SANTA CLARA COUNTY SCHOOL READINESS

FALL ASSESSMENT FINDINGS 2023

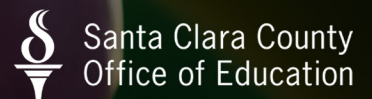### FULL REPORT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

CONTENTS

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) comprehensively examined 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 with families to inform updates to the study's parent survey, the *Parent Information Form (PIF)*. Listening sessions were also held 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 and share their insights and recommendations. The input obtained from families and teachers is included in this report.

Due to school closures and challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, only a parent survey was conducted in 2020, and a small sample of classes participated in teacher-administered assessments in 2021. Consequently, in this report, the 2023 results are compared only to the results of the 2018 SRA, the last time a comprehensive, representative countywide study was conducted. The study offers the clearest picture yet of how Santa Clara County's kindergarten students, families, and schools are faring in the wake of the pandemic.
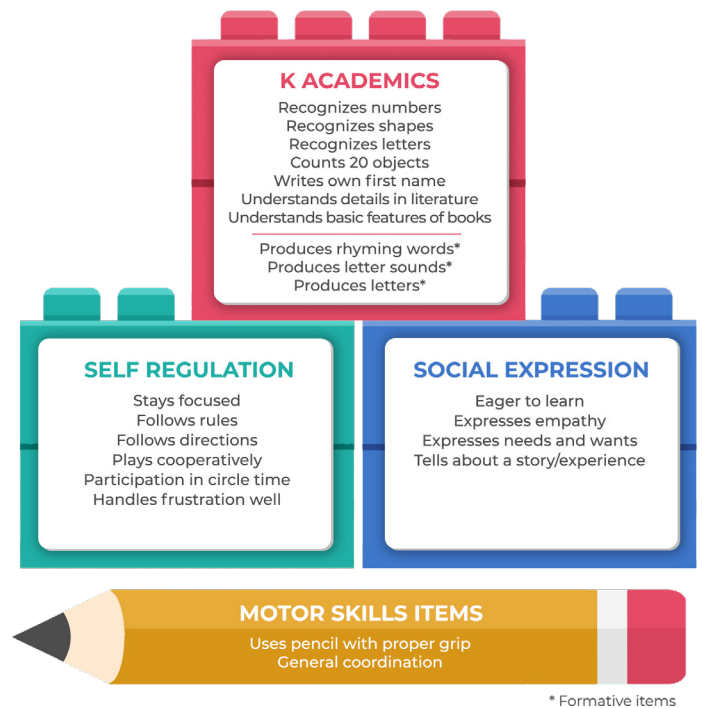
FOUR COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL READINESS

CHILDREN   FAMILIES   SCHOOLS   COMMUNITIES

METHODOLOGY

Kindergarten readiness was assessed by kindergarten teachers in the first few weeks of the school year using the *Kindergarten Observation Form* (*KOF*), a reliable and valid assessment that has been shown to predict third-grade academic achievement.[iv] The *KOF*'s kindergarten readiness skills are scored on a four-point scale from 1 = *Not Yet* demonstrating the skill to 4 = *Proficient* on the skill. These readiness skills comprised *three Building Blocks – Self-Regulation, Social Expression, and Kindergarten Academics*. A fourth area includes two items related to fine and gross motor skills, which serve as a foundation for these *Building Blocks*. Rhyming, producing letter sounds, and producing letters collectively represent advanced *Kindergarten Academic* skills that kindergartners are not expected to be competent in at kindergarten entry; these items were not included in the assessment in 2023.

K ACADEMICS
Recognizes numbers
Recognizes shapes
Recognizes letters
Counts 20 objects
Writes own first name
Understands details in literature
Understands basic features of books

Produces rhyming words*
Produces letter sounds*
Produces letters*

SELF REGULATION
Stays focused
Follows rules
Follows directions
Plays cooperatively
Participation in circle time
Handles frustration well

SOCIAL EXPRESSION
Eager to learn
Expresses empathy
Expresses needs and wants
Tells about a story/experience

MOTOR SKILLS ITEMS
Uses pencil with proper grip
General coordination

* Formative items

All teachers participated in a 90-minute training prior to conducting the assessment. At these trainings, ASR staff reviewed the scoring rubric and a detailed scoring guide, then allowed teachers to practice assigning ratings based on pictures and scenarios. These trainings and the specific skill descriptions provided in the scoring guide were designed to minimize the possibility of teacher bias.

To better understand how family factors are related to children's levels of readiness, a *Parent Information Form (PIF)* survey was completed by parents/caregivers. Care was taken to ensure that the questions could be read at a sixth-grade reading level. Versions of the form were offered in English and Spanish, and parents/caregivers were given a children's book as an incentive for their completion of the *PIF*.

Listening Sessions

The study this year utilized participatory methods to improve the quality of the data collection and interpretation of the results. Families with children ages 3-6 were recruited from local community-based organizations and elementary schools to participate in listening sessions, helping inform the study methods and interpretation of the results. Each participant in the listening sessions was compensated with a $30 gift card for their time. In June 2023, two listening sessions were conducted (one in English and one in Spanish) with six families to inform updates to the *PIF*. Families reviewed the *PIF* and answered questions about the relevance, clarity, and respectfulness of the survey items. In March 2024, English and Spanish listening sessions were conducted with 22 parents/caregivers to provide insights and recommendations related to the results of the assessment. Finally, in April 2024, a listening session was conducted with five teachers from five different districts to discuss the results and their implications for the community.

Listening sessions were conducted with families and teachers to gather their insights and recommendations

SAMPLE

In all, 951 kindergarten students from 34 classrooms were included in the study.[v] The table below shows the number of classrooms and study participants represented by each school. The sample represents 7% of the 14,602 students enrolled in kindergarten in the county in 2023,[vi] and is large enough to produce statistically valid and reliable results, but please see "A Note about How to Interpret the Data in This Report" at the end of this section for a discussion of the study's limitations, which affect the generalizability of the results to the larger population. Please also note that some districts were over-represented in the sample (e.g., Campbell Union, Santa Clara Unified, and Oak Grove Elementary) to compensate for the fact that some districts did not participate in the study (e.g., Cupertino Union, Palo Alto Unified, and Union Elementary; please see Appendix A for more details), and **the sample was not representative at the district level**.

