the only common data elements currently used for initial school enrollment across the state. The remaining data elements are collected in as few as one and as many as 23 different charter schools and school districts.

In the following sections of this report, we provide an analysis of the data elements currently used in kindergarten enrollment forms. We conclude with a set of recommendations for important elements that could be included in a standardized, statewide form to be used at kindergarten entry.

Information about Entering Kindergarten Children

While only four data elements are common to all enrollment forms, most forms collect a great deal of information about the child at the time of enrollment. Figure 1 shows the number of districts and charter schools that request each piece of routine information. Figures 2 and 3 provide more information on types of data that are gathered about children's health and children's school histories, respectively.

As shown in Figure 1, most school districts and charter schools collect information on children's sex/gender, ethnicity, place of birth, race, social security number, and first language, in addition to information about names and birthdates that are collected universally. Of note, two school districts ask if the student/family is currently in a temporary living arrangement, and if yes if the arrangement is due to loss of housing or economic hardship. Three districts ask about homelessness.

In addition to requesting basic demographic information about the child, Delaware's school districts and charter schools often pose additional questions about children's health status. Findings from enrollment forms are summarized in Figure 2. Most notably, a majority of districts and charter schools require emergency contact information as part of the primary enrollment form. Few charter schools and districts ask for additional information pertaining to medical history and current medications on the primary enrollment form. However, many charter schools and districts require parents or guardians to fill out separate forms for school nurses. This is one reason why relatively few of Delaware's school enrollment forms contain questions addressing children's medical history, allergies, and medications.

