



SANTA CLARA COUNTY SCHOOL READINESS

FALL ASSESSMENT FINDINGS 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PREPARED BY



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Office of Education

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Of course, this assessment would not be possible without the support of the participating kindergarten teachers who generously gave their time and energy to help us understand the skills of their students. ASR gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the many individuals listed in the following table.

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

School	Teacher
Abram Agnew Elementary	Jerod A Collins
Argonaut Elementary	Michele Calhoun
	Ailish Johnson
Blossom Hill Elementary	Cheri Lozoya
Booksin Elementary	Archer Elizabeth Andrus
	Erin Hannon
	Rocio Kappenman
Bracher Elementary	Alison Inouye
Braly Elementary	Gina Fielden
Abram Agnew Elementary	Jerod A Collins
Campbell School of Innovation	Jesus Miramontes Jr.
Capri Elementary	Kylie Ziolkowski
Carolyn A. Clark Elementary	Karen Acosta
Castlemont Elementary	Alicia Stapes
	Victoria Urzi
Cesar Chavez Elementary	Jane De Jesus
Cherrywood Elementary	Silvia Chan
Del Roble Elementary	Ana Cristina Mendoza
Ellis Elementary	Kimberly Caldwell
	Phuong Kim Duong
	Margarite Galvan
	Ariana Harris
Fammatre Elementary	Karen Kuljis
Franklin Elementary	Carlos Marquez
George C. Payne Elementary	Ashley Ellis

School	Teacher
George Mayne Elementary	Katharine Bartlett
Glen View Elementary	Patricia Ljungberg
Joseph Weller Elementary	Kristi Mastrome
	Melanie McLaughlin
Kathryn Hughes Elementary	Stephanie Durand
	Desiree Peterson
Lakeside Elementary	Heather Wingfield
Laneview Elementary	Ha Tran
Ledesma (Rita) Elementary	Sandra Cordero
	Sandy Santos
LUCHA	Kimi Hiroshima
Luigi Aprea Elementary	Mandi Middleton
Montague Elementary	Karyn Howl
	Lisa Stuart
Nordstrom Elementary	Jennifer Clifford
Oak Ridge Elementary	Holly Carlson
	Stacy Dolan
Robert Sanders Elementary	Jenessa Locklin
	Ana Garcia-Soares
Santa Rita Elementary	Tarang Gupta
	Bailey Linden
Santee Elementary	Kimberly Leonhardt
Washington Elementary	Rosalia Canela
Westwood Elementary	Elena Dritsas

SNAPSHOT OF THE SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

BACKGROUND

Children's kindergarten readiness is tied to numerous long-term outcomes, including third grade proficiency and high school graduation.^{i,ii,iii} However, the development of children's readiness skills is largely dependent on the quality of their early environments, and their successful transition to kindergarten is dependent on the quality of the schools they enter. Children thrive when their basic needs are met, they are exposed to enriching early experiences, and the schools they enter are prepared to meet their needs. As a result, the 2023 Santa Clara County School Readiness Assessment (SRA) examined readiness comprehensively, exploring the readiness of children, families, communities, and schools.

The 2023 SRA also utilized participatory methods to better understand the nature of readiness in the county. Listening sessions were conducted, in English and in Spanish, with six families to inform updates to the study's parent survey, the *Parent Information Form (PIF)*. English and Spanish sessions were also held with 22 parents/caregivers after the assessment was complete to share results of the study and request feedback on the findings and recommendations. Likewise, five of the participating kindergarten teachers joined a listening session to discuss the results to share their insights and recommendations. The input obtained from families and teachers is included in this report.

This snapshot illustrates the key findings from the 2023 SRA in which 951 students were assessed on the teacher-administered *Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF)* of readiness skills, and 710 parents/caregivers completed a *PIF*. The sample represents 7% of the 14,602 students enrolled in kindergarten in the county in 2023.^{iv} It was large enough to produce statistically valid and reliable results and was representative of the county in terms of race/ethnicity but differed from the overall county on other demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic characteristics. Due to the study's limitations, generalizations to the larger population should be made with caution. In this report, the results of the 2023 study are compared to the 2018 SRA, the last time a comprehensive, representative, countywide study was conducted.