Figure 01: An Overview of Participation, by School

District	School	# of Classrooms	# of Students
Alum Rock Union Elementary	Cesar Chavez	1	24
	LUCHA	1	23
Berryessa Union Elementary	Cherrywood Elementary	1	17
	Laneview Elementary	1	22
Cambrian	Fammatre Elementary	1	22
Campbell Union	Campbell School of Innovation	1	19
	Capri Elementary	1	20
	Castlemont Elementary	2	45
Evergreen	Carolyn A. Clark Elementary	1	25
Franklin-McKinley	Franklin Elementary	1	21
	Santee Elementary	1	25
Gilroy Unified	Glen View Elementary	1	18
	Luigi Aprea Elementary	1	18
Lakeside Joint	Lakeside Elementary	1	10
Los Altos Elementary	Santa Rita Elementary	2	44
Los Gatos Union Elementary	Blossom Hill Elementary	1	21
Milpitas Unified	Joseph Weller Elementary	2	38
Moreland Elementary	George C. Payne Elementary	1	15
Morgan Hill Unified	Nordstrom Elementary	1	24
Mt. Pleasant Elementary	Robert Sanders Elementary	2	34
Oak Grove Elementary	Del Roble Elementary	1	14
	Ledesma (Rita) Elementary	2	35
	Oak Ridge Elementary	2	43
San Jose Unified	Booksin Elementary	3	67
	Washington Elementary	1	22
Santa Clara Unified	Abram Agnew Elementary	1	21
	Bracher Elementary	1	21
	Braly Elementary	1	16
	George Mayne Elementary	1	21
	Kathryn Hughes Elementary	2	34
	Montague Elementary	2	41
	Westwood Elementary	1	18
Saratoga Union Elementary	Argonaut Elementary	2	30
Sunnyvale	Ellis Elementary	4	83
Total		**48**	**951**

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.

The map below illustrates the participation of children in the study, by the ZIP Code of the child's school. We had the greatest participation in the most populous ZIP Codes of the county—San Jose, Sunnyvale, and Santa Clara.

**Figure 02: An Overview of Participation, by ZIP Code**
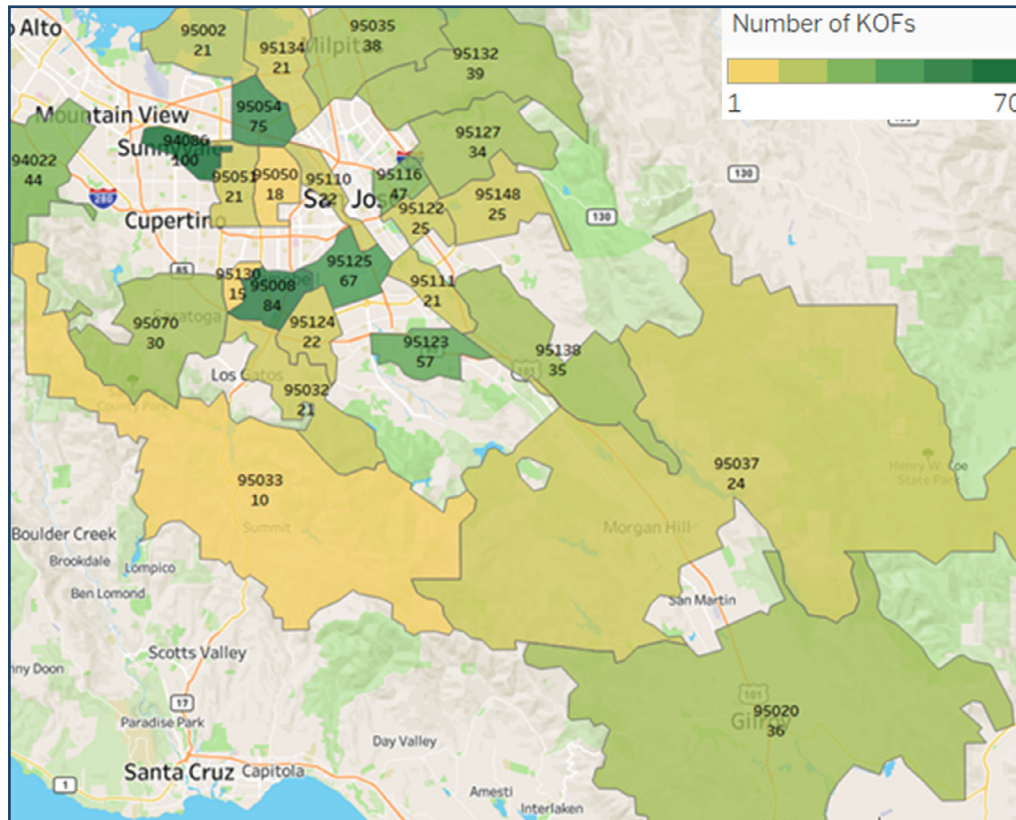
Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.
Note: Map shows ZIP Code of the child's school rather than home due to the availability of more complete, accurate data.

In the current study, children were 5.4 years old on average at the time of the assessment. Just over half (52%) were male and 48% were female. About 6% of families stated that they entered the US as a refugee.

About 41% of the sample was Hispanic/Latino, 29% was Asian, 15% was White, 4% was Filipino, 1% was Black, and 6% was multiracial or another race. Race/ethnicity was not reported for the remaining 5% of the sample. The sample was racially/ethnically representative of the county kindergarten population, differing from the overall county by no more than two percentage points for each racial/ethnic category.

Figure 03: Students' Race/Ethnicity
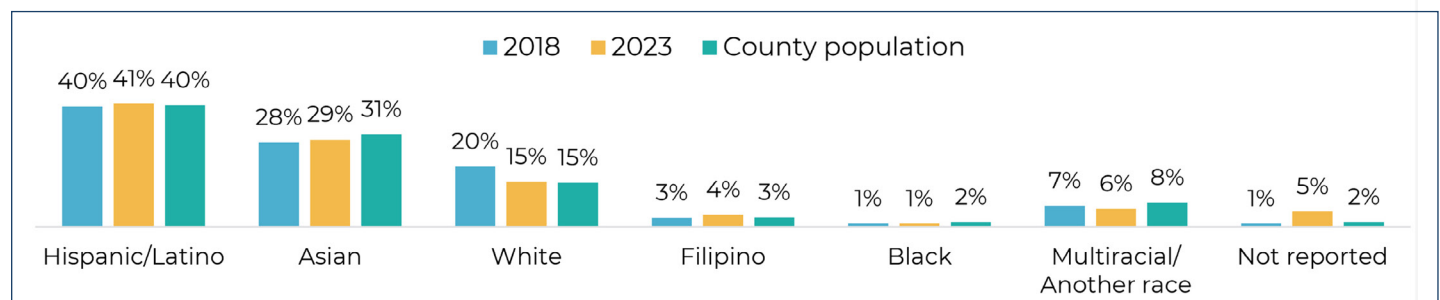
Source: Kindergarten Observation Form, Parent Information Form. California Department of Education (2023-24).
Note: N = 872 (2018); N = 951 (2023). Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Another race includes Native American and Pacific Islander.

