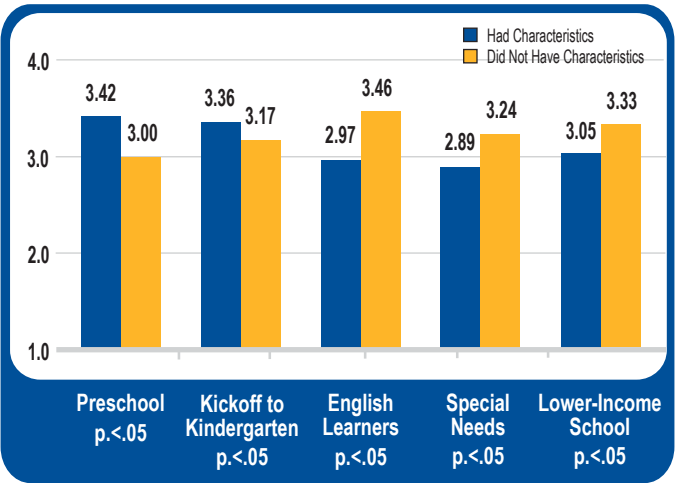


What Characteristics Are Most Associated With Kindergartner's Readiness?

To answer this question, the researchers first calculated an overall average school readiness score. This score represented children's average level of proficiency across all of the 20 skills included in the assessment and shown in Figure 3. The researchers then tested the relationship between the overall average readiness score and characteristics, such as participation in preschool, Headstart, and Kickoff to Kindergarten as well as the presence of special needs, English Learner status, age, gender and income (based on school-level data). Because these characteristics often co-occur, appropriate statistical procedures were used to adjust for children's varying backgrounds. For example, when testing for differences between children with and without preschool experience, the influence of the effects of Head Start, Kickoff to Kindergarten, English Learner status, presence of special needs, age and gender were held constant. The analysis revealed that children who had participated in preschool and Kickoff to Kindergarten had significantly higher average school readiness scores than children who had not participated in these programs. Though not included in the 2003 analysis, participation in Raising a Reader[®] has also been shown to positively impact children's overall average readiness scores.⁵ Children who were English Learners had

significantly lower readiness scores than their English proficient peers. Children with special needs and those attending lower-income schools also had significantly lower scores.

Figure 4 - Overall Average Adjusted Readiness Score by Key Characteristic of Observed Students, 2003



Note: In statistical terminology, if p < .05, a difference is reported to be statistically significant.

⁵ The overall average readiness score for Raising a Reader[®] was calculated based on the five skills the program expects to impact: expresses curiosity and eagerness for learning, has expressive abilities, recognizes the letters of the alphabet, engages with books and can count 10 objects correctly.

How Will We Use These Findings?

- Children with preschool and/or summer transitional program experience are better prepared for kindergarten. Therefore, we must champion early learning experiences for children in their youngest years.
- Children are least prepared in the developmental area of communication and language usage. Therefore, we must support efforts that foster the development of early literacy skills.
- Schools must be ready for children. This includes schools' ability to support a child's successful transition into kindergarten no matter where they fall on the developmental continuum. Therefore, we must strengthen efforts to link early care/learning programs with the elementary school system.

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Jefferson School District
La Honda-Pescadero Unified District
Pacifica School District
Ravenswood City School District
Redwood City Elementary District
San Mateo-Foster City Elementary School District
South San Francisco Unified School District



For a copy of the full report or questions regarding the assessment methodology, please contact Michelle Fries, Special Projects Manager, at 650.581.4373 or visit our web site at www.pcf.org/peninsula_partnership/.

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Ready For School?

A Report on Skill Levels of San Mateo County Kindergartners



Executive Summary
2004



Why Is School Readiness Important?

You’ve bought the new school clothes and packed the first day’s lunch, but what does it mean for a child to be “ready for school”? A growing body of child development and early education research indicates that school readiness begins long before the first day of kindergarten and is determined by a complex interplay of family, environmental and societal risk and protective factors. Together, these factors comprise a unique repertoire of assets and skills to help the child transition into and succeed in school.¹

This research has also shown that all children do not have equal access to this “repertoire of assets.” In fact, many children arrive at kindergarten already lagging behind. Some have health problems that impede their ability to learn. Others lack the cognitive skills that are associated with early academic achievement. And still others lack the social and emotional skills that are needed for successful classroom participation. All these children are at risk for behavioral problems, early school failure, later academic problems and difficulties in the workplace during their adult lives.²

To address this national challenge, many communities across the country have set for themselves the ambitious goal of ensuring that all children are ready for school, particularly those who are most vulnerable. These efforts reflect a broader commitment to school readiness at both the state and national level as exemplified by the National Education Goals Panel, Good Start, Grow Smart – No Child Left Behind Act, and the California Master Plan for Education.