KEY FINDINGS

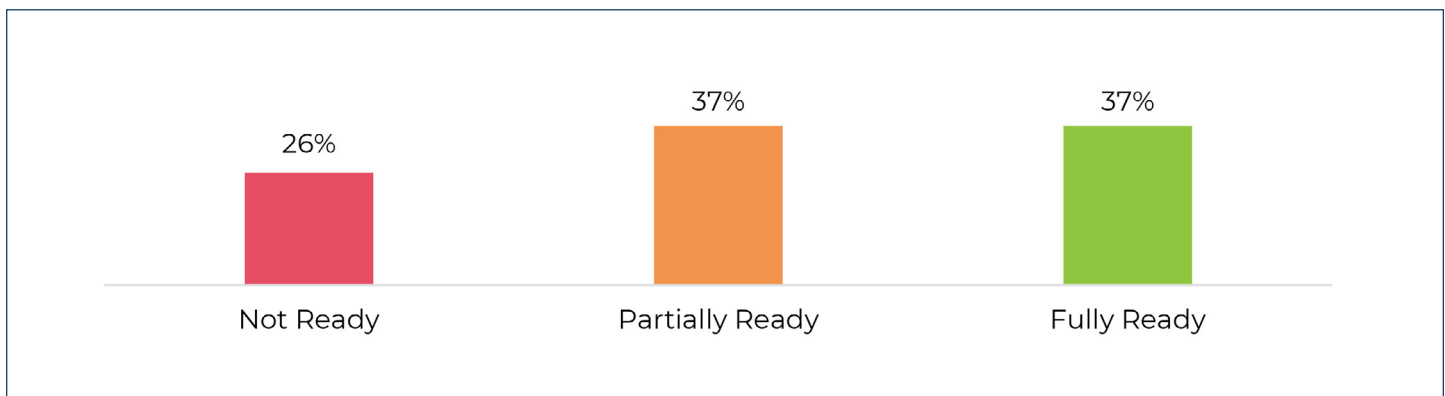
How ready for school were children assessed in Santa Clara County?

Children who were proficient or nearly proficient in all three of the primary readiness domains measured on the KOF (*Self-Regulation, Social Expression, and Kindergarten Academics*) were considered *Fully Ready* and made up 37% of the Santa Clara County SRA sample in 2023. Another 26% of children in the sample were *Not Ready*, meaning they scored below 3.25 in all three domains. The remaining 37% of the sample was *Partially Ready*, having scored at least 3.25 in one or two of the domains.