Most children primarily heard English at home (62%), while about 20% of children heard Spanish most often at home. The remainder of the sample primarily heard Chinese, Vietnamese, a South Asian language, or another language at home. Over a quarter (26%) of children were emergent bilingual students. Data on the primary home language is not available for the countywide kindergarten population, but 36% of entering kindergartners were designated as English Learners in 2023.[vii]

Figure 04: Home Languages
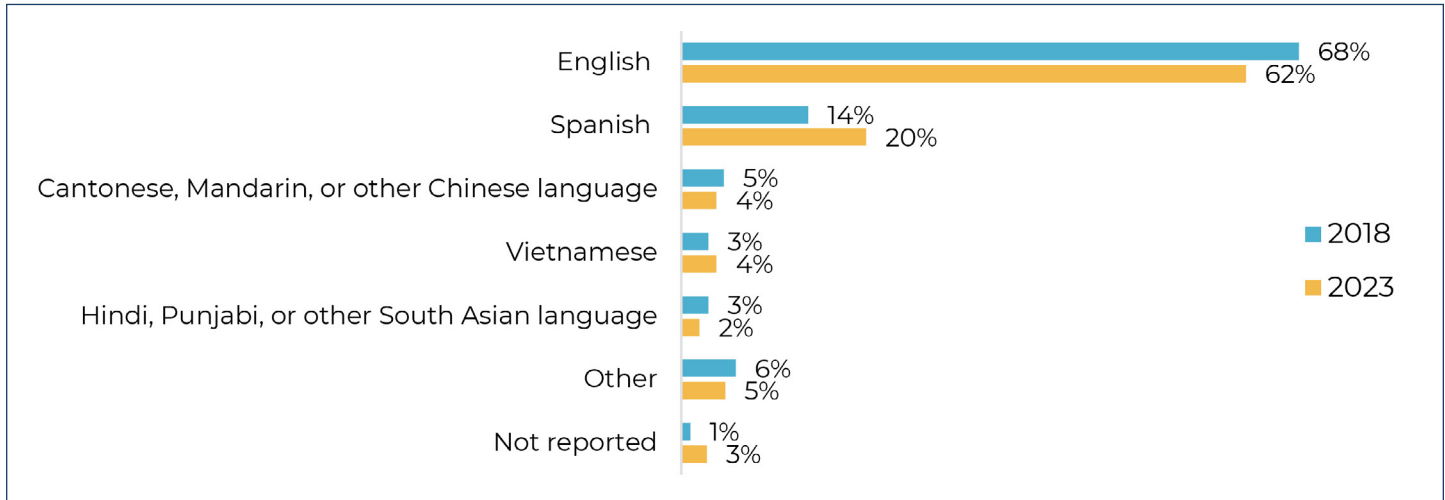
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 878 (2018); N = 951 (2023). Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

When asked about their current family income, about one in five (18%) of parents/caregivers reported earning less than $50,000 per year, about 14% earned between $50,000 and $100,000 per year, and 39% earned at least $100,000 per year. Income was not reported for the remainder of the sample. The income range options provided on the 2018 survey were different than those provided on the 2023 survey, but almost one-quarter (24%) of families in the 2018 study earned less than $50,000 per year, and 23% did not report their income. Households in the current study were somewhat lower income than households in the county overall, according to the US Census American Community Survey. However, it should be noted that the Census data reflects all households, not just those with entering kindergartners.

Figure 05: Family Income
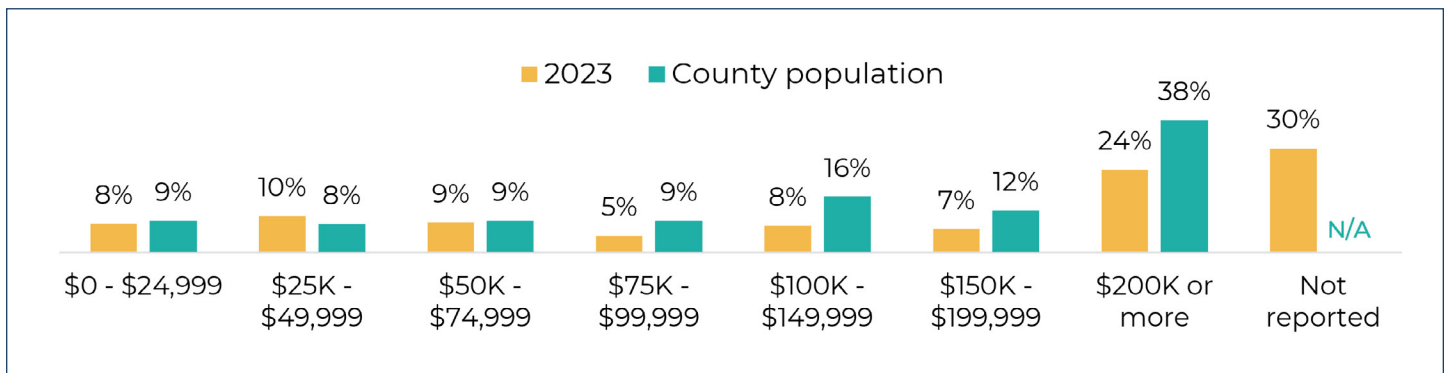
Source: Parent Information Form. US Census American Community Survey (2022)
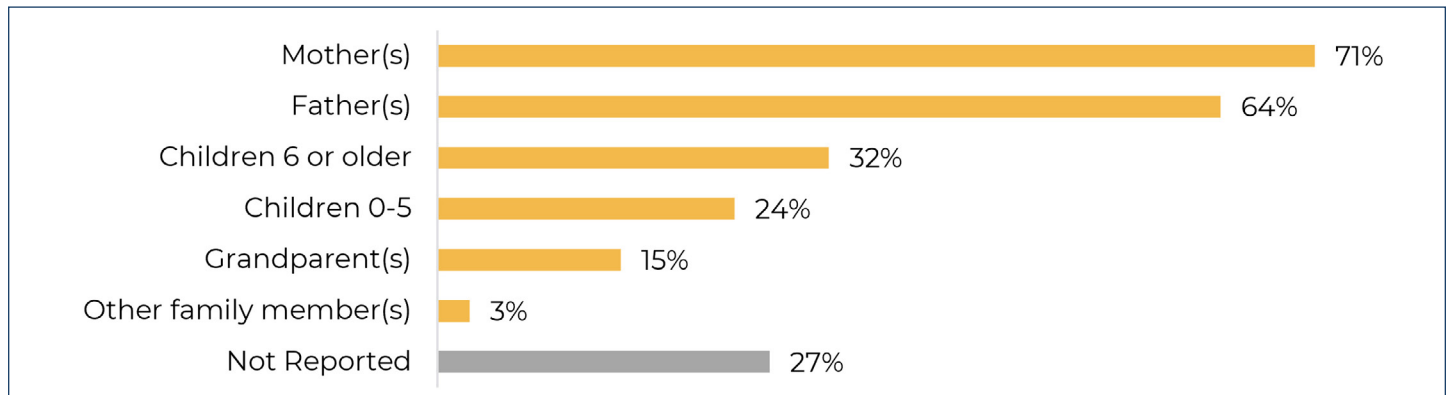Note: N = 952. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Different income ranges were provided on the 2018 survey.
N/A: Information not available.

In 2023, we asked families to report on who lives at home with the child (this question was not asked in 2018). Most children lived with at least two parents/caregivers. These caregivers were primarily mother(s) and/or father(s), but about one in five children lived with grandparents or other family members, such as uncles, aunts, and stepparents. About a third (32%) lived with an older sibling, and 24% lived with siblings ages 0-5. Family composition was not reported for 27% of the sample.

Figure 06: Family Composition, 2023

Category	Percentage
Mother(s)	71%
Father(s)	64%
Children 6 or older	32%
Children 0-5	24%
Grandparent(s)	15%
Other family member(s)	3%
Not Reported	27%

Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 694. Question not asked in 2018.

