

OLDER CHILD IN THE KINDERGARTEN

Over 20 years ago, WECAN completed the last Older Child Survey. In October, 2025, a new survey was sent to our member schools asking questions about our colleagues' current work with the older child in the kindergarten and other relevant questions about our EC practices. By mid March, 2026, 82% of our member schools had replied. This research, compiled by WECAN Board and staff members, holds important insights for all of us.



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Please note that the percentages in this document are approximate.

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26. Do you experience pressure to introduce academics into your kindergartens? If so, from whom does this pressure come?
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29. What questions are you carrying about first-grade readiness and/or the transition from kindergarten to grade 1?

What ages are the students in your kindergartens at the beginning of September?

Age 4

~118 responses → ~94%

Age 5

~115 responses → ~91%

Age 6

~105 responses → ~83%

Age 3

~45 responses → ~36%

Age 2 / 2.5

~6 responses → ~5%

Key Takeaways

- Age 4 and 5 are the most common
- Age 6 appears in most mixed-age programs
- Age 3 is included in about 36% of programs.
- Age 2 children are rare

What is the cut-off date for eligibility for first grade?

Approximate Number of Schools



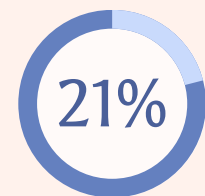
Key Pattern:

The most common policy by far is:

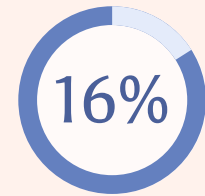
- 6 years old by June 1 of the kindergarten year. 73% of the responses indicated a cut-off date between April 30 and June 1.
- Another 11% stated a cut-off date from August until September 1.

Many schools also indicated that while a date exists, developmental readiness and case-by-case flexibility are often considered, especially for children with spring or summer birthdays.

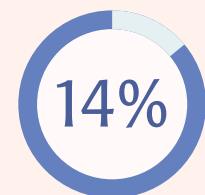
By whom was the decision made to use the listed cut-off date?



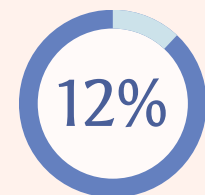
Full faculty with Early Childhood Input 21-25%



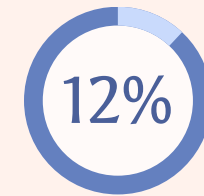
Institutional Habit
(decision made in the past and still practiced by the school)



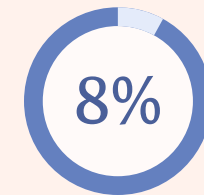
First Grade Committee / Care Group
(composed of kgn teachers, remedial and support teachers, grade school teachers)



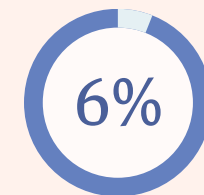
Early Childhood Faculty or Kindergarten Teachers



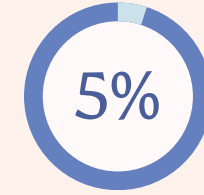
College of Teachers with Early Childhood Input



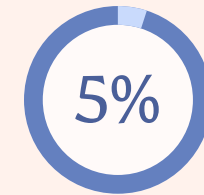
Head of School with Admin. Team with Early Childhood Input



Admin and Faculty with Early Childhood Input



School Director or Head of School with Early Childhood Input



State/Province Determined
(alignment with local government policy)

Key Understandings:

Survey results indicate that the input of the early childhood teachers working with the children was central to the decision in the vast majority of schools.

How was the decision made to use the listed cut-off date?

1 Faculty-Led Decisions (Most Common)

The majority of schools reported that the early childhood faculty made the decision, often collectively. In some cases- this involved early childhood teachers, sometimes together with grades teachers. Decisions were often based on observations of child development and readiness for first grade.

Typical process:

- Input from kindergarten teachers
- Early childhood faculty discussions or study
- Consensus or full-faculty vote

Key participants:

- Kindergarten teachers
- Early Childhood faculty
- Grades teachers
- Full faculty groups

2 Pedagogical Leadership / College of Teachers

Many schools indicated that the decision was made or approved by the College of Teachers or another pedagogical leadership body.

Examples of decision groups:

- Care Committees
- Pedagogical leadership committees
- Pedagogical Council
- College of Teachers

These groups often reviewed proposals from early childhood faculty and formally adopted the cut-off policy.

3 Collaborative Administrative Decisions

Several schools described a collaborative process between faculty and administration, often including:

- Kindergarten teachers
- Student support or remedial teachers
- Pedagogical administrators
- Directors or leadership teams
- Admissions or enrollment staff
- Head of School

Some schools formed special committees, such as:

- First Grade Readiness Committees
- Rising First Grade Committees
- Educational Support or Care Groups

These groups reviewed individual child development records and data, including the grade one readiness documents, teacher experiences, and the overall needs of the child and the class before the decision was made.

4 Alignment with External Guidelines

Some schools reported that the cut-off date was influenced by external guidelines or systems, including:

- Other independent or Waldorf schools
- Poor adaptation of younger children in grade one in previous years
- State or provincial regulations
- Local public school cut-off dates

A few schools changed their cut-off date to align with public school systems or regional expectations.

A few schools changed their cut-off date back to an earlier date due to the poor adaptation of the younger children going into grade one.

5 Development-Based Decision Making

Some schools emphasized that the cut-off date was chosen to support child readiness and developmental considerations, including:

- Physical maturity
- Organic changes pertaining to the second birth
- Emotional readiness
- Social development
- Ability to handle academic expectations

Several responses also noted case-by-case flexibility for individual children.

Key Process Insights:

1. Recommendations proposed by early childhood teachers
2. Recommendations reviewed or approved by faculty leadership
3. Sometimes cut-off date decisions are made with input from administration or enrollment staff.

Many policies and practices were established historically and reaffirmed over time, with a small number of schools adjusting dates to align with public school systems or enrollment challenges.

How strictly do schools adhere to their age requirement?

● Responses

Somewhat strictly - occasional exceptions

Very strictly - no exceptions

Not strictly - some exceptions

Not strictly - many exceptions

Other



1 Parent–Faculty Agreement (Most Common)

The most common approach is that both parents/guardians and early childhood faculty must agree before a child is enrolled in first grade early.

Typical process:

- Early childhood teachers evaluate readiness
- Parents discuss the recommendation with teachers
- A shared decision is made in the child's best interest

Often additional participants are included:

- First grade teacher
- Student support team
- School leadership

Key theme: collaborative decision-making

When exceptions to the age requirement are made, how are those exceptions made?

2 Parent Decision After Faculty Recommendation

The second most common approach is that parents make the final decision after receiving a recommendation from early childhood faculty. In these schools:

- Teachers assess readiness and provide guidance
- Parents decide whether the child advances or remains in kindergarten

Some respondents noted that parents sometimes choose first grade even when teachers recommend another year of kindergarten.

3 Committee or Team-Based Decisions

A smaller group described a formal decision structure, such as:

- Early childhood + grades faculty consultation
- Rising first grade committee
- Care group or student support team

These committees review:

- developmental readiness
- teacher observations
- physical, emotional and social readiness

4 Schools That Do Not Make Exceptions

Several schools reported that they do not make exceptions at all and strictly follow the age requirement.

Some noted that they used to allow exceptions but stopped after observing difficulties for younger students in the grade one classes.

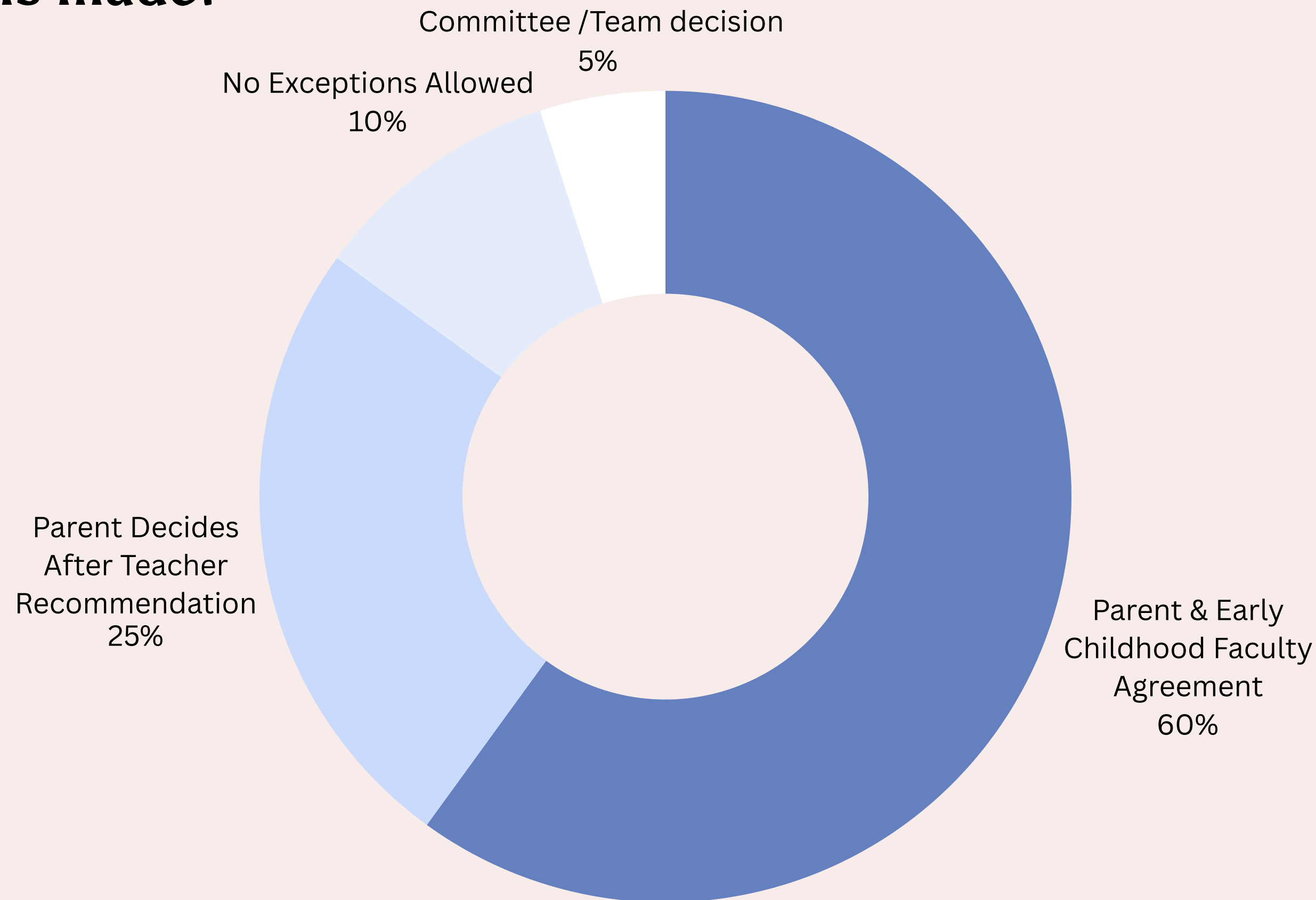
5 Special Circumstances

A few schools noted exceptions only under specific conditions, such as:

- children with summer birthdays
- children transferring from another school system
- strong evidence of developmental readiness

Many schools mentioned the opposite situation: children remaining in kindergarten for an additional year rather than entering first grade early.