37%

of children in the 2023 SRA sample were **Fully Ready** for kindergarten

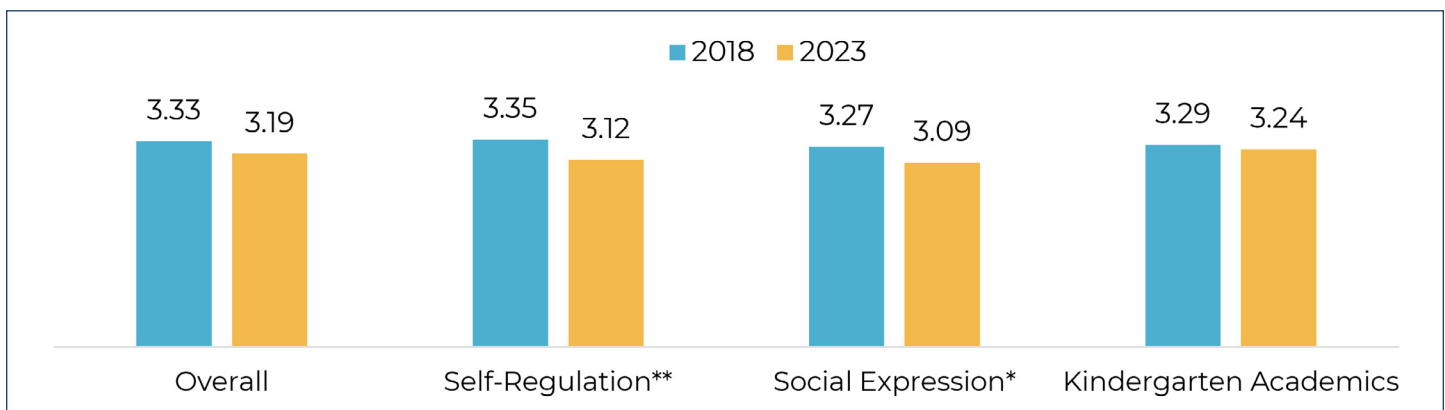
Figure 01: Readiness Profile



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.
Note: N = 918 (unweighted).

Children assessed in 2018 showed significantly higher readiness than children assessed in 2023 (in 2018, 50% of children assessed were *Fully Ready* for kindergarten). The figure that follows shows the average readiness scores overall and on each domain in each assessment year, after statistically adjusting for differences in the sample. The trend in lower readiness observed in 2023 relative to 2018 is similar to what has been observed in other parts of the state and country.^v It may be due to the lingering effects of COVID-19 on children and their families, including those resulting from the widespread closure of early care and education (ECE) sites (one of the strongest predictors of school readiness), other disruptions to ECE access, the lack of available vaccines for the youngest children, and families choosing not to enroll children in ECE during the height of the pandemic.

Figure 02: Average Readiness, by Domain and Year



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.
Note: Ns (Unweighted) = 585-614 (2018), 917-951 (2023). Differences are statistically significant at *p < .05, **p < .01. Average scores could range from 1 to 4. Model controls for race, child gender, age, English Learner status, special needs, and SES.




What child and family factors are associated with higher levels of school readiness?

The factors that were strongly and independently associated with readiness in the past two readiness studies are described in this section. Although many of these factors are related to one another, each one contributes to readiness even after taking into account the contributions of the other factors.

Malleable Assets

Many of the factors that were strongly associated with school readiness are experiences that can be modified with intervention; these “malleable assets” include access to early learning, community resources, and basic needs.

Figure 03: Factors Associated with School Readiness in Recent Santa Clara County Readiness Studies

	Early Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child attended licensed early care and education (ECE), including transitional kindergarten (TK)
	Child Development, Health, and Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child comes to school healthy, well-rested, & well-fed, & has consistent attendance[^] Child is exposed to less screen time Child demonstrates resilience (e.g., adjusts well to changes in routine)
	Family Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family has access to and uses community resources, such as libraries & museums Family has higher income (as income increases, readiness increases) Family has stable housing

[^]According to child's teacher. All other factors reported by child's parent/caregiver.

There are inequities in access to these assets rooted in systemic racism and community disinvestment, which help account for demographic differences in readiness, as we will discuss next.

Demographic Factors

Some of the factors associated with readiness were **demographic, including the child being older at the time of the assessment, being female, and identifying as White, as well as living with more than one caregiver.** English Learner students also tend to have lower readiness than children who are proficient in English (despite the fact that the assessment is conducted in the child's preferred language), but this correlation is no longer statistically significant when other factors are taken into account, indicating language is not one of the strongest predictors of readiness. While demographic characteristics are often correlated with school readiness, it is crucial to consider the complexity of this finding, recognizing the role of individual differences and environmental influences, including structural inequities and biases, in readiness disparities. For example, girls and older children may exhibit behaviors that are perceived as more conducive to the classroom environment, such as better impulse control, cooperation, and verbal communication skills.^{vi,vii} Yet societal expectations and stereotypes about gender, age, and race/ethnicity may also influence adults' perceptions of a child,^{viii} thereby impacting children's actual readiness outcomes.^{ix} Additionally, readiness disparities based on race/ethnicity may be attributable to the fact that children of color face various systemic, social, and economic challenges that can contribute to lower school readiness, including living in historically disinvested communities and experiencing barriers to quality early learning environments.^x

