The Maddux School Alumni Follow-up Study: A Brief Summary of Findings

2011-2012

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INTRODUCTION

The Maddux School is an early childhood/primary level, regular-education school offering state-approved curricula and supportive programming for students ages 3½ to 8 in pre-school through second grade. The mission of The Maddux School is to establish strong academic, communication and social foundations in a nurturing environment.

Children generally come to The Maddux School with cognitive strengths but may demonstrate mild vulnerabilities in social and play-skill development, pragmatic language, self-esteem, sensory integration, motor-planning, fine motor skill development and self-regulation.

The Maddux School was founded in 2004, and began as a pre-school, serving eight students. Since that time, The Maddux School has expanded to offer kindergarten, first, and second grades and currently serves a total of 60 students.

As part of its ongoing improvement efforts, The Maddux School recently undertook an alumni follow-up study to find out about the types of schools in which alumni are currently enrolled, how alumni are doing both academically and socially, and how well The Maddux School helped prepare alumni for their current lives. This document summarizes the results of the alumni follow-up study.¹

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The Maddux School administrators identified the names and contact information for the 78 alumni who met these criteria. The parents of 42 of these alumni (or approximately 54% of eligible participants) participated in the 2011 study. Ten alumni families did not participate because contact information was no longer current, and the remaining 26 alumni families failed to respond for unknown reasons.

Participants in the 2011-2012 Maddux School Follow-up Study included parents of The Maddux School alumni who left the program between 2004-2011.

DATA COLLECTION

In early 2011, a team including the Research Coordinator, The Maddux School Director and The Maddux School Program Specialist, developed a 29-item survey protocol that addressed alumni’s experiences of leaving The Maddux School, in-school supports received in their current settings, social and community life, and key academic and social challenges faced. Questions also addressed interviewees’ perceptions of how well The Maddux School helped prepare alumni both academically and socially.

The survey was formally launched in 2011, and by early 2012, The Maddux School reached its goal of a 50% response rate.

¹ For a copy of the full-length report, please contact The Maddux School.
ANALYSIS

Interview data included both quantitative data (responses to Likert-type scales) and qualitative data (open-ended responses).

- **Quantitative data**: In order to analyze quantitative data, descriptive statistics were generated using Excel.
- **Qualitative data**: In order to analyze qualitative data, WEFT QDA (a software program designed for the organization and analysis of qualitative data) was used. Emerging themes were identified for each question, with “major” themes being those mentioned by 10 or more interviewees and “minor” themes being those mentioned by a minimum of three interviewees.

SURVEY RESULTS

LEAVING THE MADDUX SCHOOL

Most of The Maddux School alumni included in this survey attended The Maddux School for one or two years. It is important to note, that because many of these alumni attended The Maddux School during its formative years, they were unable to take full advantage of the expanded grade range and academic/social program currently available to students. For example, 51% of The Maddux School alumni spent two years in the program prior to leaving, 34% spent one year, 7% spent three years, 5% spent four years, and 2% spent five years.

For nine alumni, pre-K was the last grade attended at The Maddux School; for 21 alumni, kindergarten was the last grade attended, and for eight alumni, first grade was the last grade attended. Thirty-two alumni went on to enter the next grade at their new schools, and six repeated a grade (most commonly kindergarten).

Most children left The Maddux School because they had either “aged out” of The Maddux School program (48%) or were ready for a different program (48%). Other reasons included the following: 10% were concerned about acceptance into another school during an open enrollment year, 7% left because of program cost, and 5% left for other reasons including loss of funding and referral to another program by The Maddux School staff.
The Maddux School alumni transferred to a variety of different types of school, the most common being another private regular education program (42%). Significant numbers transferred to a private program for children with learning differences (29%) and public regular education programs (26%), and least commonly, alumni transitioned to a public program for children with learning differences (2%).

Several parents noted that they appreciated the support they received from The Maddux School staff in selecting and applying for different schools. Several parents expressed ambivalence about their decisions to leave The Maddux School.

**SCHOOLS AND IN-SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

The Maddux School alumni are enrolled in classes with a wide range of class sizes. For example, alumni are enrolled in classes with:

- 10 or fewer students (n=5);
- 11-15 students (n=14);
- 16-20 students (n=10); and
• 21 or more students (n=12).