When exceptions to the age requirement are made, how are those exceptions made?



Key Findings:

The majority of schools (about two-thirds) follow the cut-off somewhat strictly but allow occasional exceptions.

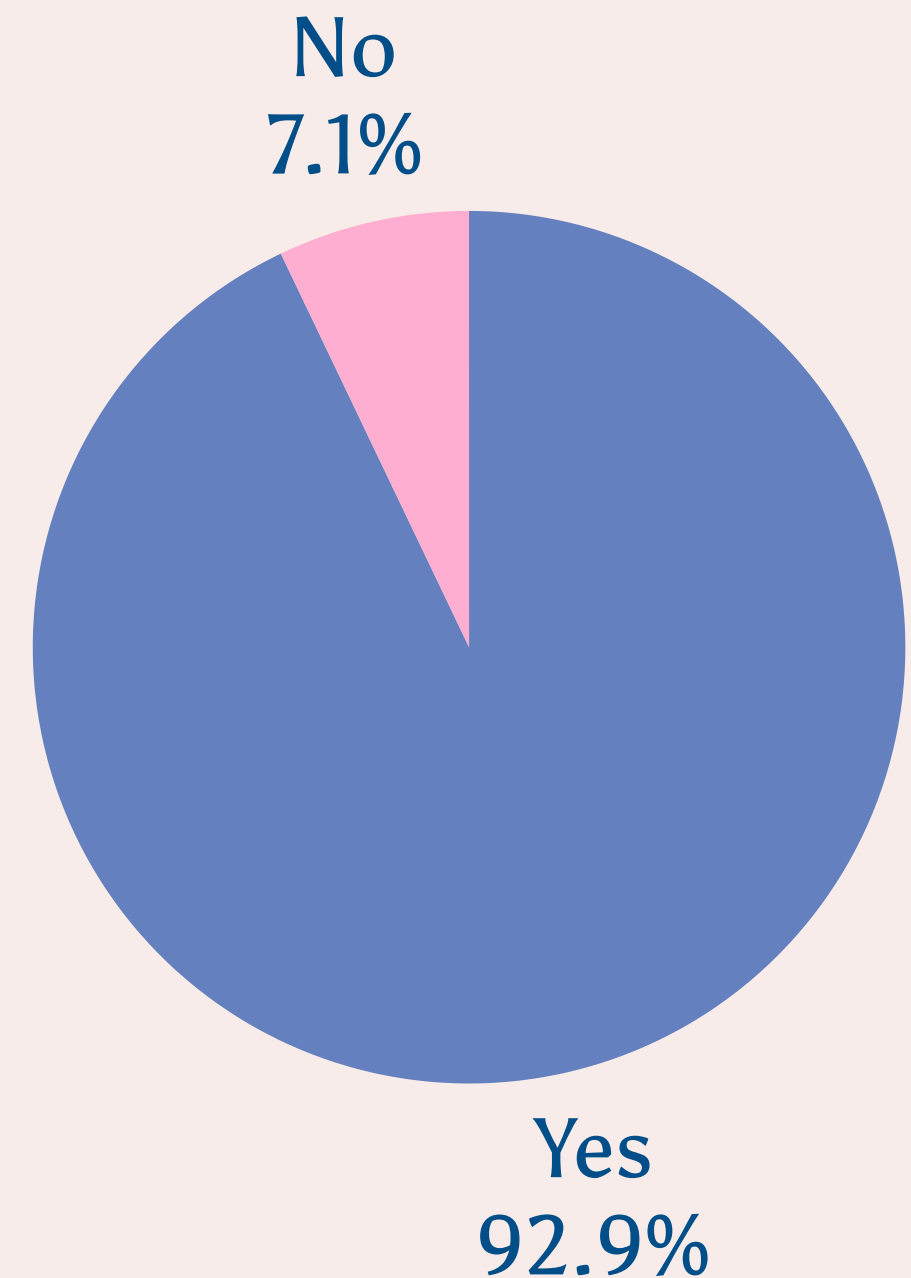
A significant minority enforce the policy very strictly with no exceptions.

Overall, the results suggest that while cut-off dates are important policy guidelines, some schools still allow professional judgment and developmental considerations to influence the decision when determining readiness for first grade.

Does your school have a formal process for assessing first-grade readiness?

Key Takeaway:

A strong majority of respondents report that their school does have a formal process for assessing first-grade readiness, with only a small minority indicating that such a process is not in place.



Schools' processes for assessing readiness for first grade.

90–95%

Observation by the child's kindergarten teacher

This is by far the most common practice and appears to be the foundation of nearly all readiness assessments.

65–75%

Observation by a developmental specialist

A majority of schools include specialist input, especially for students needing closer evaluation.

55–65%

Observation by another kindergarten teacher

A collaborative approach with early childhood teams is also common.

50–60%

Observation by a grade school teacher

About half of schools involve grade school teachers.

Other practices

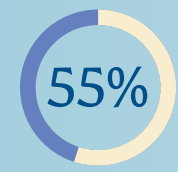
Family communication, external evaluations, readiness tests, committees, admin teams, and broader support teams appear less consistently.

Overall Takeaway:

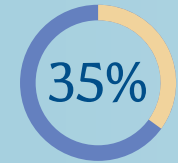
Many schools rely on a multi-observer, team-based approach, with the child's kindergarten teacher at the center, often supported by specialists and sometimes expanded to include additional teachers, administration and family input.



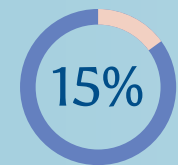
How do these assessments take place?



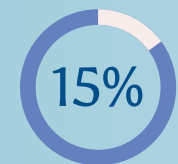
Remedial / Extra Lesson / Learning Support Teachers: 45–55%



Educational / Student Support Specialists (general support roles): 25–35%



Movement / Therapeutic Specialists (e.g., movement therapy, OT, sensory integration): 10–15%



Leadership or Faculty Roles (e.g., EC director, pedagogical chair, committees): 10–15%



Outside Professionals (e.g., doctors, therapists, external evaluators): 5–10%

Overall Takeaway:

When developmental specialists are involved, they are most often remedial or support educators with specialized training, sometimes complemented by therapeutic or movement-based expertise, and occasionally supported by teams or external professionals. 20% of the schools reported that there were no developmental specialists involved.

How are first-grade readiness assessments shared and used by the receiving first-grade teacher?

Meetings / Conversations 85-95%

The majority of schools use in-person meetings, class studies, or discussions between kindergarten and first-grade teachers. These often include:

- End-of-year or spring transition meetings
- One-on-one teacher conversations
- Full faculty presentations of the rising class. Sometimes the upcoming first grade teacher is not able to be present for this yet.

Written Reports / Documentation Provided

80-85%

Most responses indicate that formal written reports, checklists, or assessment summaries are passed along and are often:

- Included in student files
- Shared via Google Drive or internal systems
- Accompanied by narrative observations and recommendations.

Combination of Written + Verbal Sharing

70-75%

A large portion explicitly described a dual approach with written reports plus meetings to add context, answer questions, and discuss individual students.

First-Grade Teacher Involvement in the Process **50-60%**

About half noted that the receiving teacher:

- Attends meetings or participates in committees
- Observes kindergarten students
- Engages in transition discussions and festivals before the school year

Meetings / Documentation Used to Plan Child Support / Instruction **45-55%**

Many respondents said assessments help:

- Identify student needs
- Plan supports or interventions
- Inform classroom strategies

Limited or Inconsistent Use **20-30%**

A notable minority reported that grade one teachers: have access but use is optional or varies

- some rarely refer to them
- use depends on teacher interest or time

Minimal Clarity or Uncertainty about Use **10-15%**

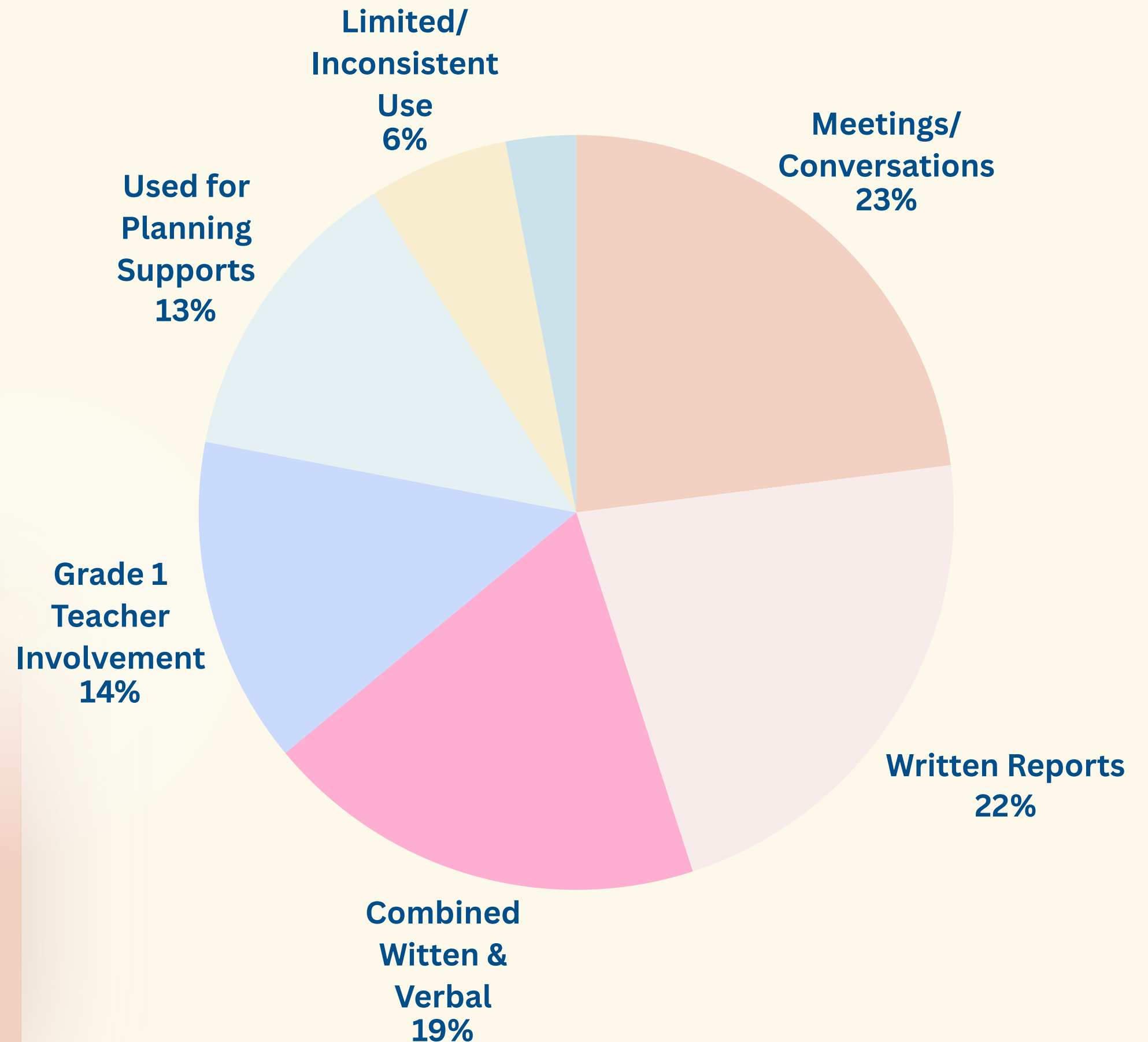
A smaller group indicated:

- They are unsure how assessments are used
- Information is shared but follow-through is unclear

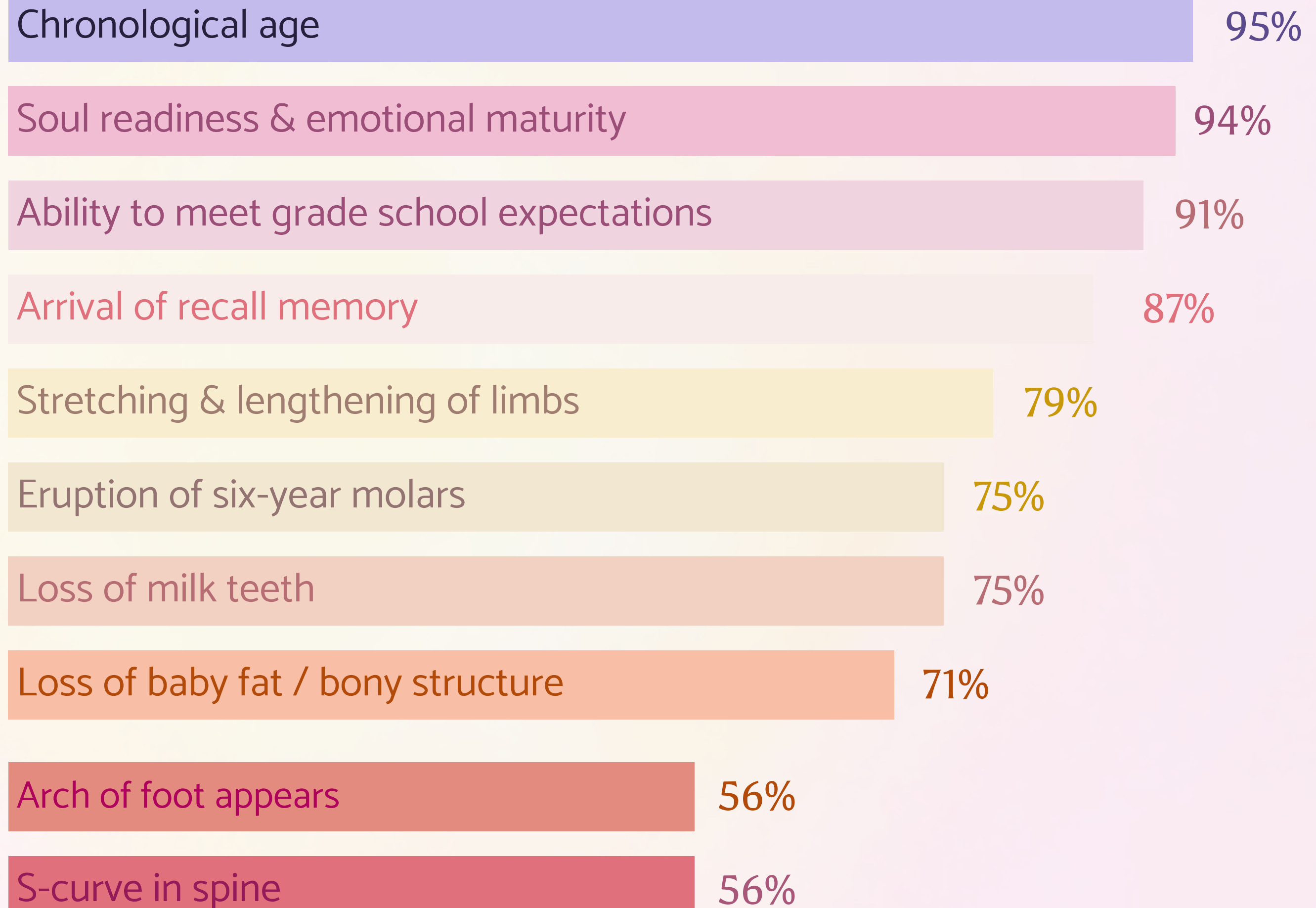
How Assessments are Shared and Used

Key Takeaway:

Most schools rely on a relationship-based sharing—combining meetings, discussions, and written reports—but the consistency of how first-grade teachers actually use the assessments varies widely.



First Grade Readiness Markers



Markers Used to Determine First-Grade Readiness

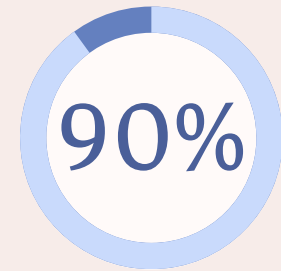
- **Chronological Age (95%)**)Nearly all schools use age as a baseline indicator, though many note it is not used in isolation.
- **Soul Readiness & Emotional Maturity (94%)** One of the most emphasized markers. Schools consistently highlight social-emotional readiness, self regulation, and maturity as central to decision-making.
- **Ability to Meet Grade School Expectations (91%)** Widely used alongside emotional readiness, including the child's ability to:
 - Sit still and listen
 - Problem solve social interactions
 - Follow directions
 - Participate in group learning
 - Sustain attention and engagement
- **Arrival of Recall Memory (87%)** A commonly cited cognitive marker, reflecting memory development
- **Stretching/Lengthening of Limbs (79%)** Frequently used as a physical developmental indicator of readiness.
- **Eruption of Six-year Molars (75%)** A widely referenced physiological milestone, though many note it is not a determining factor on its own.
- **Loss of Milk Teeth (75%)** Another common physical marker, often considered alongside molars and other growth signs.
- **Loss of Baby Fat / Visible Bony Structure (71%)** Moderately used as an indicator of physical maturation.
- **S-curve in Spine (56%)** Included by many schools as part of postural and developmental readiness.
- **Arch of Foot Appears (56%)** Used by about half of respondents as a gross motor/structural development marker related to achieving levity (skipping)



Key Takeaways:

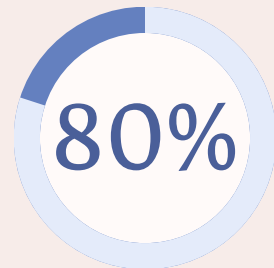
- **Holistic approach dominates:** The vast majority of schools emphasize that no single marker determines readiness—decisions are based on a combination of physical, consciousness, and emotional changes.
- **Emphasis on readiness over milestones:** While physical markers are widely tracked, emotional maturity and classroom readiness are often prioritized in final decisions.
- **Flexibility in application:** Many respondents say that even if some markers are not present, children may still advance if the overall developmental picture supports readiness.

How do you develop a shared understanding with all families about how a Waldorf EC curriculum builds a foundation for school readiness?



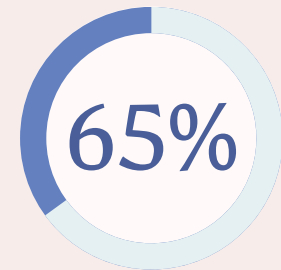
Parent Meetings / Education Evenings (including readiness-specific events)

→ The most common approach. Nearly all schools host regular parent evenings, often including a dedicated first-grade readiness or “bridge” meeting.



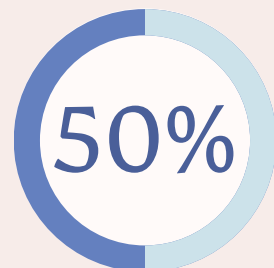
Parent-Teacher Conferences (individual conversations)

→ Widely used to personalize understanding, discuss individual children, and reinforce readiness concepts.



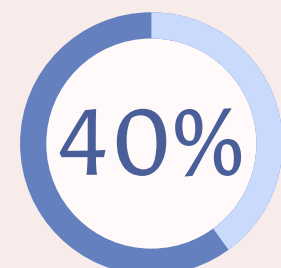
Written Communication (newsletters, articles, handbooks, emails)

→ Many schools supplement in-person work with ongoing written materials to explain curriculum and development.



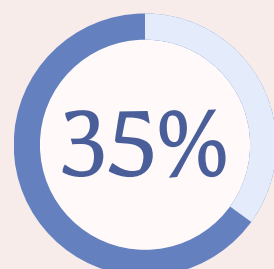
Enrollment Process (tours, interviews, open houses)

→ A significant portion begin setting expectations early, during admissions and initial family engagement.



Ongoing Relationship-Building / Informal Communication

→ Includes continuous dialogue, trust-building, and day-to-day conversations with families.



Special Events with Grades Teachers / Cross-Grade Collaboration

→ Many schools involve first-grade or grades teachers in readiness meetings to help families understand the transition.

Overall Takeaway:

Schools primarily build shared understanding through consistent, layered parent education—combining group meetings, individual conferences, and ongoing communication—often starting at enrollment and continuing through the kindergarten years, with a strong emphasis on dedicated first-grade readiness events.

How do you develop a shared understanding between the early childhood educators, grade school faculty, and administration about how a Waldorf early childhood curriculum builds a foundation for school readiness?

Full Faculty / All-staff Meetings: 85%

- The primary method. Most schools rely on regular faculty meetings to share pedagogy, child development insights, and early childhood perspectives.