How Is School Readiness Measured?

San Mateo County is one of the first communities in the nation to systematically measure school readiness. Through the Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families – an initiative of Peninsula Community Foundation and San Mateo County – and in partnership with a multi-disciplinary School Readiness Assessment Task Force and through support from our research consultants, Applied Survey Research, kindergarten teachers have assessed nearly 2,000 students in 20 different readiness skills. These skills align with the work of the National Education Goals Panel which defines children’s school readiness according to five areas: (1) physical well-being and motor development, (2) social and emotional development, (3) approaches toward learning, (4) communication and language usage, and (5) cognition and general knowledge.

The Peninsula Partnership has completed three years of assessment in eight school districts that comprise approximately 70% of the kindergarten population in San Mateo County. The most recent assessment, conducted during the 2003-2004 school year, includes a core sample of 486 students and an over-sample of 236 students in lower performing schools. Key findings from this assessment are highlighted in this executive summary.



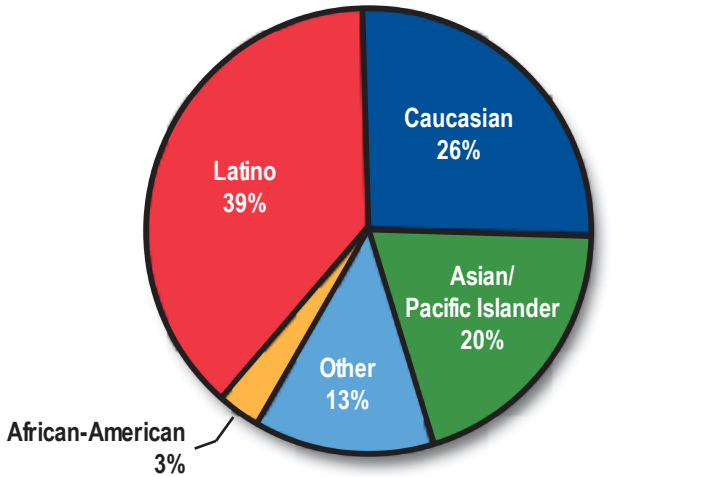
¹ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000). From Neurons to Neighborhoods: the Science of Early Childhood Development. Shonkoff, J.P. and D. Phillips, (Eds), Board on Children, Youth and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.

² Ounce of Prevention Fund (2003). Ready for School: The Case for Including Babies and Toddlers as We Expand Preschool Opportunities. <http://www.ounceofprevention.org>.

Who Are San Mateo County's Kindergartners?

Students who were observed as part of the 2003 study reflected the ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic diversity of the county. Thirty-nine percent were Latino, followed by Caucasian (26%), Asian/Pacific Islander (20%), African-American (3%) and multi-ethnic, unknown or other ethnicities (13%).

Figure 1 - Ethnic Composition of Observed Students, 2003



Forty-seven percent of sampled students were English Learners, speaking some 43 different languages in their homes. Spanish, Filipino (Tagalog), Cantonese, Tongan, Hindi, Arabic, Japanese and Russian comprised 90% of the languages spoken among these students.

In addition to ethnic and linguistic diversity, there is tremendous socio-economic diversity in San Mateo County. Wealthy communities are situated adjacent to lower-income communities and the public schools mirror these differences. For instance, in the La Honda-Pescadero Unified District, La Honda Elementary had a student population where 9% of the students were enrolled in the free and reduced cost lunch program compared to 81% in Pescadero Elementary.

Figure 2 - Percentage of Students Enrolled in Free and Reduced Cost Lunch by District, 2002-2003

School District	District
Cabrillo Unified School District	24%
Jefferson School District	48%
La Honda-Pescadero Unified District	59%
Pacifica School District	17%
Ravenswood City School District	70%
Redwood City Elementary District	53%
San Mateo-Foster City Elementary School District	29%
South San Francisco Unified School District	29%

Source: California Basic Educational Data System, California Department of Education.

The types of early education experiences of sampled students, based on the information available to kindergarten teachers, also varied and included formal curriculum-based preschool (63%), Raising a Reader³ (38%), Kickoff to Kindergarten⁴ (32%), and Head Start (8%).



³ Raising a Reader[®] is a take-home book bag program that is integrated into 450 low-income preschool sites throughout San Mateo County.