A Note about How to Interpret the Data in This Report

The SRA sample was large and representative of the county in terms of race/ethnicity but differed from the overall county on other demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic characteristics, and was not large enough to generalize the results for specific demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic subgroups. Also, teachers and parents/caregivers participated in the readiness study voluntarily. This means that participants in the study may differ in important ways from students and families who did not participate. Furthermore, the findings should also be considered in the context of limitations inherent to teacher observations and parent/caregiver surveys, including implicit bias, social desirability bias (when respondents tend to make a more socially acceptable response), and reference bias (when responses are influenced by participants' differing reference points based on their own experience and understanding). Due to the study's limitations, generalizations to the larger population should be made with caution.

READINESS OF CHILDREN

This section presents information on the readiness levels of students entering kindergarten according to the *KOF* as well as indicators of child health and well-being, which impact children's readiness for school.
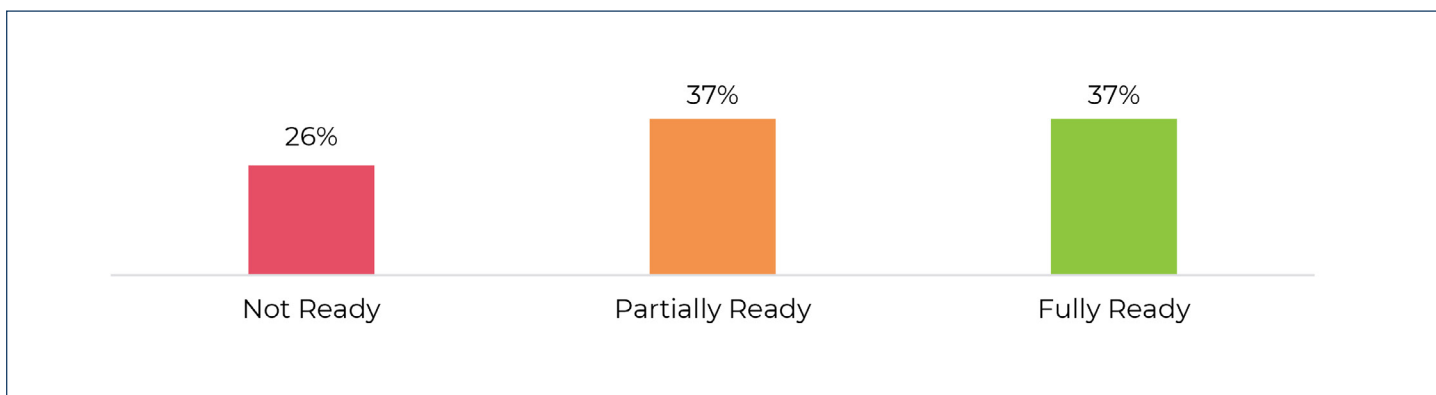
KINDERGARTEN READINESS ON THE *KOF*

Students' average scores overall and on each of the *Basic Building Blocks* dimensions were calculated (scores could range from 1 = *Not Yet* to 4 = *Proficient*). Children who scored 3.25 or higher on the assessment in all of the three primary domains (*Self-Regulation, Social Expression, and Kindergarten Academics*) were considered *Fully Ready* and made up 37% of the Santa Clara County SRA sample in 2023, whereas 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%

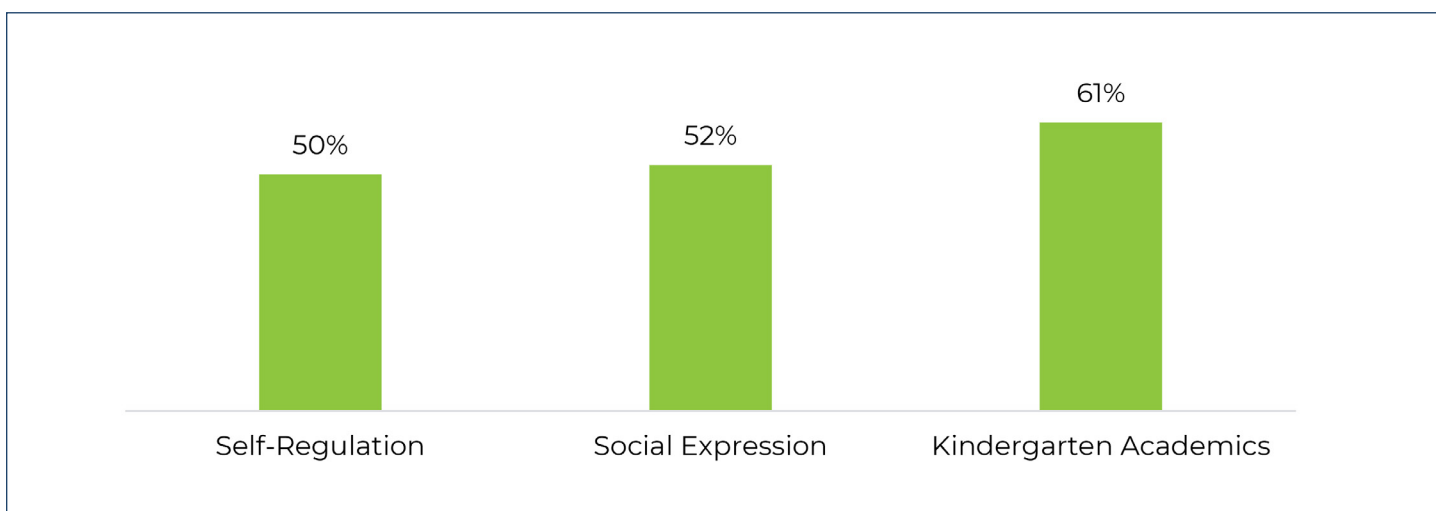of children in the 2023 SRA sample were *Fully Ready* for kindergarten

Figure 07: Readiness Profile

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

The percentage of children ready in each domain ranged from 50% to 61%, and readiness was highest in the *Kindergarten Academics* domain.

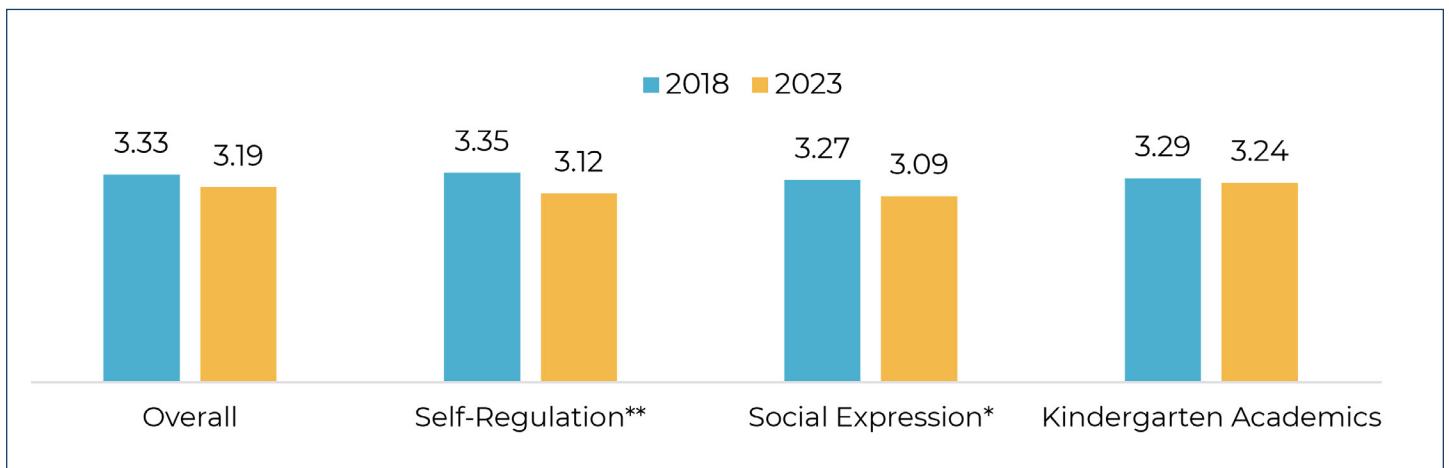**Figure 08: Percentage Ready, by Domain**

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.
Note: N = 917 - 951.