Figure 1. *Basic Child Demographic Information*

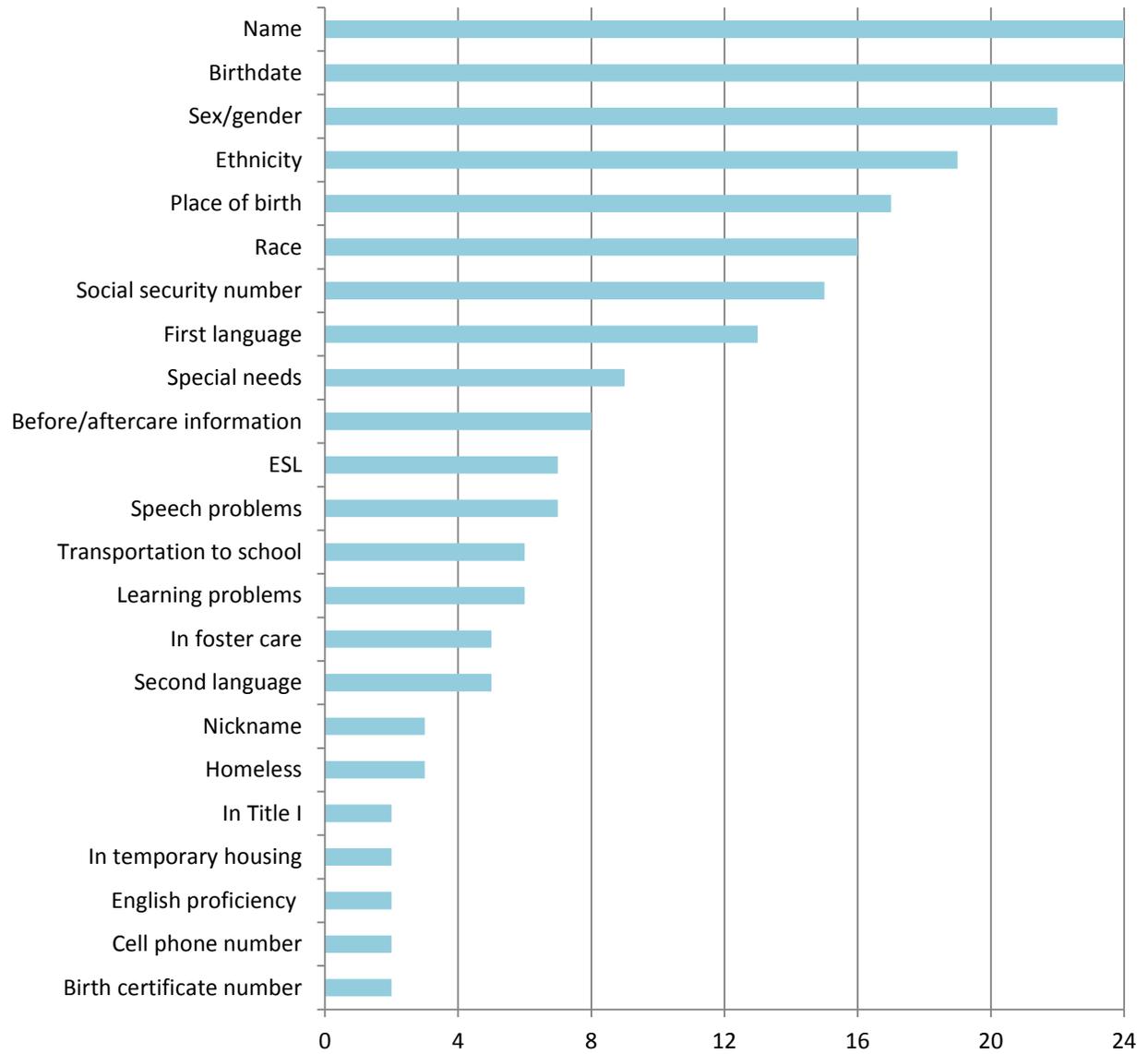