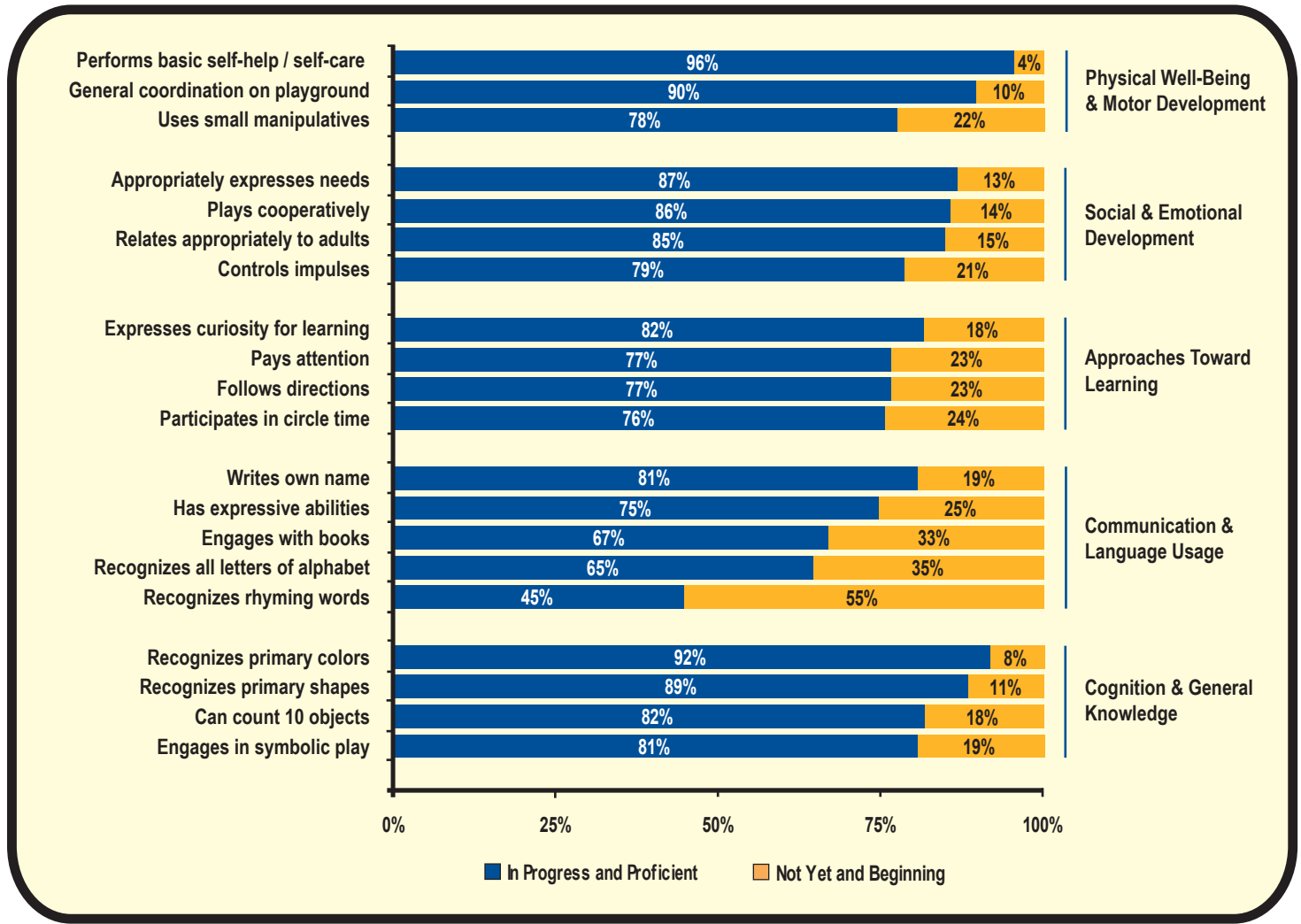
⁴ Kickoff to Kindergarten is a four- to six-week summer transitional program serving children who are English Learners and/or have not had prior preschool experience.

How Did San Mateo County Kindergartners Score?

Teachers used a four-point scale of proficiency to assess children’s readiness in 20 different skills, ranging from one (“not yet”), two (“beginning”), three (“in progress”) and four (“proficient”). As shown in the chart below, cognition and general knowledge is the area where children are succeeding – 92% of children were in progress or fully proficient in skills related to *recognizing primary colors*, 89% *recognizing primary shapes*, 82% *counting 10 objects*, and

81% *engaging in symbolic play*. Communication and language, on the other hand, is the area in which children need the greatest help – 55% of children had no proficiency or only beginning levels of proficiency in skills related to *recognizing rhyming words*; 35% in *recognizing all letters of the alphabet*; 33% in *engaging with books*; and 25% in having *expressive abilities*.

Figure 3 - Percentage of Observed Students by Proficiency Level in Key Readiness Skills, 2003



Note: Percentages do not include responses of Don’t Know / Not Observed.