Compared to children assessed in 2018, children assessed in 2023 showed similar academic readiness, but were less likely to demonstrate strong social-emotional skills

Compared to the children assessed in 2018, when 50% of children were *Fully Ready*, fewer children in the 2023 study demonstrated the skills needed to be successful in kindergarten. In particular, children assessed in 2023 had significantly lower *Self-Regulation and Social Expression* scores than children assessed in 2018. 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 is similar to what has been observed in other parts of the state and country.[viii] 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 09: Average Readiness, by Domain and Year

Legend: ■ 2018 ■ 2023

	2018	2023
Overall	3.33	3.19
Self-Regulation**	3.35	3.12
Social Expression*	3.27	3.09
Kindergarten Academics	3.29	3.24

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.

The figure that follows illustrates the distribution of scores for each of the 19 items on the *KOF*. Students in the study entered kindergarten strongest at recognizing shapes and numbers. Skills they were still developing included answering questions about a story and telling about a story or experience.

Figure 10: Students' Proficiency Levels across School Readiness Skills

MOTOR SKILLS				
Has general coordination		9%	34%	55%
Uses a pencil with proper grip	5%	12%	30%	53%

SELF-REGULATION				
Follows two-step directions	6%	18%	29%	47%
Works and plays cooperatively with peers	5%	16%	33%	46%
Follows class rules and routines	6%	20%	33%	41%
Participates successfully in large group activities	8%	20%	31%	41%
Handles frustration well	9%	18%	34%	39%
Stays focused in individual/small group activities	7%	21%	35%	37%

SOCIAL EXPRESSION				
Demonstrates curiosity, eagerness for learning	5%	18%	34%	43%
Expresses empathy or caring for others	7%	19%	34%	40%
Appropriately expresses needs and wants	6%	19%	36%	39%
Tells about a story or experience	9%	22%	33%	36%

KINDERGARTEN ACADEMICS				
Recognizes primary shapes		7%	24%	65%
Recognizes numbers 0-10	5%	11%	20%	64%
Writes own first name	8%	15%	25%	52%
Understands structure, basic features of books	7%	19%	26%	48%
Counts up to 20 objects	7%	11%	35%	46%
Recognizes letters of the alphabet	6%	19%	34%	41%
Answers questions about details in literature	13%	19%	33%	36%

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form. N = 871 - 951. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Proportions of less than 5% are not labeled. Scores were omitted for 33 students for whom language barriers were a concern.

MALLEABLE ASSETS ASSOCIATED WITH OVERALL READINESS

An analysis called *multiple regression* was conducted to explore the characteristics and experiences that most strongly correlate with school readiness. The analysis examines how factors are uniquely related to readiness levels, holding constant other characteristics or experiences. However, the analyses are ultimately correlational—*not causal*—analyses. The only way to truly determine what causes increased readiness is by conducting a well-controlled experiment. It is also important to note that there are likely many other variables that could affect readiness that are beyond the scope of this assessment.

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 11: Factors Associated with School Readiness in Recent Santa Clara County Readiness Studies
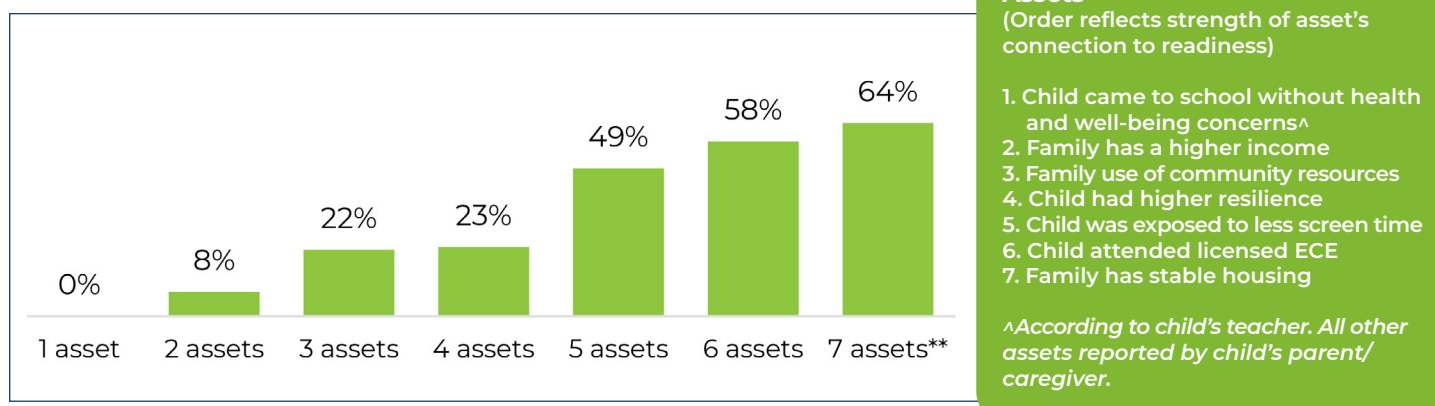
🤝	**Early Learning**	• Child attended licensed early care and education (ECE), including transitional kindergarten (TK)
🧠	**Child Development, Health, and Well-being**	• Child comes to school healthy, well-rested, & well-fed, & has consistent attendance^ • Child is exposed to less screen time • Child demonstrates resilience (e.g., adjusts well to changes in routine)
👪	**Family Support**	• 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.

CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF ASSETS

There is a cumulative effect of these malleable assets on children's readiness for kindergarten—the more assets children have, the higher their readiness. Over two-thirds (64%) of children with all seven assets were *Fully Ready,* whereas none of the children with only one asset was *Fully Ready*.

Figure 12: Percentage *Fully Ready*, by Number of Assets

1 asset	2 assets	3 assets	4 assets	5 assets	6 assets	7 assets**
0%	8%	22%	23%	49%	58%	64%

Assets
(Order reflects strength of asset's connection to readiness)

1. Child came to school without health and well-being concerns^
2. Family has a higher income
3. Family use of community resources
4. Child had higher resilience
5. Child was exposed to less screen time
6. Child attended licensed ECE
7. Family has stable housing

^According to child's teacher. All other assets reported by child's parent/ caregiver.