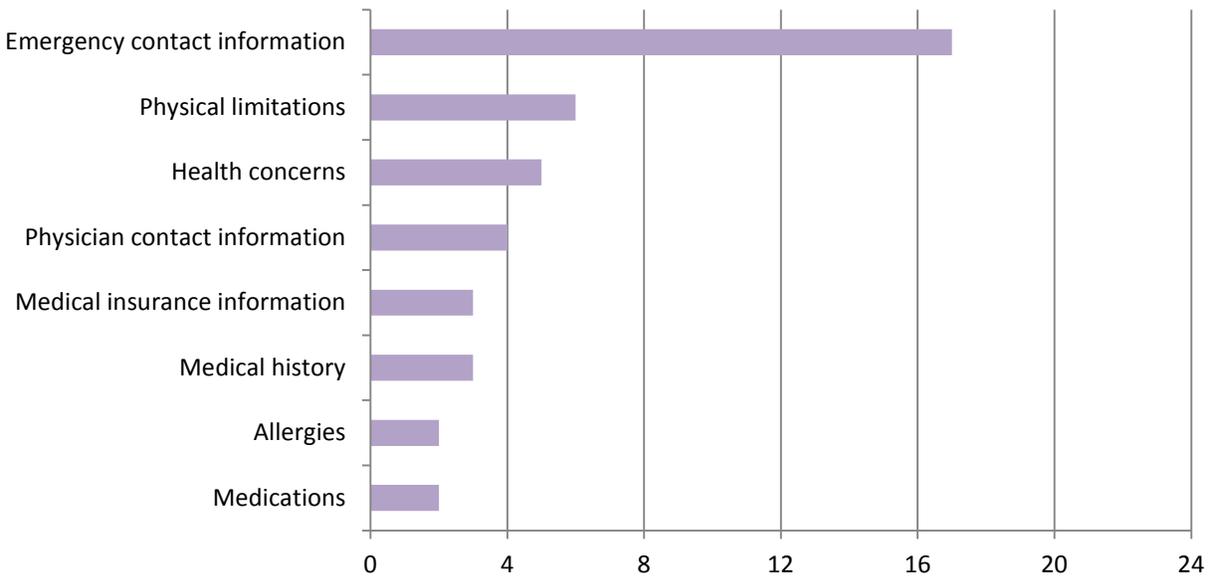
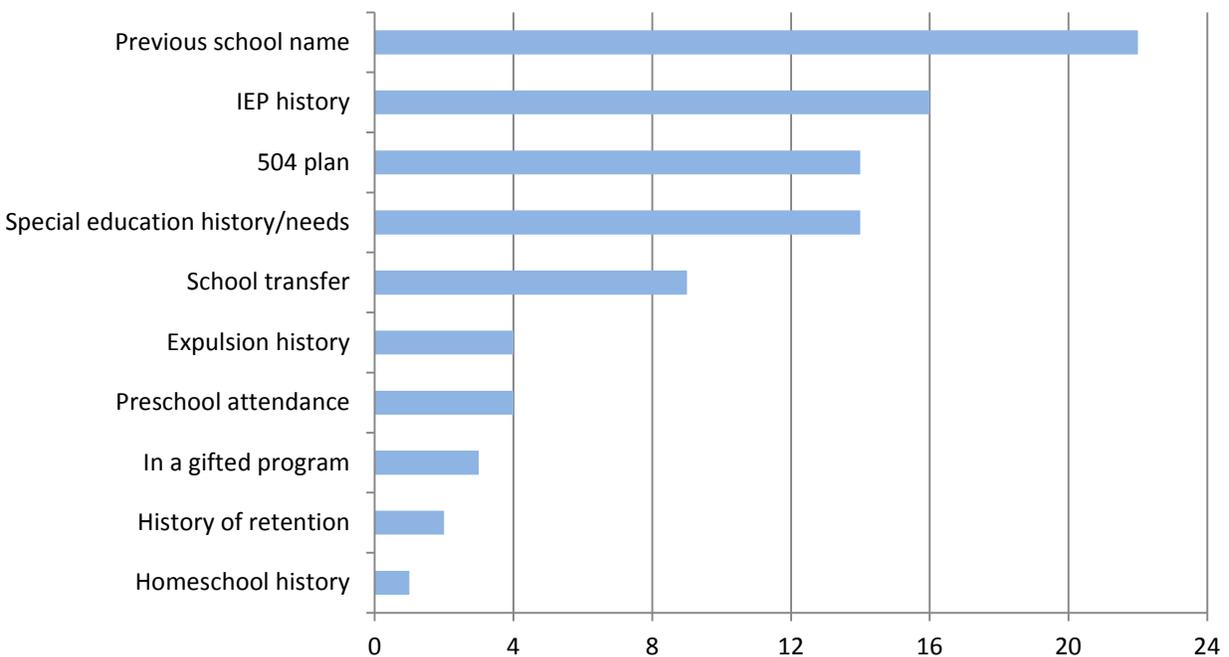