The Maddux School alumni are enrolled in programs with a wide range of teacher/student ratios. For example, alumni are enrolled in programs with a teacher/student ratio of:

• 1:5 or lower (n=7);
• between 1:6 and 1:10 (n=15);
• between 1:11-1:20 (n=9); and
• 1:21 or greater (n=9).

Although parents were only able to provide approximations, it appears that The Maddux School alumni attend schools of widely varying sizes. For example, The Maddux School alumni attend schools of:

• Less than 100 (n=5);
• 101-300 (n=9);
• 301-400 (n=10); and
• 400 or more (n=7).

Alumni are currently receiving the following types of in-school supports at their schools:

• speech and language therapy (31%);
• social skills training (31%);
• occupational therapy (28.6%);
• individualized education program (IEP)(23.8%);
• counseling (21.4%); and
• resource help/academic tutoring (14.3%).

In addition, parents mentioned the following types of in-school supports: paraprofessional support, accommodations such as scribing, assistive technology, "Lunch Bunch" social skills or Friends' Club, and advanced academic tutoring or gifted instruction. Parents also mentioned the following types of out-of-school supports: anxiety-related counseling and cognitive behavioral therapy.

The vast majority of parents expressed satisfaction with alumni's current schools. A total of 97.7% were either “very satisfied” (66.7%) or “somewhat satisfied” (31%). The remaining 2.4% reported that they were “very dissatisfied” with alumni’s current school.
Some concerns parents expressed about their post-The Maddux School experiences included schools being too small, too chaotic, or lacking in adequate therapeutic supports.

Parents were also very positive about how well The Maddux School had prepared alumni academically. A total of 95.2% of parents felt that The Maddux School had prepared their child either “very well” (85.4%) or “moderately well” (9.8%). A few parents (4.9%) were “unsure.”

![How Well The Maddux School Prepared Child Academically](chart.png)

**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY LIFE**

Almost all alumni of The Maddux School participate in one or more organized community activities (90.5%). Most commonly, alumni participate in organized sports or athletic classes of some kind, including basketball, football, soccer, track, baseball, skating, gymnastics, swimming, tae kwon do, snowboarding, yoga, dance, lacrosse, karate, horseback riding, wrestling, and tennis. Also common is participation in religious groups and activities, including Hebrew school and Sunday school. Other types of activities mentioned included Cub Scouts/Boy Scouts and Brownies, drama and improvisation groups, chess and Lego clubs, cartooning and other art classes, and choir and band. Most alumni participate in some type of organized community activity one or more times per week. Of the 9.5% alumni who do not participate regularly in organized community activities, parents noted that this was due either to parents’ schedules or alumni’s lack of interest in and/or difficulty engaging in structured group activities.

The majority of alumni (n=20) have one or more play dates with friends per week, with several others (n=7) having one or two play dates with friends per month. The remainder (n=7) have infrequent play dates, if at all. Unstructured social activities included indoor and outdoor games, sleepovers, and birthday parties. In terms of facilitation, the majority of parents (n=15) noted that play dates required no facilitation/supervision, whereas other parents noted that play dates require minimal facilitation/supervision (n=10) or moderate to high/levels of facilitation/supervision (n=2). Several parents (n=7) noted that alumni have one or more close friendships. Some parents (n=6) identified ongoing social challenges, and made comments such as “He still doesn’t have a lot of friends and has trouble getting into the mix,” and “He will never be the type of kid who likes a large group of friends,” whereas other parents mentioned how much progress alumni had made in terms of social interaction.
Parents expressed ambivalence in terms of the overall quality of alumni’s social interactions when compared to that of their peers. Only 64.3% felt that alumni’s social interactions were “excellent” (16.7%) or “good” (47.6%), whereas 33.4% reported that alumni’s social interactions were “not very good” (31%) or “poor” (2.4%).

Over 88% felt that The Maddux School had prepared alumni socially. A total of 66.7% felt that the school had prepared alumni “very well” or “moderately well”; whereas only 4.8% felt that the school had prepared alumni “not very well.” Several, however, were “unsure” (7.1%).