Committees / Working Groups (e.g., first grade readiness, care group): 55%

- Many schools use cross-disciplinary committees that include early childhood, grades, and administration to deepen shared understanding and decision-making.

Professional Development & Faculty Study (e.g., child study, book study, training): 50%

- Ongoing study of child development and Waldorf pedagogy is a key tool for alignment across roles.

Cross-Division Collaboration (e.g., early childhood–grades meetings, transition discussions): 40%

- Includes joint meetings, transition conversations, and sharing about rising first graders.

Presentations / Sharing about Students (e.g., rising first grade presentations): 35%

- Many schools formally present students or early childhood work to the broader faculty to build understanding.

Informal Conversations / Ongoing Dialogue: 35%

- Day-to-day communication and relationship-building also play an important role.

Challenges / Lack of Consistency Noted: 30%

- A notable portion of responses indicate this is still a work in progress, with gaps in communication or alignment.

Overall Takeaway:

Schools most often build shared understanding through faculty-wide meetings and collaborative structures, supported by professional study and cross-grade dialogue. However, many acknowledge that achieving consistent alignment between early childhood, grades, and administration remains an ongoing challenge requiring efforts and intentionally structured time.



Is there an event held for children and families that marks the transition from kindergarten to first grade?

The majority of schools hold transitional events. About 92–94% of respondents reported having a formal event for children and families marking the transition from kindergarten to first grade. Most respondents mentioned a separate ceremony for the end of the kindergarten year and the beginning of the grade one year.

A few schools do not have formal events: Only about 6–8% reported no formal ceremony, sometimes holding an informal gathering, circle, or parent meeting instead.

Common types of ceremonies:

Rose Ceremony – the most frequently mentioned, usually on the first day of first grade. Children are welcomed to the new grade one classroom, often walking a decorated path, sometimes receiving a rose or other symbolic gift. Many schools involve parents and older students in the ceremony.

Bridge / Rainbow Bridge / Fly Away / Dove Ceremonies – often held at the end of kindergarten year, sometimes with storytelling, puppet plays, symbolic crossings, or performances. Children may meet their first-grade teacher during these events.

Kindergarten Graduation / Last Day Festivals – a smaller, celebratory event with parents, snacks, and gifts to mark the end of the kindergarten year.

Other Variations: Puppet shows, sailing boats, baby-naming (little ones) or sewing projects, and symbolic gifts (candles, crystals, swords, flowers) were mentioned as part of the transition. Some schools have the children visit grade one for a short story or to greet the new grade one teacher or to have lunch with the grade ones.

Combined Approach: Most schools combine an end-of-kindergarten event (bridge, fly-away, graduation) and a first-day-of-grade-one Rose Ceremony to celebrate both leaving kindergarten and entering first grade. Parents are often invited.

YOUNGER VS. OLDER STUDENTS

First-Grade Teacher Observations:

Maturity, Stamina, and Focus 55%

Older students tend to show more self-regulation, confidence, and can sustain attention longer; younger students tire easily.

Academic Readiness 35%

Older students tend to handle academic work smoothly; younger students need extra support and time for skills like writing and sitting at a desk.

Social-Emotional Readiness 30%

Younger students tend to struggle with peer interactions, emotional regulation, and transitions; older students often model inappropriate behavior.

Impact of Birthdate Cutoffs 20%

Strict cutoffs reduce extremes in age differences; an extra kindergarten year may have positive long-term effects.

Individual Differences / Neurodiversity 20%

Temperament, prior experience, and learning differences can compound age-related differences.

Long-Term Differences (3rd Grade and Beyond) 15%

Developmental gaps may become more pronounced in later grades with complex academic and social demands.

What are you hearing from first-grade teachers about the differences they experience between very young first graders and older first graders?

1 Maturity, Stamina, and Focus

- Older first graders generally demonstrate **greater emotional and social maturity**, classroom stamina, and confidence. They adjust more easily to the structure of first grade and sustain attention throughout the day.
- Younger first graders often tire more quickly, have **shorter attention spans**, and may struggle with emotional regulation and self-control. They may require additional support in transitions, peer interactions, and completing tasks.
- Approximately 50–60% of responses highlighted these **differences in stamina, focus, confidence and emotional readiness**.
- The **extra challenge for boys** on the threshold of the cut-off date was mentioned several times.

2 Academic Readiness

- Older students tend to **handle academic demands more readily**, often seeking additional challenges once they finish tasks.
- Younger students may **need more time to develop** skills like writing symbols, sitting at a desk, or completing lessons or tasks.
- About 30–40% of responses mentioned **academic differences related to age**, some noted these **differences could level out with individualized support** and several mentioned the widening in the gap between the youngest and oldest children as the years go on. The **burden for the teacher** of carrying a wide age spread was also mentioned.
- Core strength and integration into their body, ability to **sustain the will** to do academic work within the time allotted and the ability to sit and listen were mentioned as difficulties for the younger children.

3 Social-Emotional Differences

- Teachers observed that younger students may feel “**behind**” **socially and emotionally** compared to older classmates, especially early in the school year.
- Older first graders often **act as role models**, while younger ones benefit from structured peer support.
- Around 25–35% of responses highlighted **social-emotional readiness as a key area of difference**.
- Teachers observed that the younger children can **struggle with the transitions** and the number of teachers in grade one.

6 Long-Term Perspective

- Differences tend to become more **noticeable by 3rd grade**, where younger students may struggle with more complex academic and social expectations.

4 Impact of Birthdate Cutoffs

- There is definite impact of choice of Birthdate Cutoffs
- Schools with strict cutoff dates (e.g., June 1) reported **fewer extreme differences** between youngest and oldest first graders.
- A few respondents noted that children who are kept an extra year in kindergarten may **disengage later**, suggesting the timing of first-grade entry matters.

5 Individual Variation

- Many teachers emphasized that differences are not solely age-related; **temperament, prior experiences, and neurodiversity** can have equal or greater impact and can compound the difficulty of transition for the younger child.
- Approximately 20% of responses stated that **developmental readiness and individual traits** are often more influential than chronological age.

Summary Statement

Overall, teachers report that **even a few months of age difference** can affect first graders' stamina, vitality, focus, social-emotional wellbeing, resilience and confidence. Older first graders generally transition more smoothly, while younger ones generally struggle and need extra support, movement, and individualized guidance. However, individual developmental differences often matter as well as chronological age. It was mentioned that, after realizing that the younger children were not ready, the school changed the date back for the sake of the younger children.

✱ **One typical response:** "First-grade teachers often share that they notice clear developmental differences between very young first graders and those who are slightly older. Older first graders tend to arrive with more maturity in self-regulation, social confidence, and classroom stamina, allowing them to adjust more smoothly to the structure and expectations of Grade One. Younger first graders, while enthusiastic and capable, often need more support with emotional regulation, peer interactions, and sustaining attention. Teachers frequently observe that these younger children become tired more easily, especially with the longer school day and the increased demands of formal learning. They may require additional movement, rest, and reassurance as they build the physical, social, and cognitive endurance needed for Grade One. Overall, teachers consistently note that even a few extra months of development can make a meaningful difference in a child's readiness, confidence, and overall well-being."

Kindergarten Circle Time Frequency

81 responses 67%

Daily / 5 times per week

Includes responses like “daily,” “5 days a week,” “daily with variations,” “students have circle or movement/Eurythmy 5x/week.”

24 responses 20%

Four times per week

Includes “4x/week,” “four times each week,” or variations combined with other activities.

10 responses 8%

Three times per week

Includes “3x/week,” “three times each week,” or combinations.

2 responses 2%

Twice per month/ Variable

Includes responses like “2 weeks a month” or highly variable classes.

5 responses 4%

Varies / depends on class

Responses noting differences between multiple classes or rhythms.



Key Takeaways:

- Most kindergartens (67%) have circle time every day.
- A significant portion (20%) have it four times per week..
- Fewer classes have it three times per week or less, and some vary by class or schedule.
- Circle time frequency is generally high, reflecting its importance in the kindergarten routine.

Components included in circle time.

Songs	100%
Spoken verses	100%
Gross motor movement	98%
Small motor movement	97%
Games	93-95%
Obstacle courses	70-75%

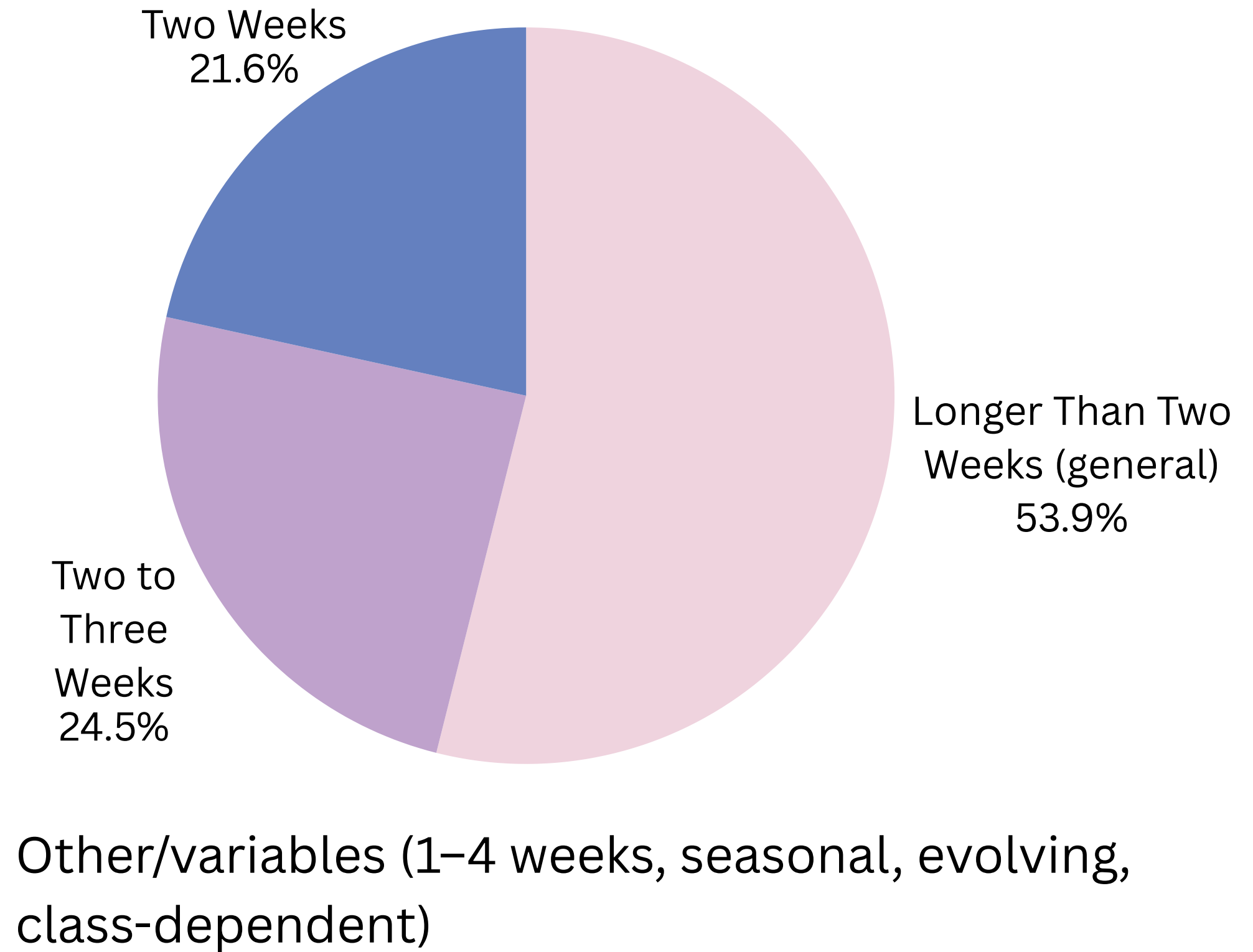
Brief Summary:

Circle time is highly consistent across respondents, with songs and spoken verses appearing universally. Nearly all programs also include gross and small motor movement, showing a strong emphasis on physical development. Games are very common, included by the large majority, while obstacle courses are somewhat less consistent, used by about three-quarters of respondents—often noted as occasional.

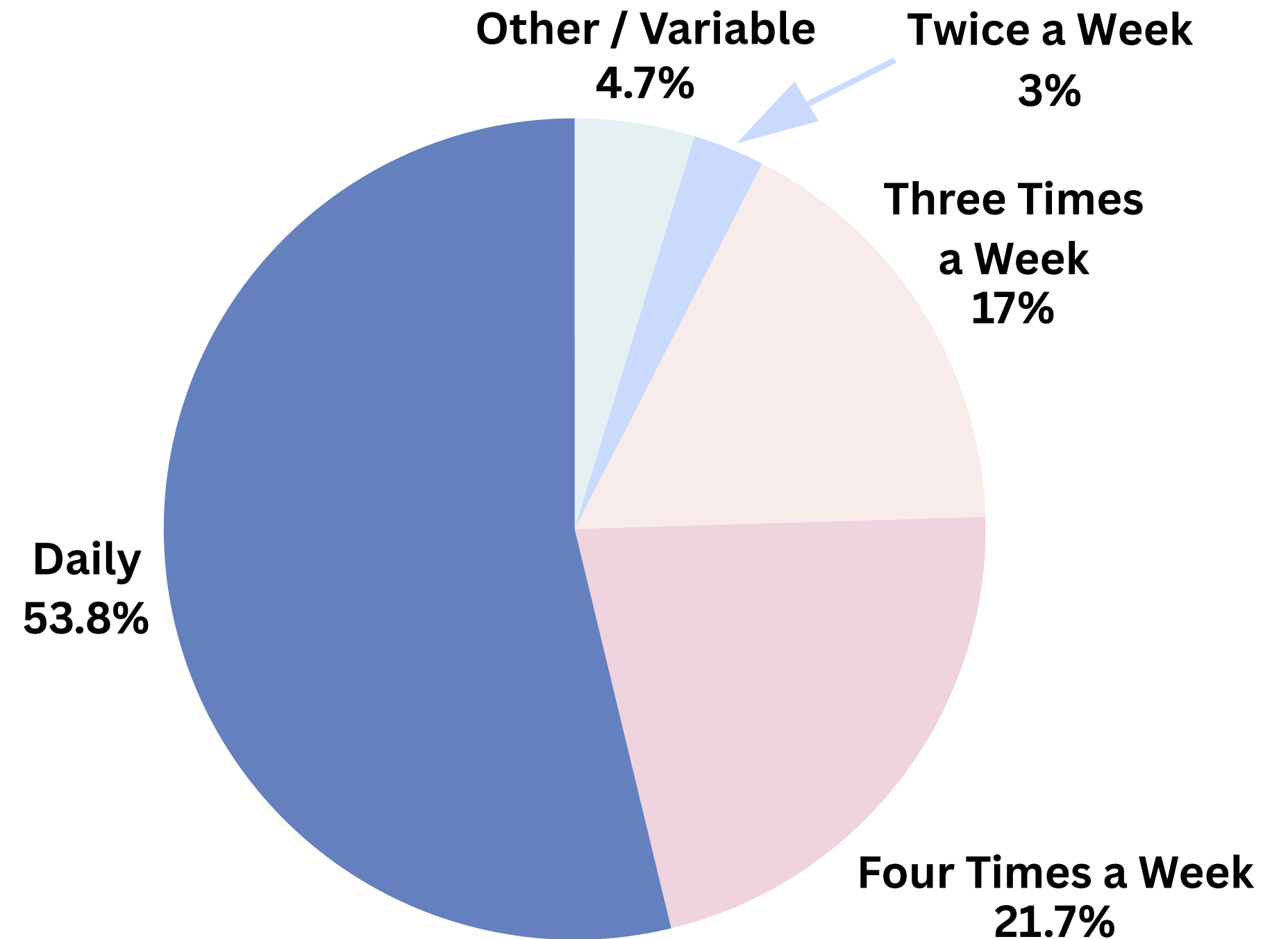
Overall Insight:

Circle time is overwhelmingly movement-rich and rhythm-based, blending music, speech, and physical activity, with obstacle courses serving as a flexible or supplementary component rather than a core daily element. The growing use of games is mentioned by the respondents.

How long
is a typical
circle
shared?