Figure 2. *Child's Health Information*



In addition to health and emergency contact information, enrollment forms often request information about the special needs of enrollees. The frequency of data elements about children's school history is summarized in Figure 3. Many of the enrollment forms request information about the child's IEP history and any special education services that have been used in the past. As children may not have previous experience in formal school settings, very few districts or charter schools ask about retention or expulsion at the time of kindergarten enrollment.

Figure 3. *Child's School History*



Information about the Families of Entering Kindergarten Children

In addition to requesting information about children enrolling in school, enrollment forms typically request data about their parents or legal guardians. Figure 4 provides more information about the types of data requested about these adults.

Most enrollment forms requested basic information about one or more parent(s) – particularly contact information such as phone numbers, home addresses, and email addresses. A majority of charter schools and districts require the person completing the enrollment form to identify their relationship to the child (e.g., parent, stepparent, foster parent, or guardian), either in conjunction with the child’s residency information or in a box next to the adult’s name. A majority also require information about custody status, and the adult with whom the child lives. However, few schools and districts request that adults provide personal identifiers, such as their social security numbers or driver’s license numbers. It is important to note that although those identification numbers are not usually required to be on file, many schools require presentation of a license or social security card at the time of enrollment.

Figure 4. *Parent/Guardian Information*

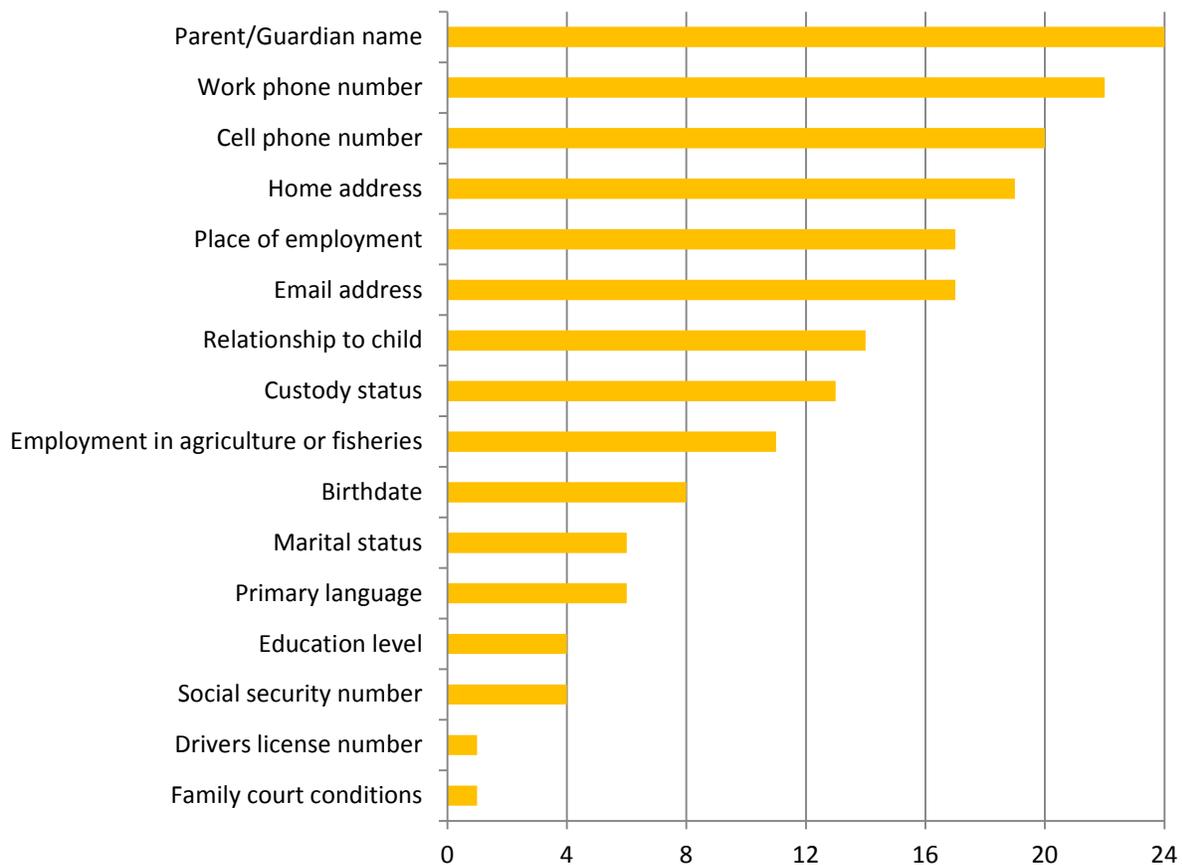
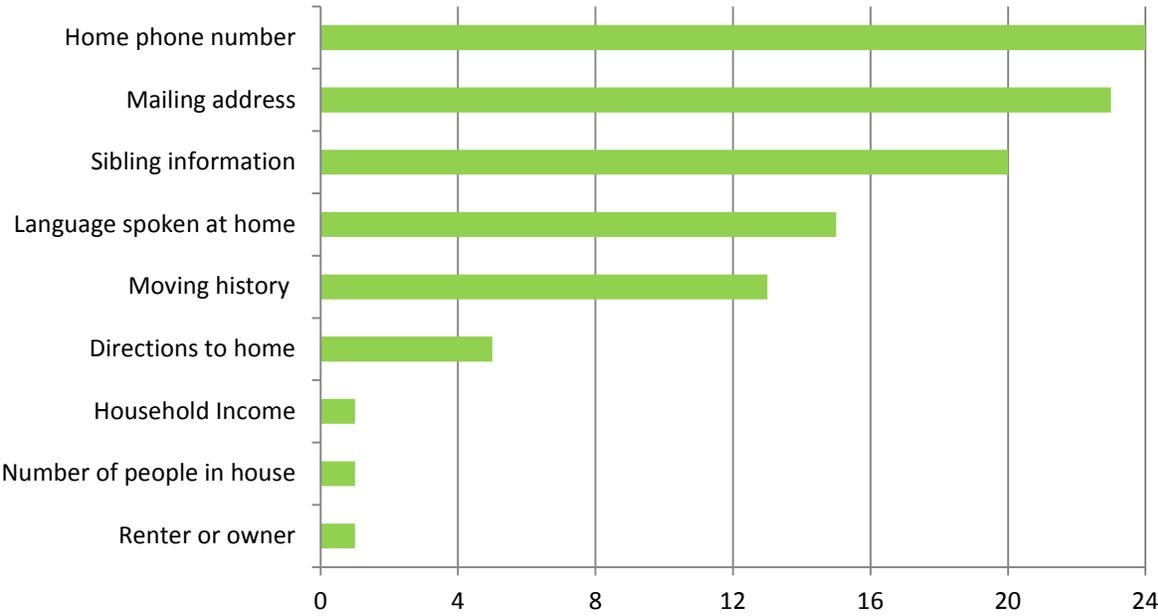