Similarly, single-parent families are often more socioeconomically disadvantaged with more limited access to resources that support readiness than families with more than one caregiver in the home.^{xi} **However, it is important to recognize that there is often more variability in readiness within groups than between groups of children.** Some younger children, boys, children of color, and children in single-parent families exhibit high levels of school readiness, while some older children, girls, White children, and children in families with multiple caregivers exhibit lower levels of readiness. Consequently, schools should be ready to address the unique needs of each student entering their classrooms.

How ready were families and communities to support children?

In addition to examining the readiness of children, we explored the readiness supports families and communities provided children to build their readiness. Key takeaways from this assessment include the following:

- **Less participation in ECE.** Relative to children in the 2018 sample, fewer children in the 2023 sample had attended any form of ECE. This was driven primarily by a drop in preschool attendance. *More* children had attended TK in the 2023 study than in the 2018 study.
- **More family engagement.** Families in the 2023 study were *more* likely to engage in sports and crafts activities at least four days per week than families in the 2018 study.
- **High levels of screen time.** Screen time exposure remained steady across the two studies; over half of the children in both years had more than the recommended amount of screen time (i.e., no more than one hour)^{xii} on weekends.
- **Insufficient sleep.** Less than a quarter of children in the 2023 study got the recommended 10 hours of sleep^{xiii} each night.
- **Fewer reported family concerns.** Parents/caregivers in the 2023 study were *less* likely to report family, employment, and basic needs concerns than parents/caregivers in the 2018 study.
- **Less use of community resources.** Fewer families in the 2023 study said they accessed community resources (e.g., parks, libraries, and museums) compared with families in the 2018 study.
- **Benefits of FIRST 5 Santa Clara County services.** Families who accessed services from a FIRST 5 Family Resource Center (FRC) received more school readiness information, engaged in more school readiness activities, and used more community resources; they also had a greater ability to soothe their child. These benefits are similar to those found in the 2018 study. In that study, utilization of FIRST 5 FRC services was associated with greater engagement in school readiness activities, a higher likelihood the child had received screenings, and higher child readiness in the social-emotional domains.

How ready were schools to support children?

Finally, the study looked at how ready elementary schools were to support their incoming kindergartners. When it comes to kindergarten transition supports, the study found the following:

- **Fewer kindergarten transition activities.** Families in the 2023 study were less likely to report kindergarten transition activities like meeting the child's teacher than families in the 2018 study.
- **Most receive kindergarten readiness information.** The percentage of parents/caregivers who received readiness information was consistent between the two studies, but ranged from two-thirds who received information about how ready their child was for kindergarten to 86% who received information about vaccinations needed for school.
- **Most receive readiness information from the child's teacher.** Nearly all parents/caregivers said they received information about kindergarten readiness from their child's preschool, child care, or kindergarten/TK teacher.



WHAT IS NEEDED TO “TURN THE CURVE” ON SCHOOL READINESS IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY?

The results from the assessment and the listening sessions with families and teachers point to several key recommendations to increase school readiness in Santa Clara County. The county can use these recommendations to build upon the rich range of resources and supports currently available to families.



Early Learning

Quality ECE has long been recognized as critical in preparing children for kindergarten. Parents/caregivers in the listening sessions noted improvements in their children's speech, reading abilities, social skills, and overall readiness for kindergarten as direct outcomes of engagement in early education programs (including preschool and TK). However, access to ECE was limited during the pandemic, and many parents/caregivers said they still struggle to find suitable ECE options for their children. Similarly, teachers noted a decline in ECE participation among their entering kindergartners. The expansion of TK to all 4-year-olds has the potential to improve access to ECE, but families discussed ongoing challenges in finding a school that offered TK and enrolling their child early enough to secure a spot in their local program. As the community navigates recovery from the pandemic, families and teachers said it is imperative to highlight the pivotal role of ECE in the county, and ensure it is both of high quality and affordable, particularly for families who may not qualify for child care subsidies but still struggle with the high cost of living in Santa Clara County. To have high-quality ECE with well-qualified staff, investments and policy changes are needed to increase the wages and benefits for ECE professionals, who still earn significantly less than employees in other sectors with similar education levels.^{xiv} Prioritizing affordable ECE supports children's educational growth and provides families in the county with an essential service that allows them to work and support their families.