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form, Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 664. Differences are statistically significant at **p < .01. Definitions of assets: child was rarely hungry, tired, sick, absent, or tardy; family income is at least $100K/year (the approximate eligibility cutoff for subsidized care for a family of three); family used at least three community resources; child adjusts well to changes in routine, calms self, and stays calm when faced with a challenge; child was exposed to one hour or less of screen time on weekdays; child attended licensed ECE; family has not experienced homelessness in child's lifetime.

There are inequities in access to these assets rooted in systemic racism and community disinvestment, which help account for the demographic differences in readiness discussed later in this section.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN READINESS

In addition to the malleable assets, 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 non-Latino/a, 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. It is crucial to consider the complexity of the link between demographic factors and readiness, 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.[ix,x] Yet societal expectations and stereotypes about gender, age, and race/ethnicity may also influence adults' perceptions of a child,[xi] thereby impacting children's actual readiness outcomes.[xii]

> Disparities in readiness are largely rooted in **structural inequities and biases and community disinvestment**

> **Access** to assets like early learning, community resources, and basic needs **increases readiness**

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.[xiii] Similarly, families with just one primary caregiver are often more socioeconomically disadvantaged with more limited access to resources to support readiness than families with more than one caregiver in the home.[xiv] Indeed, as shown in the chart that follows, Hispanic/Latino children had fewer assets than children of other races/ethnicities, and children in single-caregiver families had fewer assets than those in multi-caregiver households. These disparities in assets may partly account for the demographic readiness differences observed.

Figure 13: Average Number of Assets, by Race/Ethnicity and Number of Parents/Caregivers
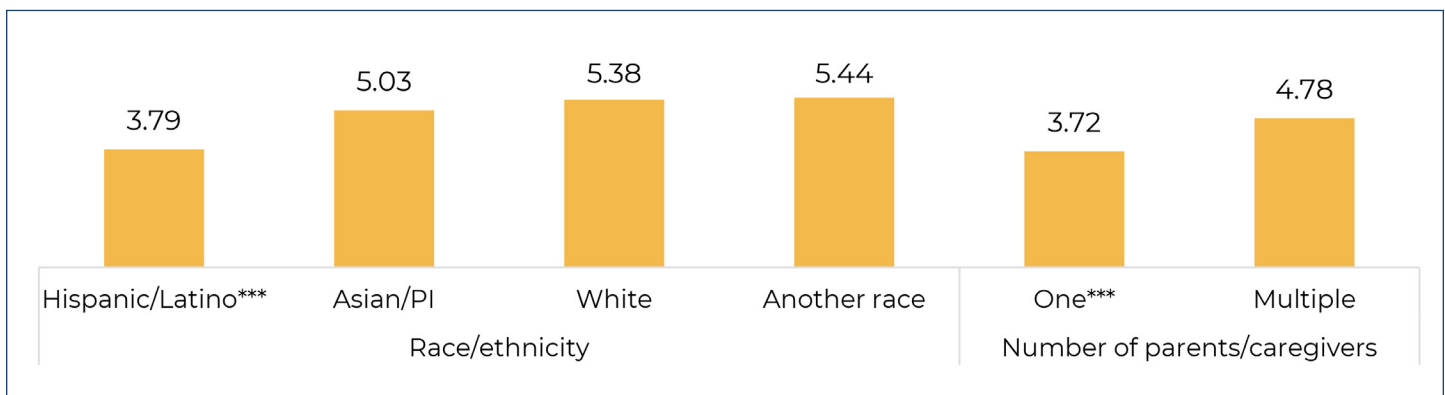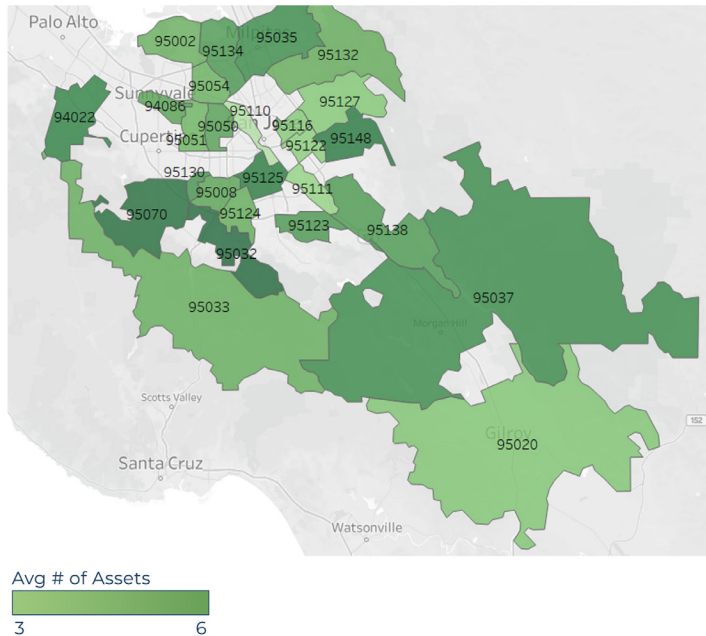
Source: Kindergarten Observation Form, Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 606-618. Differences are statistically significant at ***p < .001.

Despite the group disparities we observed and discussed in this section, it is also 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.

GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN READINESS

As with demographic disparities, geographic differences in readiness were also strongly linked to differences across the county in the availability of resources and experiences that promote kindergarten readiness. Historical policies and practices like redlining, which denied services like banking and insurance to certain neighborhoods based on their racial or ethnic composition, have contributed to a legacy of segregation and geographic inequities in resources. In Santa Clara County, socioeconomic and safety disparities still exist between ZIP Codes that were redlined—like 95116 (East San Jose)—and ZIP Codes that were not—like 95125 (Willow Glen).[xv,xvi] The maps below illustrate the average readiness of students, by the ZIP Code of their school,[1] compared to the average number of malleable assets, by ZIP Code. It demonstrates that where families have access to more assets (generally in communities that were not redlined), children have higher readiness levels overall.

Average Number of Assets, by ZIP Code

Avg # of Assets

3   6

Average Readiness Score, by ZIP Code

Avg Readiness Score

2.6   3.5
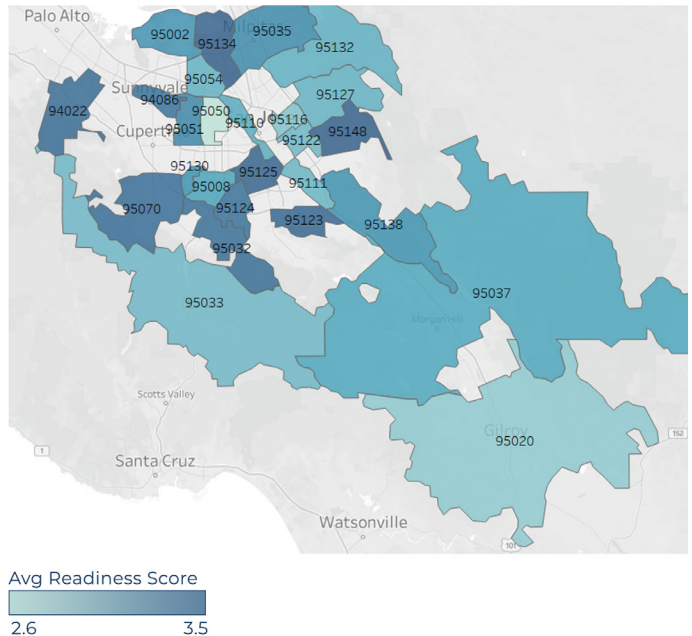
Source: Kindergarten Observation Form, Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 688 - 951.