Figure 4 depicts only data elements that are included on the primary enrollment form, thus giving the initial impression that information about parents' primary language is infrequently requested. However, some schools and districts utilize supplementary language surveys to collect additional information about languages used by the family. Overall, more than half of Delaware's charter schools and districts request information about the primary language spoken by parents and/or the entire family, through a means other than the primary enrollment form.

Figure 5 shows that most charter schools and school districts also collect basic household information at the time of enrollment. Also, a number of school enrollment forms request information about the family's history of mobility, and specifically if the moves were related to pursuit of employment in agriculture, food processing, or the fisheries.

Approximately 78% of school districts collect information about siblings, primarily requesting their names and ages. An even greater percentage of charter schools (90%) request information about siblings, likely because this information is used as an enrollment preference, to determine if the siblings are currently enrolled in the charter school or are seeking entry the same year.

Figure 5. *Household Information*

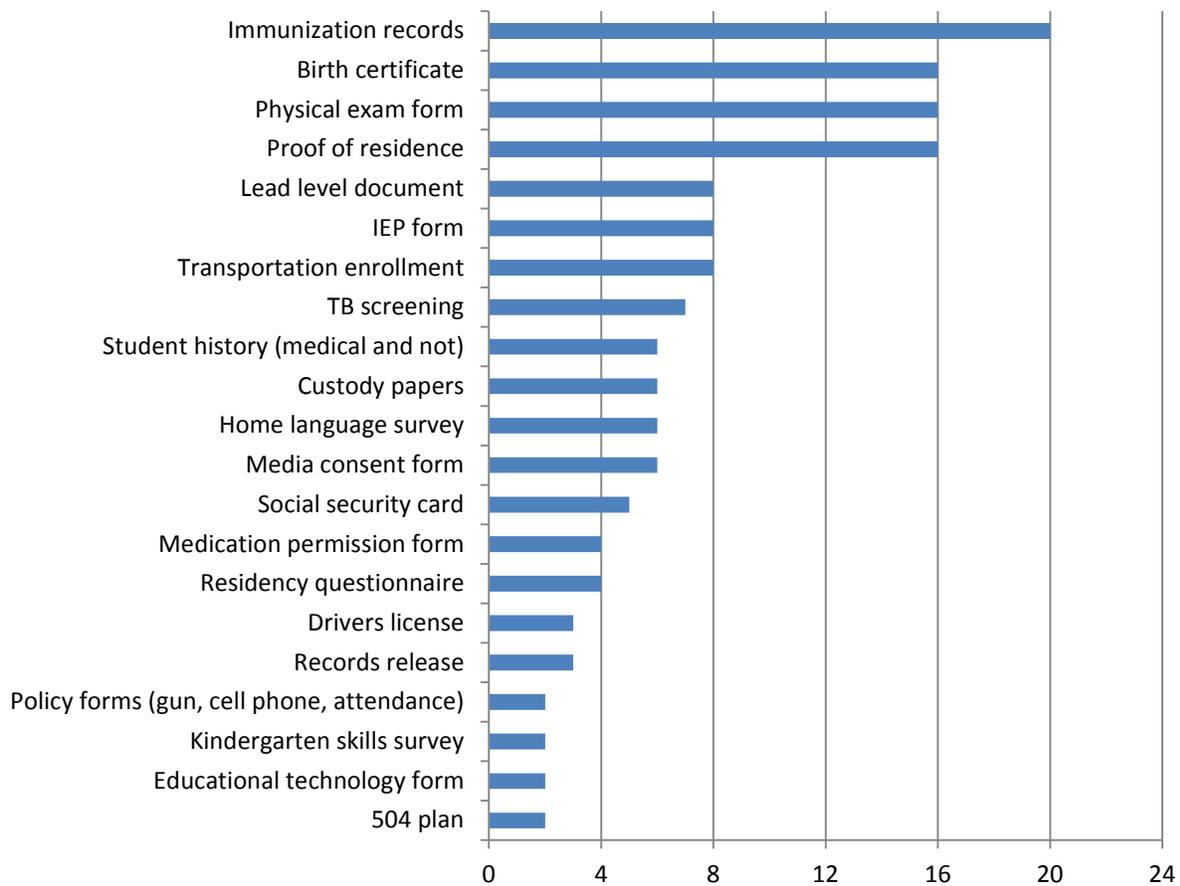


The broad range of information requested in the enrollment forms used across the state is notable. While some differences may be due to variations in demographic characteristics across Delaware or school-specific priorities, overall there are few apparent patterns. The uniqueness of the information collected through the enrollment forms may be a reflection of charter schools and districts working to reduce the burden of paperwork by limiting the primary enrollment form to a single page.

Information Gathered Through Supplementary Forms at Kindergarten Enrollment

Again, in our analysis, we distinguished between data elements requested on the primary enrollment forms used by a district or charter school, and information requested through additional, or supplementary, forms. Figure 6 depicts the additional data elements that charter schools and districts request, but that are not included on primary enrollment forms used at kindergarten entry.

Figure 6. *Additional Forms*

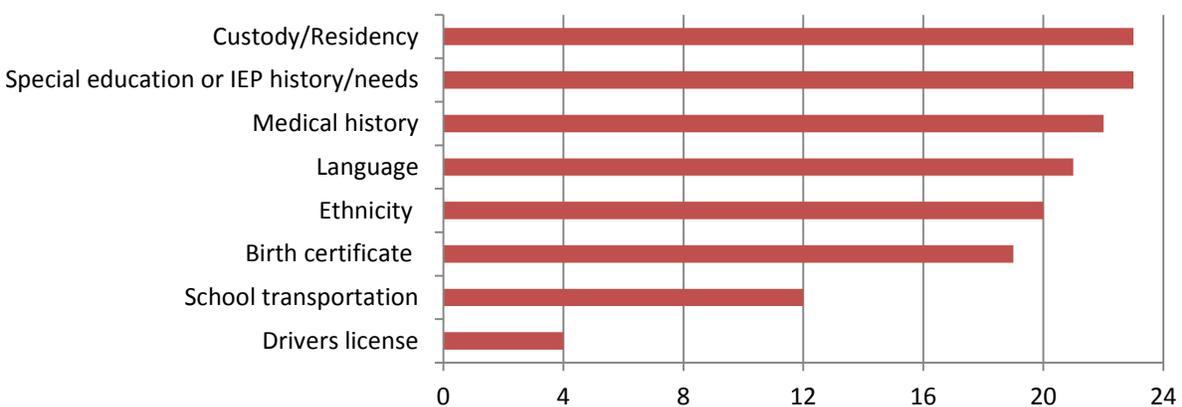


Only the elements appearing on additional forms used by two or more schools or districts are shown in Figure 6.¹ None of these additional data elements appeared on supplementary forms used by all schools and charter schools in Delaware.