The Santa Clara County Office of Education's **Resource and Referral Program** connects families to child care that meets their needs via its online **Childcare Portal**



Child Development, Health, and Well-Being Interventions

As we navigate the aftermath of the pandemic, families highlighted the critical need for comprehensive support systems that address children's development, health, and well-being. This includes ensuring resources are available for children with speech delays and other disabilities, which families reported were limited during the pandemic. Similarly, teachers were concerned about the increased number of kindergartners entering school with unaddressed special needs, particularly speech impairments, behavioral challenges, and autism spectrum disorders. Parents/caregivers were also worried about the negative effects of screen time—which families said they had to rely on during the pandemic to work and keep their children engaged—on children's language and social skills. They recommended increasing access to more enriching activities outside the home that could replace screen time. Finally, both families and teachers discussed concerns about the social-emotional health of young children in the wake of the pandemic and called for more kindergarten readiness services like FIRST 5 Family Resource Center programs that could help children build self-regulation, social skills, and resilience.

The **Inclusion Collaborative** supports ECE sites, schools, and community agencies to implement inclusive practices for children of all abilities and operates a multilingual **WarmLine** that offers families and providers support, information, and referrals



Family Support

Children experience more positive outcomes when their parents/caregivers are equipped with information and resources to help them support their child's readiness. More specifically, families participating in listening sessions expressed a desire for increased guidance and assistance in navigating the kindergarten/TK transition, including information on who is eligible for TK, the availability of TK programs in their neighborhood, the enrollment process for kindergarten/TK, the skills children need to be ready for kindergarten/TK, and how parents/caregivers can help their child build those skills. This study showed families commonly received kindergarten/TK transition information from their child's kindergarten teacher or school, but families indicated they needed this information earlier in the transition and enrollment process. Furthermore, families said further outreach is needed to ensure all parents/caregivers are aware of TK as an option and are assisted with finding and enrolling in a program. In addition to kindergarten/TK transition information, teachers recommended more parent education programs, preferably in the evening or online, to help parents/caregivers identify and address signs of a disability, set up routines, read effectively with their child, and manage their child's behavior. Families highlighted the role community hubs like libraries could play in delivering this information. Parents and caregivers are their child's first teacher, and thus there is a clear need for parent education and other services that can empower them to successfully navigate their child's transition into kindergarten/TK.

In addition to guidance and support around the kindergarten/TK transition, families need financial stability, which is correlated with reduced stress levels and access to a wider array of resources to enhance their children's readiness for school. Disparities in readiness levels, often observed along socioeconomic and racial/ethnic lines, primarily stem from systemic inequalities, such as differential access to essential school readiness opportunities like high-quality ECE. The pandemic took a toll on families' financial stability, and many continue to need income and basic needs assistance to make ends meet. Participants in the listening sessions specifically discussed needing help to pay for activities for their children, ECE, transportation, and internet access. Teachers and parents/caregivers wanted comprehensive resource lists or websites families could use to easily find needed services. Navigating the various systems that serve families can be a challenging and complex process, as these systems, which are rooted in systemic inequities, have often operated in isolation from one another. Families would benefit not only from additional supports, but also system alignment and assistance reaching the available services and resources.