1 The ZIP Code of the child's school rather than home was used due to the availability of more complete, accurate data. The majority of students lived in the same ZIP Code as their school.

ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF CHILD READINESS

In addition to data on readiness according to the *KOF,* parents/caregivers and teachers shared their perspectives on children's learning and social-emotional well-being.

Parent/Caregiver Concerns about Child Health and Well-Being

The most common concern parents/caregivers had about their child was managing their child's behavior, reported by 42% of the sample. Over a quarter of parents/caregivers were concerned about their child's mental health (28%) and that their child had fallen behind in learning (27%). Fewer families were concerned about their child's physical health. Most of these questions were not asked in the 2018 study, but in that year, 55% of parents/caregivers reported concerns about managing their child's behavior.

**Figure 14: Percentage of Parents/Caregivers Reporting Concerns about Their Child, 2023**
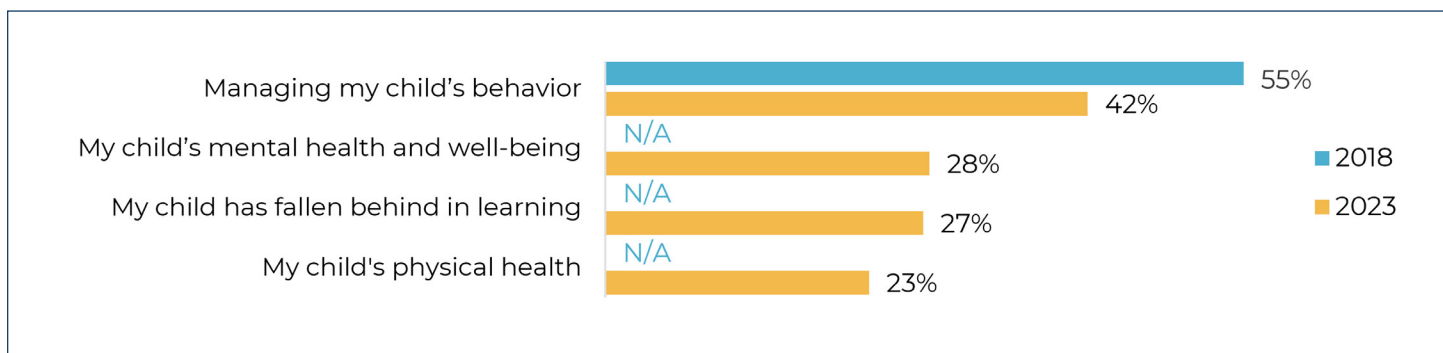
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 683 - 690 (2023). Numbers reflect the percentage of respondents who marked "a little," "moderately," or "very" concerned; proportion who marked "not at all" not shown. N/A: Question not asked in 2018.

Child Resilience

Child resilience is often strongly correlated with kindergarten readiness. Resilience levels stayed consistent over time and in both years, children were more likely to adjust well to changes in routine than they were to stay calm when faced with the challenge and calm themselves when upset.

Figure 15: Parents'/Caregivers' Perceptions of Child Resilience
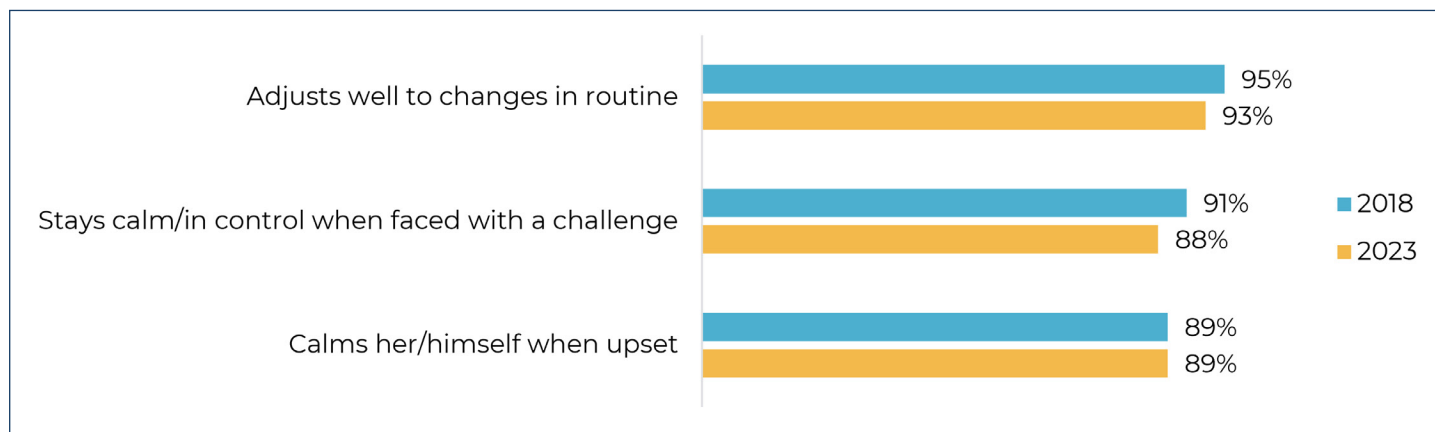
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 945 - 947 (2018); N = 693 - 694 (2023). Reflects proportion who marked the statement is "somewhat true" or "very true" of their child; proportion who marked "not true" not shown.
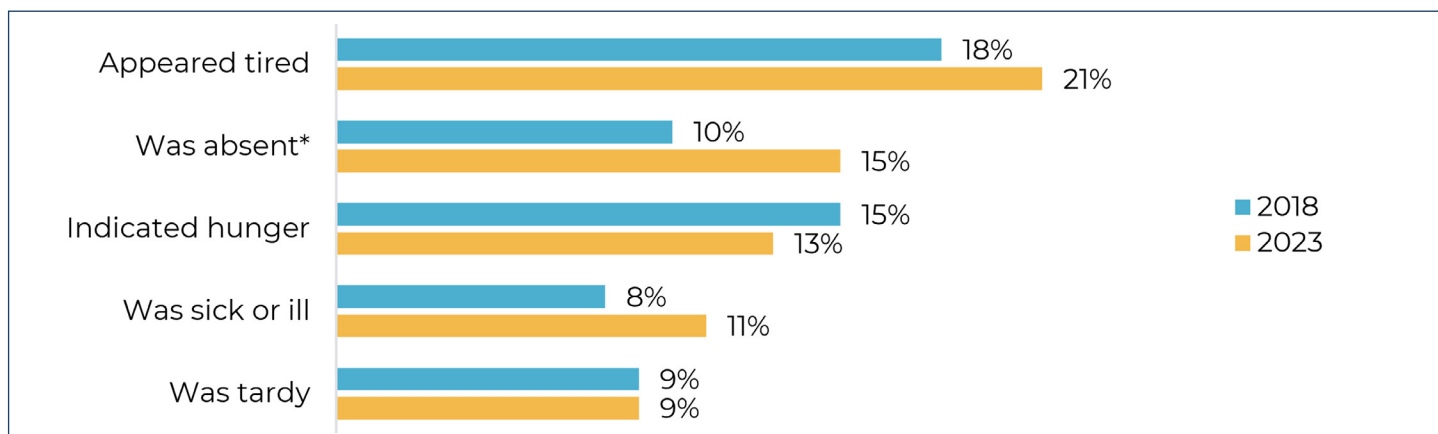
Teacher Concerns about Child Health and Well-Being