In the interest of providing a thorough examination of data elements requested through any form used in the kindergarten enrollment process – both in primary enrollment forms and supplementary documents – a brief analysis of complete enrollment packets is presented in the following section. Some of Delaware’s public kindergarten programs may have an initial enrollment form and then require the completion of additional forms at a later time. This is particularly the case for charter schools, where the enrollment process may involve a lottery or other admission decisions, and therefore several separate packets of information may be collected at different times between spring enrollment and fall school entry.

Figure 7 depicts data elements that were collected by any means at enrollment, either using primary enrollment forms or additional forms. Our earlier analysis identified child name, child date of birth, home phone number, and parent name as the four common elements currently gathered at kindergarten entry across Delaware. The graphic in Figure 7 shows that nearly all schools in the state also collect information about custody status, whether the child has special education needs, medical history and immunization records, and information concerning the child’s and family’s primary language. Also, approximately 80% of school districts and charter schools request either a birth certificate number or a copy of the birth certificate for the school records. Transportation plans, including school bus applications, are commonly requested, using either the primary form or a supplementary form. These data provide a more complete picture of the types of data elements requested in some format during the kindergarten enrollment process.

Figure 7. *Information from Primary Enrollment Forms and Additional Forms Combined*



¹ Several elements that were included on these additional forms were found in the materials from only one district or charter school. Those forms/elements were: an ethnicity questionnaire, a child’s interest inventory, a potassium iodide consent form, a weather contingency form, a PTA involvement form, a form concerning AM/PM preference for half-day, a phone contact unavailability form, a family questionnaire, a preschool survey, an individual improvement plan, a home literacy survey, and a speech survey.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Data gathered at kindergarten entry can provide important contextual information for understanding children's experiences at home and prior to kindergarten that can impact school performance. Findings from this analysis illustrate extensive variation in the information currently collected in Delaware school districts and charter schools at the time of kindergarten enrollment. In an effort to gather useful information that will assist schools in providing high quality early educational experiences for new students, and to support additional research in understanding children's readiness for school, the following common data elements on child, family, and household characteristics are recommended.

Child Characteristics:

- Home language
- Race/ethnicity
- Prior experience in early childhood settings
- Foster care status
- Special learning or developmental needs
- Place of birth

Family Characteristics:

- Parent/Guardian contact information
- Parent/Guardian marital status
- Parent/Guardian race/ethnicity
- Parent/Guardian home language
- Parent/Guardian employment status
- Parent/Guardian education level
- Parent/Guardian concern about child's development or learning

Household Characteristics:

- Home or cell phone number
- Language spoken at home
- Time at current residence/mobility history
- Household income, from a range of possible income levels
- Number of adults and children in the home

It should be noted that no recommendations are offered in the area of child and family health. Although some school districts and charter schools request this information as part of enrollment packet, schools already have established health forms with specified protocols. An additional study of these forms would be needed in order to make recommendations in the area of health.

Delaware's school districts and charter schools already collect much of the recommended information as part of their current enrollment process for entering kindergartners. However, though this analysis identifies common data elements already collected (or themes addressed) at kindergarten entry, it is important to emphasize that school districts and charter schools in Delaware do not currently use standardized terminology to request the data. As a result, even to the extent that common elements already exist, there is still variation in the way these data are gathered. Any movement toward further standardization of the data elements at kindergarten enrollment would need to include additional discussion on operationalizing the data elements listed above and further examination of the distinction between primary enrollment forms and kindergarten enrollment packets, to ensure that data elements are captured in consistent ways across charter schools and school districts.