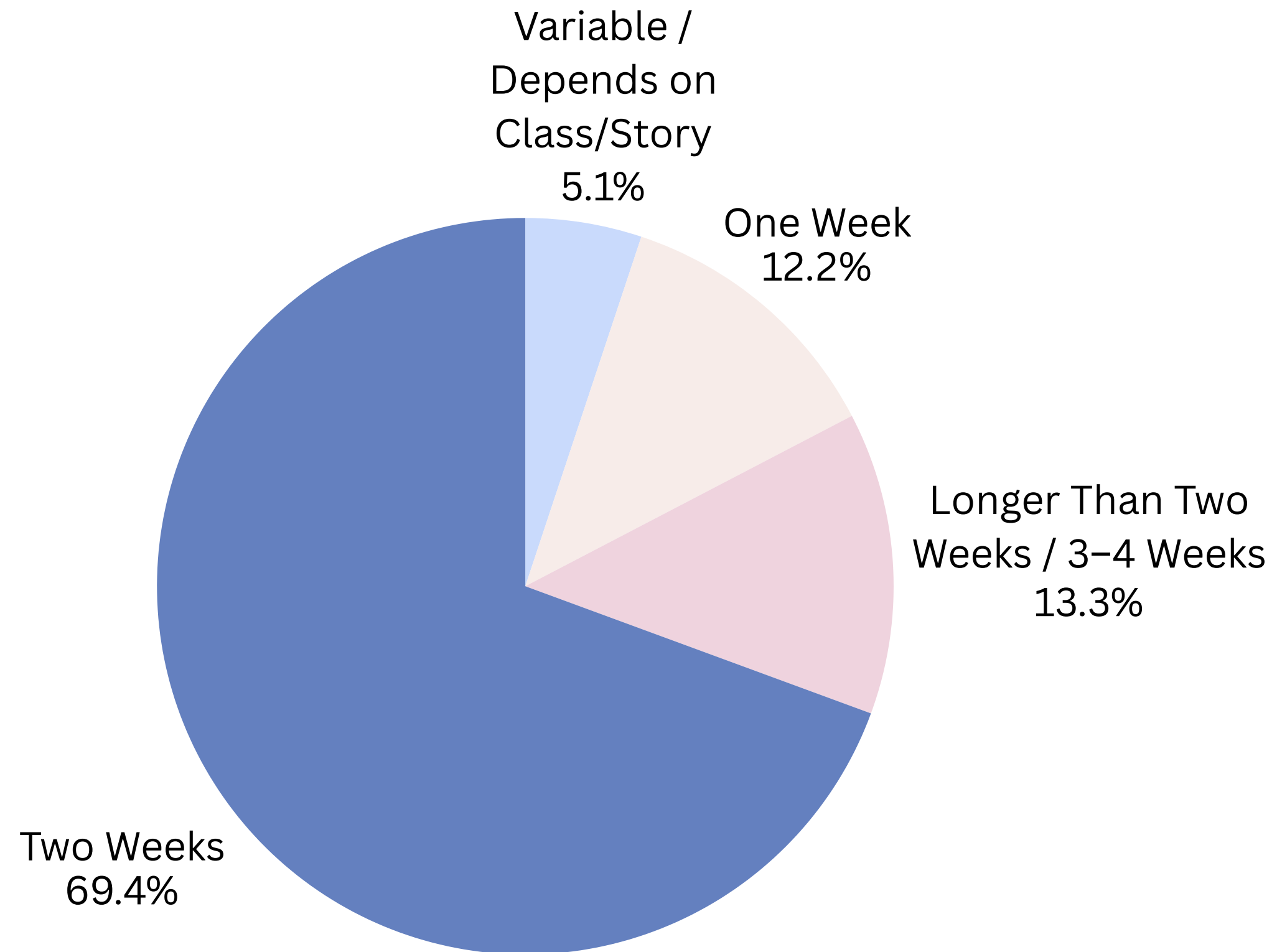


**How often do
your
kindergartens
have story
time?**



Approximate Percentages

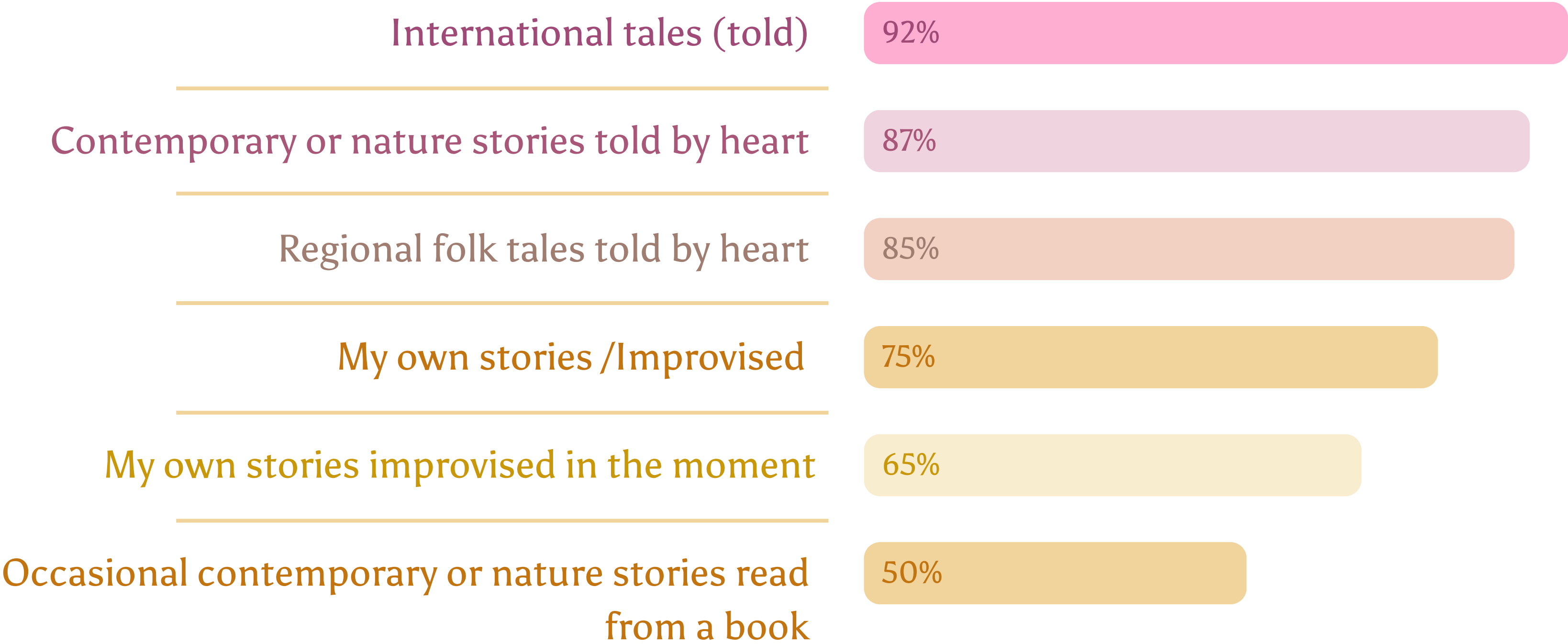
How long is a typical story shared?



Key Takeaway:

Two weeks is repeatedly mentioned as the standard practice—nearly 7 out of 10 respondents follow this rhythm. The rest are fairly evenly split between shorter (one week) and longer or more flexible storytelling cycles, with only a small fraction explicitly emphasizing variability.

What types of stories are shared in the kindergartens?



Key Takeaways:

- Most commonly shared are **international folk/fairy tales** told by heart and contemporary/nature stories told by heart, appearing in nearly 9 out of 10 responses. This emphasizes the importance of the oral tradition.
- **Regional folk tales** told by heart and original stories are also very frequent, showing that storytelling relies heavily on memory and the ability to improvise what is needed in the moment.
- **Reading from books** is less common, with about half of the respondents sometimes including book-based stories, often as a supplement to oral storytelling.
- **Improvised or teacher-created stories** are prominent, reflecting a flexible, adaptive approach to responding to the moment with the children.

Daily Activities in the Kindergarten

Outdoor free play 98%

Food preparation 90%

Indoor free play 85%

Drawing 70%

Overall, daily schedules balance play, practical life skills, and creative/artistic activities, with some activities (like festivals) being more seasonal or class-specific.



Key Insights:

- Outdoor and indoor free play are nearly universal, forming the backbone of daily activity.
- Food preparation is a very common daily activity, highlighting practical life skills.
- Creative activities (drawing, painting, handwork) are frequent, with drawing and handwork slightly more common than painting.
- Festival preparation occurs daily in over half of kindergartens, when tied to specific seasonal rhythms.
- Cleaning, practical work indoors and outdoors, was mentioned by most respondents.

Weekly Kindergarten Activities

95%

Bread Baking

92%

Drawing

91%

Painting

75%

Handwork

70%

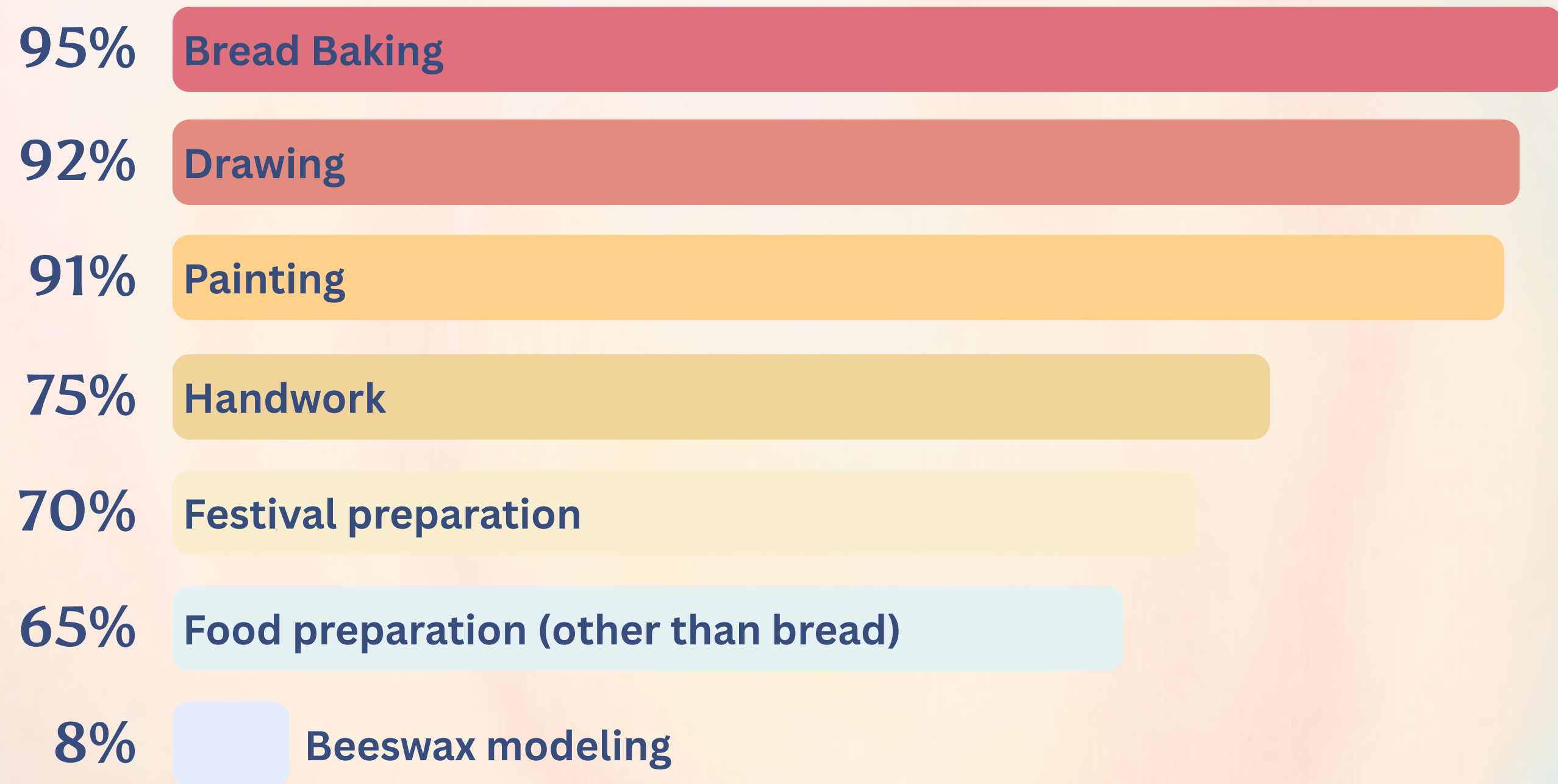
Festival preparation

65%

Food preparation (other than bread)

8%

Beeswax modeling





Key Insights:

- Bread baking, drawing, and painting are nearly universal weekly activities.
- Handwork and festival preparation are very common but slightly less frequent.
- Specialty activities like beeswax modeling and woodworking are rare weekly occurrences.

Is there anything you'd like to share about how and/or why specific activities do or do not take place in your kindergartens?

Activities Not Done / Limited

- Wood sanding / woodworking: Some classes do not offer sanding/woodworking due to age, safety, or logistics. (5%)
- Bread baking / food prep: Frequently limited or done weekly/monthly; restrictions due to allergies, space, stove availability, or class size. (10%)
- Certain crafts/handwork: Occasionally limited for younger children or large classes (5%).

Activities Done Regularly / Seasonally

- Outdoor play / forest kindergarten / hiking: Very common; daily or multiple times per week (15%).
- Painting / artistic work: Often on designated days or seasonally (10%).
- Movement / developmental exercises / Eurythmy: daily or scheduled weekly (10%).
- Gardening / animal care / environmental work: Daily in some programs, tied to seasons in others (5%).

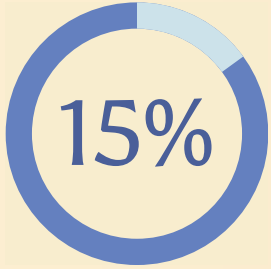
Reasons for Variation / Modifications

- Class size and logistics (large classes make some activities difficult).
- Age and developmental readiness (some tasks reserved for older children).
- Space, equipment, and safety regulations (e.g., hot food prep not allowed).
- Emphasis on free play and rhythm over structured tasks.
- Seasonal rhythm and festivals influence when certain activities occur.
- Allergies and food preferences influence food preparation
- Rhythms affected by extra needs of the children
- Parent expectations and local demographics influence curricular adjustments in a small number of schools.

Noted Trends / Educational Philosophy

- Many kindergartens prioritize movement, free play, sensory integration, and seasonal rhythm.
- Two respondents adapted kindergarten activities to support first-grade readiness (phonics, literacy, fine motor skills).
- Optional activities are sometimes offered for children who are interested (jump rope), .
- Majority of the respondents indicated “No” or “N/A” regarding barriers to activities, suggesting most activities are implemented in some form (50%).