Families can find a variety of resources and parenting supports through the online [FindHelp](#) portal and at the FIRST 5 Santa Clara County [Family Resource Centers](#)





Resources for Schools to Support the Kindergarten Transition

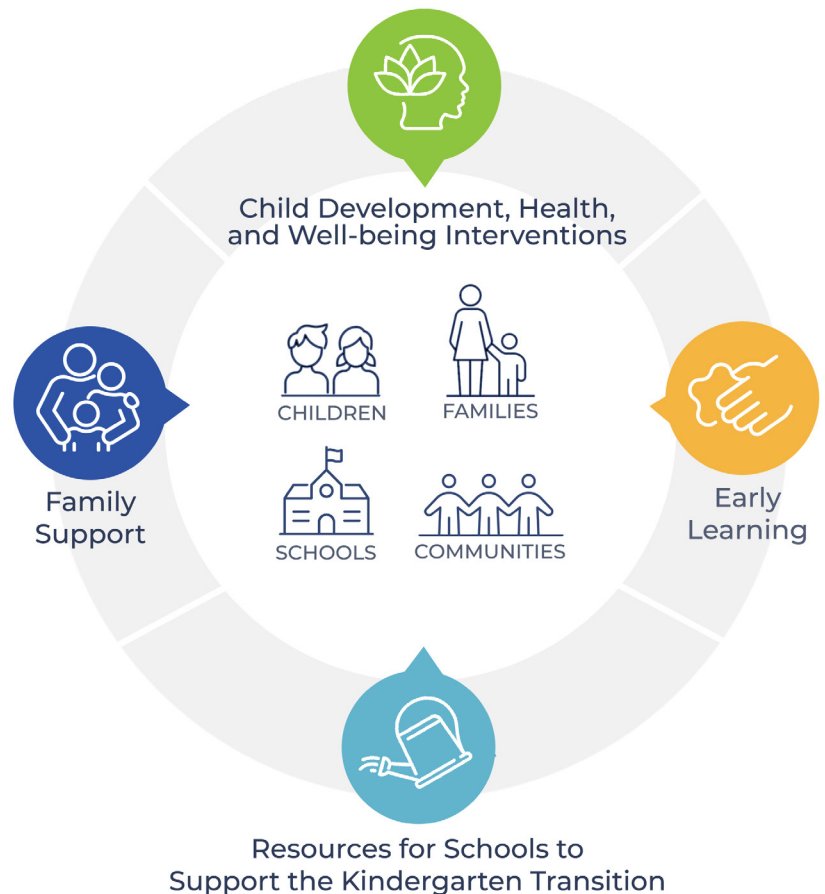
The concept of “school readiness” extends beyond the preparedness of individual children, families, or communities; it also encompasses the readiness of TK-12 schools to effectively cater to the needs of incoming students. As highlighted earlier, families expressed a need for greater access to kindergarten readiness information and advocated for schools to outreach to and actively engage with the families of incoming kindergartners in community spaces like libraries, family resource centers, community centers, and churches.

Additionally, families emphasized the importance of adequate school funding to ensure that schools have the necessary resources and staff to keep student-to-teacher ratios low and provide developmentally appropriate educational experiences that support the diverse needs of all incoming students, including younger students, boys, children of color, children with disabilities, and emergent bilingual students. Similarly, teachers called for more school counselors and other specialists (e.g., speech pathologists) to address the needs of students entering kindergarten.

With its **Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Initiative**, Santa Clara County Office of Education is building the capacity of school districts and community agencies to expand access to equitable, high-quality learning opportunities and supports for young children

CORE CONTRIBUTORS TO SCHOOL READINESS

Children’s experiences in early childhood significantly shape their long-term outcomes, and thus it is critical to prioritize investments that target the school readiness of children, families, communities, and schools. Partnerships, policies, and programs should be geared toward promoting the holistic well-being of each child and family, ensuring they have the necessary support to thrive in kindergarten and beyond.



ENDNOTES

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ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities by creating meaningful evaluative and assessment data, facilitating information-based planning, and developing custom strategies. The firm has more than 40 years of experience working with public and private agencies, health and human service organizations, city and county offices, school districts, institutions of higher learning, and charitable foundations. Through community assessments, program evaluations, and related studies, ASR provides the information communities need for effective strategic planning and community interventions.

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