**OVERVIEW**

**Academic Challenges**

Parents were asked to identify the primary academic challenges faced by alumni, and the following major and minor themes emerged:
- lack of organizational skills;
- difficulty focusing;
- slow processing speed;
- difficulty with language arts (reading and writing);
- impatience and/or impulsivity;
- executive dysfunction;
- lack of strategies for coping with frustration; and
- poor receptive and/or expressive language skills.

Other areas of academic challenge mentioned by fewer than three parents included lack of a work ethic, behavioral acting out while in class, anxiety, lack of higher order thinking skills, difficulties with math and social studies, challenges related to information retention, emotion regulation, difficulties with pacing, lack of flexibility, and lack of fine motor skills.

Parents reported that several alumni do not currently face any challenges related to academic performance.

**Social Challenges**

Parents were asked to identify the primary social challenges faced by alumni, and the following major and minor themes emerged:

- difficulty with group settings;
- impatience and/or impulsivity;
- difficulty initiating and/or understanding the mechanics of social interaction;
- lack of conversation skills (e.g., taking turns, staying on topic, responding to social cues);
- anxiety;
- shyness and/or social isolation; and
- social rigidity.

Other areas of social challenge mentioned by fewer than three parents included lack of skills for coping with social frustration, inability to regulate emotions, sensory overstimulation, inappropriate behavior, difficulty with unstructured play time, bossiness, sensitivity to criticism, and difficulty “fitting in.”

Parents reported that several alumni (n=6) do not currently face any social challenges. Others stressed that while alumni may not be developing typically in terms of social skills, they nonetheless continue to make significant progress in this area.

**Key Skills Developed**

Parents were asked to identify the most important skills or qualities alumni developed while at The Maddux School, and the following major themes emerged:

- flexibility;
- confidence and self-esteem;
- social skills;
- conversation skills;
- problem-solving skills;
Minor themes included the following:

- classroom functioning (e.g., following directions and rules, completing homework, following routines);
- awareness of others;
- self-advocacy;
- ability to handle transitions;
- fine motor skills;
- emotional/self-regulation;
- executive function and organizational skills; and
- developing/maintaining friendships.

Other skills mentioned by fewer than three parents included improved speech and articulation, development of a work ethic, ability to remain focused, impulse control, and a decrease in aversions.

**Overall Impressions**

A major theme that came up repeatedly across surveys was parents’ overwhelmingly favorable impressions of The Maddux School in terms of the support it provided their children both academically and socially. For example, parents made the following types of comments” “The program was excellent,” “It was the best money we ever spent,” “Thanks to The Maddux School, [our son] was ready for a mainstream school,” and “Keep doing what you’re doing – I can’t think of a better way to improve the foundation skills you provide!”

When asked to describe a favorite memory of The Maddux School, the most common theme was how nurturing and supportive The Maddux School was. Many parents also named specific teachers. A third major theme was the importance of the art program and art shows for developing students’ artistic skills and sensibilities. Minor themes included the importance of other special events, including the literary festival, holiday programs, open houses, fall harvest sale, and musical performances; pleasure and relief at finding a school that was a “good fit” for their child; and alumni’s abiding affection for The Maddux School.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

When interpreting the results of this study, it is important to keep in mind that several of the parents who were less than satisfied with their children’s academic and social outcomes were not able to take full advantage of The Maddux School’s current offerings (e.g., transferring to another program after a single year at The Maddux School because higher grades were not yet available).

**SUMMARY**

In summary, most alumni included in this study left The Maddux School after one or two years because they had aged out or were ready for different programs. Alumni are currently enrolled in a wide range of schools, the majority in public or private regular education programs, but a significant minority in public or private programs for children with learning differences. Most parents were satisfied with alumni’s current schools and positive about how well The Maddux School had prepared alumni academically. Almost all alumni participate in one or more organized community activities, most commonly athletic or religious activities. The majority of alumni also
have regular play dates that require varying degrees of parental facilitation. Most alumni’s social interactions are excellent or good in comparison to their peers, but a significant minority continues to experience social challenges. In spite of these ongoing challenges, most parents felt that The Maddux School had done a good job preparing alumni socially. Key skills developed while attending The Maddux School included flexibility, self-confidence, social and conversation skills, and problem solving. Overall, parents were very impressed by the high quality of The Maddux School’s curriculum and the school’s ability to nurture both social and academic growth.