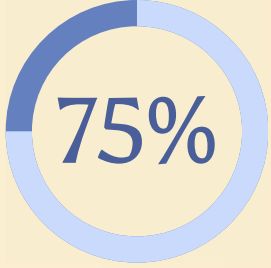
Activities Reserved for Rising First Graders



15%

Programs That Do Include Special Activities for Rising First Graders

- Some kindergartens offer handwork, woodworking, or practical tasks (e.g., sanding, sewing, loom work) specifically for children preparing for first grade.
- Afternoon or targeted sessions: a few programs schedule activities like developmental large muscle and small muscle movements
- Literacy - two respondents mentioned phonics games, or literacy support for older kindergarteners.
- Preparatory projects / special groups: examples include project work (sword making, puppet shows), helping smooth the transition to first grade by allocating special time for rising first graders.
- More complex tasks may occasionally be reserved for older children or are done less frequently.



75%

Programs That Do Not Include Reserved Activities

- Majority reported “No,” “N/A,” or similar responses indicating no activities are formally reserved.
- Many emphasize free play, daily rhythm, sensory work, movement, and seasonal activities for all children, rather than separating by age.
- Some noted that, while activities could be more complex or optional for certain children, they are not formally designated for rising first graders.



10%

Rarely offered: Reasons for Limiting or Reserving Activities

- Class size / logistics: large classes make daily prep or special activities difficult.
- Developmental readiness: younger children may not be ready for specific tasks.
- Safety or facility constraints: hot food prep, woodworking, or baking may be restricted.
- Focus on rhythm and free play: programs prioritize wholistic development over separating children by age.

Key Practices Supporting Language Development

- **Circle Time (songs, verses, movement) 95%**

Nearly all respondents emphasized circle time as a central language-rich practice, incorporating rhythm, repetition, songs, and spoken verse.

- **Oral Storytelling (told by heart) 92%**

Storytelling, often repeated, rhythmic, and expressive, was one of the most consistently cited methods for building vocabulary, listening, and narrative skills.

- **Songs, Rhymes, and Verses (including nursery rhymes) 90%**

Strong emphasis on musical and rhythmic language, including games, singing, rhyming, alliteration, and memorized verses.

- **Teacher Modeling of Clear, Intentional Speech 75%**

Many highlighted slow, articulated, expressive speech as foundational, with children learning through imitation.

- **Rhyming, Phonemic Awareness, and Word/Sound Games 50%**

Includes tongue twisters, alliteration, syllable games, and early sound recognition activities.

- **Finger Plays, Gesture-Based Language, and Movement Integration 68%**

Coordinating speech with movement to reinforce comprehension and expression.

- **Puppet Plays, Acting out Stories, and Dramatic Play 65%**

Helps children embody language and practice expressive speech in a social context.

- **Conversations and Storytelling During Daily Routines (meals, play, transitions) 60%**

Informal but intentional language used throughout the day.

- **Child Storytelling and Expressive Opportunities 55%**

Children retelling stories, sharing at circle/snack, or creating their own narratives.

- **Occasional Books and Reading Aloud 20%**

Present but less emphasized than oral traditions; often supplementary.

Less Common but Notable Practices

Multilingual Exposure / Second Language Use 12%

Some programs incorporate additional languages (e.g., Spanish, French).

Occasional Books and Independent Access to Reading Materials 20%

While present, books were less emphasized than oral language traditions.

Specialist Support (e.g., speech therapists, assessments) 8%

A minority mentioned formal interventions or external support.

Phonics or Structured Literacy Instruction 2.5%

Some included explicit sound-letter instruction or early literacy games.

Key Themes:

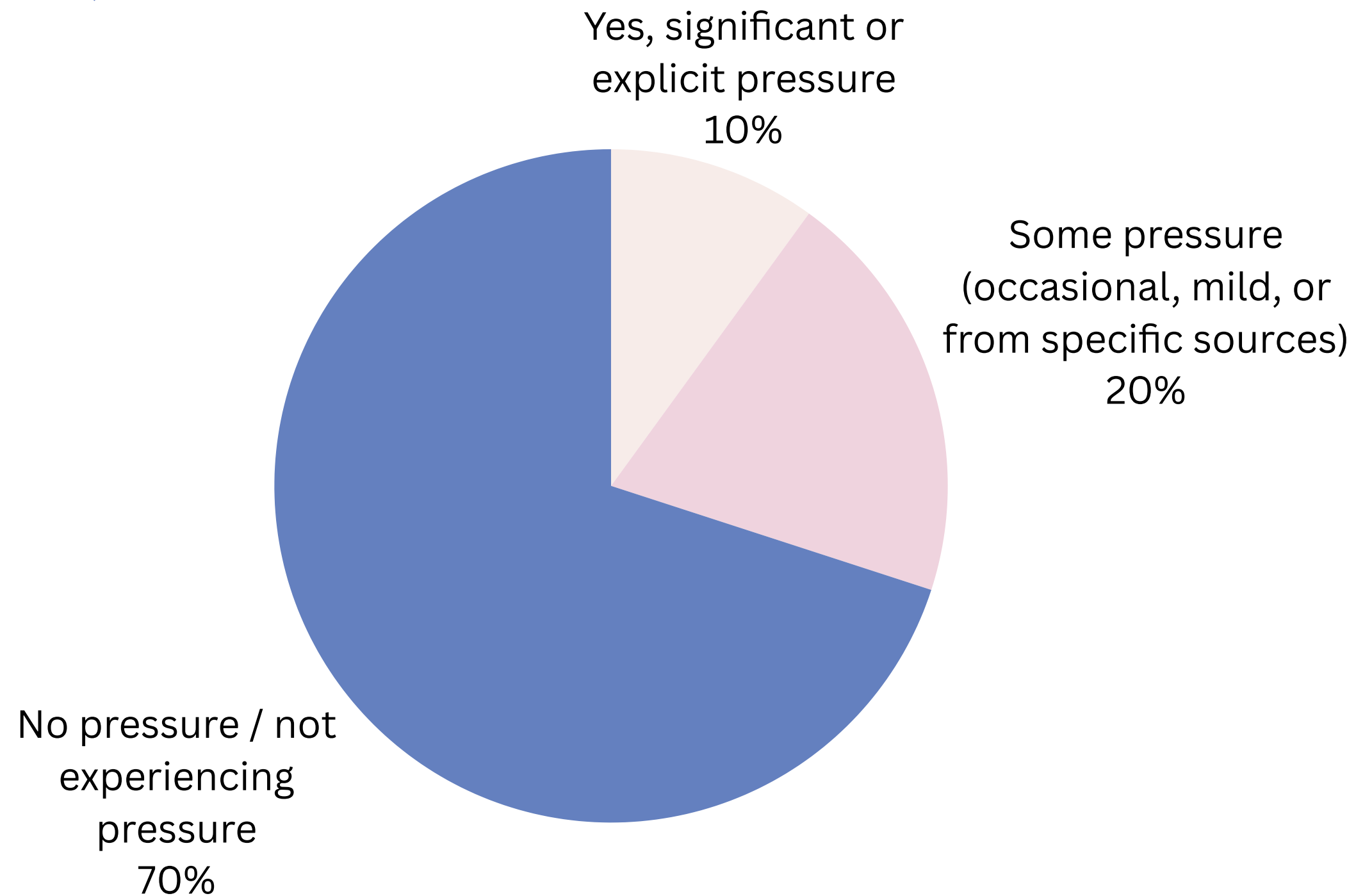
- Language development is integrated throughout the day in both structured (circle/story) and informal (play/activities/meals) contexts.
- The emphasis is on rhythm, repetition, and imitation
- Teachers consciously model slow, clearly articulated speech, language, and social conversation skills.
- Activities are playful, engaging, and often multilingual, fostering natural, joyful speech development.



Overall Insight:

Across responses, there is a strong emphasis on oral, rhythmic, and immersive language experiences rather than formal instruction. Language development is primarily fostered through repetition, imitation, storytelling, music, and meaningful social interaction, with teachers serving as key linguistic models. The environment is described as language-rich, play-based, and relational, where speech emerges naturally through daily activities.

Do you experience pressure to introduce academics into your kindergartens?



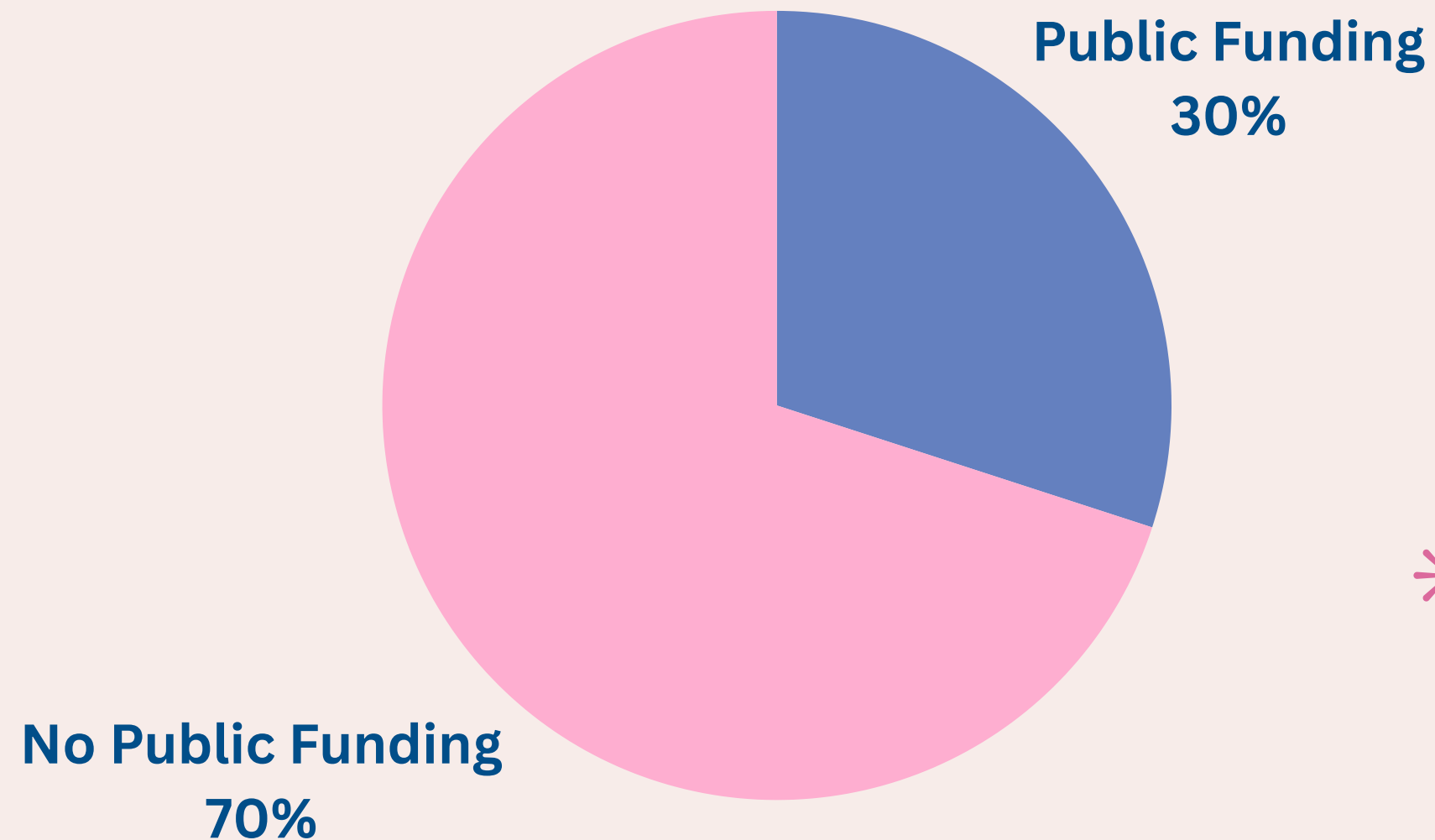
Sources of Pressure (for those who reported some pressure):

- **Parents:** Most common. Concerns typically arise when children show interest in writing or learning new things, or are related to fear that children are “falling behind.”
- **School Administration / Directors:** Occasionally noted, particularly around compliance with local curriculum requirements or enrollment concerns.
- **Grade School Teachers / Outside Schools:** Some respondents mentioned pressure to prepare children for first grade expectations.
- **Government / State Requirements:** Rare but noted in a few jurisdictions (e.g., BC Ministry, Alberta testing, Vermont bill).
- **Other External Influences: Occasionally Mentioned:** (Board, outside support services, general societal expectations).

Nature of Pressure

- Most respondents reported that it is not direct or overwhelming, often described as **curiosity, mild suggestions, or parental interest** rather than formal pressure.
- A few respondents (around 10%) indicated they **introduced early literacy or numeracy games** that could be incorporated into Waldorf “best practices” in response to parental, administrative, or regulatory influence.
- Many schools **handle parental concerns through education and communication**, emphasizing research on play-based learning, holistic development, and preparation for first grade without formal academics.
- Certain **government curriculum requirements must be met**. Some responses say most of them can be done implicitly or through traditional Waldorf early childhood activities, and most assessments are conducted through observations of students and their work.

Impact of Public Funding on Curriculum



- * **No Impact / Minimal Impact:** 65% of those receiving funding
 - Funding often comes with flexible reporting requirements or supports teacher professional development, vouchers, or scholarships.
 - Curriculum largely remains play-based and Waldorf-aligned.
 - Reporting may include observational assessments, documentation, or hours requirements.
 - In a few cases, programs can creatively align Waldorf practices with **government standards** (e.g., BC curriculum core competencies, Early Achievers, or ACT166). There are certain curriculum requirements that must be met, but most of them can be done implicitly or through traditional Waldorf early childhood activities.
- * **Significant Impact / Noticeable Curricular Change:** 10%
 - Rare; usually when state funding mandates specific instructional hours, formal reporting, or an academic focus that differs from traditional Waldorf methods.

Key Observations / Themes:

- Funding is most often used for teacher **professional development, preschool subsidies, or partial kindergarten support**.
- Programs typically **maintain foundational principles** even when reporting is required.
- Most schools **creatively integrate required reporting** with existing curriculum, minimizing disruption to play-based learning.
- Some respondents noted **funding considerations for accessibility and enrollment**, but not curriculum overhaul.

Is there any other information, questions or feedback you would like to share?

Child Development and Readiness:

- Observations on movement, motor skills, attention, behavior, and social-emotional development.
- Discussions about first-grade readiness and cut-off dates, including age imbalances and transitions.
- Interest in mixed-age kindergarten benefits.
- Some focus on supporting neurodivergent students or children with speech/attention issues.

Curriculum and Pedagogy:

- Maintaining play-based learning while connecting with academic or foundational skills.
- Use of observational assessments and alternative readiness checklists.
- Some mention of minor curricular adaptations to meet local/state expectations without compromising Waldorf principles.

Parent Engagement and Communication:

- Concerns about parents' understanding of readiness, cut-off dates, and expectations for kindergarten.
- Interest in parent education and managing expectations around early academics.

Professional Development and Collaboration:

- Interest in study groups, research projects, or sharing practices between schools.
- Teachers researching topics like movement's role in academic readiness.
- Desire for further discussion and feedback from other schools.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEIJ):

- Some responses noted active DEIJ practices in enrollment, classroom materials, and cultural celebrations.
- Curiosity about broader neurodiversity trends and inclusive practices.

Enrollment and Structural Considerations:

- Discussion about waiting lists, hybrid programs (junior kindergarten), and scheduling to accommodate younger or older students.
- Consideration of staffing and compensation for meeting program needs.



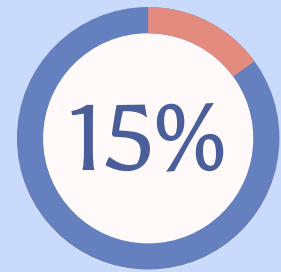
**No Additional Feedback /
N/A: 50%**

Many respondents simply indicated “no,” “not at this time,” or “N/A,” suggesting no further comments or concerns.

Key Feedback:

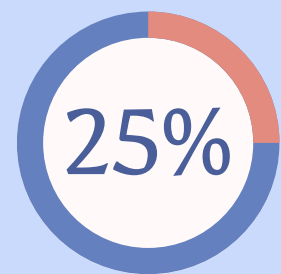
- Most schools are attentive to developmental readiness and prioritize it over strict age or academic expectations.
- There is interest in collaboration, research, and sharing best practices across the Waldorf community.
- Some respondents note increased pressures from societal expectations or administrative requirements, but most schools try to adapt while maintaining Waldorf pedagogy.

What questions are you carrying about first-grade readiness and/or the transition from kindergarten to grade 1?



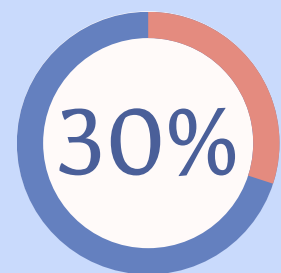
No Questions / N/A / Satisfied with Current Approach

- Respondents indicated no current questions or concerns, noting confidence in their existing processes and communication with families and teachers.



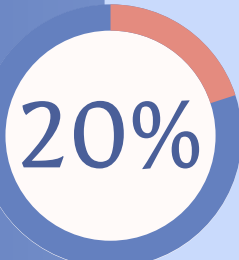
Age Cut-offs, Timing, and Cohort Composition

- Concerns about grade one entrance cut-off dates (June 1 or Sept 1) and whether younger children are ready.
- Considerations for children with summer birthdays and how exceptions affect social/emotional balance.
- Questions about mixed-age classrooms and whether separating older children might better support readiness.
- Interest in the long-term effects of early entrance to Grade 1 on the child's self image and social, emotional, and academic development.



Academic and Developmental Readiness

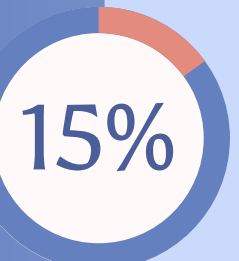
- How to support rising first graders in literacy, numeracy, and overall readiness without compromising play-based learning and Waldorf best practices.
- Questions about behavioral regulation, focus, and social-emotional development, including children with neurodiverse or extra needs.
- Observations of children with retained reflexes or developmental delays and how these affect their learning and adjustment.
- Balancing therapeutic, holistic approaches with external pressures for early academics.

A circular progress indicator with a blue outer ring and a red inner segment. The text '20%' is displayed in the center of the circle.

20%

Transition Support / Curriculum Continuity

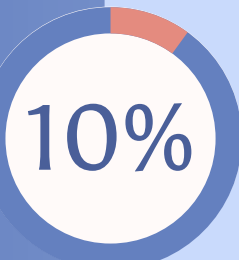
- Strategies to bridge kindergarten and Grade 1, ensuring continuity between teachers and programs.
- Supporting families with communication about what to expect in Grade one.
- Interest in developing ceremonies, check-ins, or assessments that reflect development rather than just academic skills.
- Questions about aligning first-grade expectations with what children experience in kindergarten.

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15%

Parent Communication and Societal Pressures

- How to help parents understand developmental readiness and resist external pressures for early advancement.
- Managing parent expectations regarding academic introduction, behavior expectations, and extracurricular activities.
- Concerns about parental anxiety and social pressures influencing readiness decisions.

A circular progress indicator with a blue outer ring and a red inner segment. The text '10%' is displayed in the center of the circle.

10%

Interest in Collaboration and Shared Learning

- Desire to learn from other schools' approaches, including assessment methods, cut-offs, and strategies for supporting children with diverse needs.
- Questions about best practices for developmental check-ins and first-grade assessments.

Key Takeaways:

- Age cut-offs and handling children at the younger or older end of the cohort are major concerns.
- Supporting social, emotional, and developmental readiness is prioritized over academic acceleration.
- Schools are seeking strategies for seamless transitions, better communication with families, and peer learning across schools.
- Neurodiversity and special needs support are increasingly central to readiness questions.

Many responses reflect balancing Waldorf pedagogy with societal expectations for early academic skills.

Some Ideas/ Questions from Colleagues

- * “Many years ago, we met with grades teachers so they could understand that the child they were receiving in first grade needed time to transition to the first grade curriculum. The importance of continuing with movement and warmth. We came to an understanding at our school that early childhood does not end at 6 years old. After this understanding, our first grade class teachers and first graders had a much better transition.”
- * ”Why is it a question and consideration to accelerate children in literacy and academics, either by bringing it into the Kindergarten or lowering the grade one age of entrance before the child has experienced their second birth - the birth of the etheric? Waldorf schools, teachers and administration are bound to do that which is in the best interest of the child; that which is based on child development.“
- * ”Our biggest concern right now is how to bridge the gap between the grades teachers and the early childhood teachers. We are also looking to build more opportunities to talk with EC families about how the Waldorf early childhood curriculum prepares the children for the work of the grades. There seems to be much parent confusion.”
- * ”What are the expectations of first grade students in their first semester? I was taught in a program that there is a transition—what does that look like?
- * ”What are the expectations of parents to remove themselves completely from the transition process starting on the first day of school. In my opinion there is no parent work being done prior to the first day of school to either lay out expectations with reasoning to parents or to be transparent with new first grade protocols that are distinct from kindergarten.”
- * ”What changes are needed to support the children coming now? What do teachers need to know, learn or do to meet them and their families?



THANK YOU for your interest in the results of this survey. If you have any questions, please reach out to the **WECAN Office**.