Teachers indicated the extent to which children demonstrated health and well-being and attendance concerns in the first few weeks of school; these ratings were strongly correlated with readiness on the *KOF*. Teachers' concerns about the child appearing tired or sick at school increased slightly from 2018 to 2023, while their concerns about child hunger dropped. The most significant change over time was in reported absences: 10% of children in the 2018 study were absent on at least some days compared to 15% of children in the 2023 study.

Teacher observations of **child absences increased between the 2018 and 2023 studies**

Figure 16: Well-Being and Attendance Concerns

	2018	2023
Appeared tired	18%	21%
Was absent*	10%	15%
Indicated hunger	15%	13%
Was sick or ill	8%	11%
Was tardy	9%	9%

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form. Note: N = 1,229 - 1,230 (2018); N = 938 - 940 (2023). Reflects proportion who marked "on some days," "on most days," or "just about every day." Differences are statistically significant at *p < .05.

SECTION SUMMARY

Key Findings

- Based on the *KOF* assessment, 37% of the Santa Clara County SRA sample was *Fully Ready* for kindergarten in 2023.

- Readiness was lower in the 2023 SRA study than it was in the 2018 study, especially in the *Self-Regulation and Social Expression* domains of the *KOF*.

- 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.

- Demographic and geographic disparities in readiness are strongly correlated with differences in access to resources and experiences that promote kindergarten readiness.

- Teachers conducting the assessment were more likely to report absences in 2023 than they were in 2018.

Recommendations

- Invest in malleable assets in the community, such as high-quality early learning, community resources, and basic needs, while actively working to reduce disparities in access due to factors like demographics and geography. In addition, expand community services and activities that address the social-emotional health of young children.

READINESS OF FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES

ASR
SCHOOL READINESS

This section describes the readiness of families and communities to support child development and readiness outcomes.
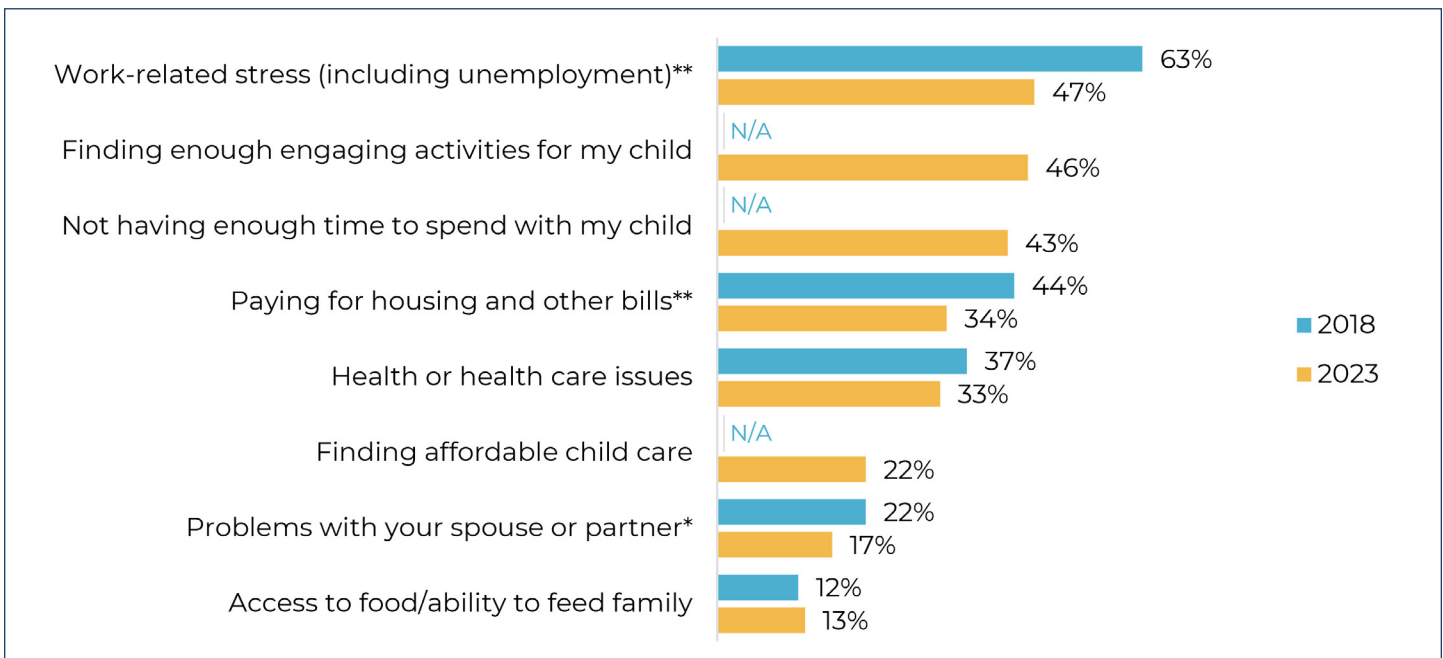
FAMILY AND CAREGIVING CONCERNS

Parents/caregivers indicated the degree to which they were worried about various types of family concerns. On average, parents/caregivers reported experiencing three of the eight stressors listed. The most common concerns were related to employment, finding enough engaging activities for their child, and having enough time to spend with the child. Concerns about employment, finances, and one's spouse or partner were actually *lower* among the parents/caregivers in the 2023 sample relative to those in the 2018 sample.

Parents/caregivers in the 2023 SRA sample expressed **fewer family concerns** than parents/caregivers in the 2018 sample

Figure 17: Percentage of Parents/Caregivers Reporting Family Concerns

| Concern	2018	2023
Work-related stress (including unemployment)**	63%	47%
Finding enough engaging activities for my child	N/A	46%
Not having enough time to spend with my child	N/A	43%
Paying for housing and other bills**	44%	34%
Health or health care issues	37%	33%
Finding affordable child care	N/A	22%
Problems with your spouse or partner*	22%	17%
Access to food/ability to feed family	12%	13%

Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 916-927 (2018); 683-690 (2023). Numbers reflect the percentage of respondents who marked "a little," "moderately," or "very" concerned; proportion who marked "not at all" not shown. N/A: Question not asked in 2018. Differences are statistically significant at *p < .05, **p < .01.

Parents/caregivers also indicated how COVID-19 had affected their employment and income. Almost two-thirds of the sample reported at least one effect, the most common of which was having to work from home with children around. Slightly more fathers were affected by this impact than mothers.

**Figure 18: Impact of COVID-19 on Family Income and Employment, 2023**
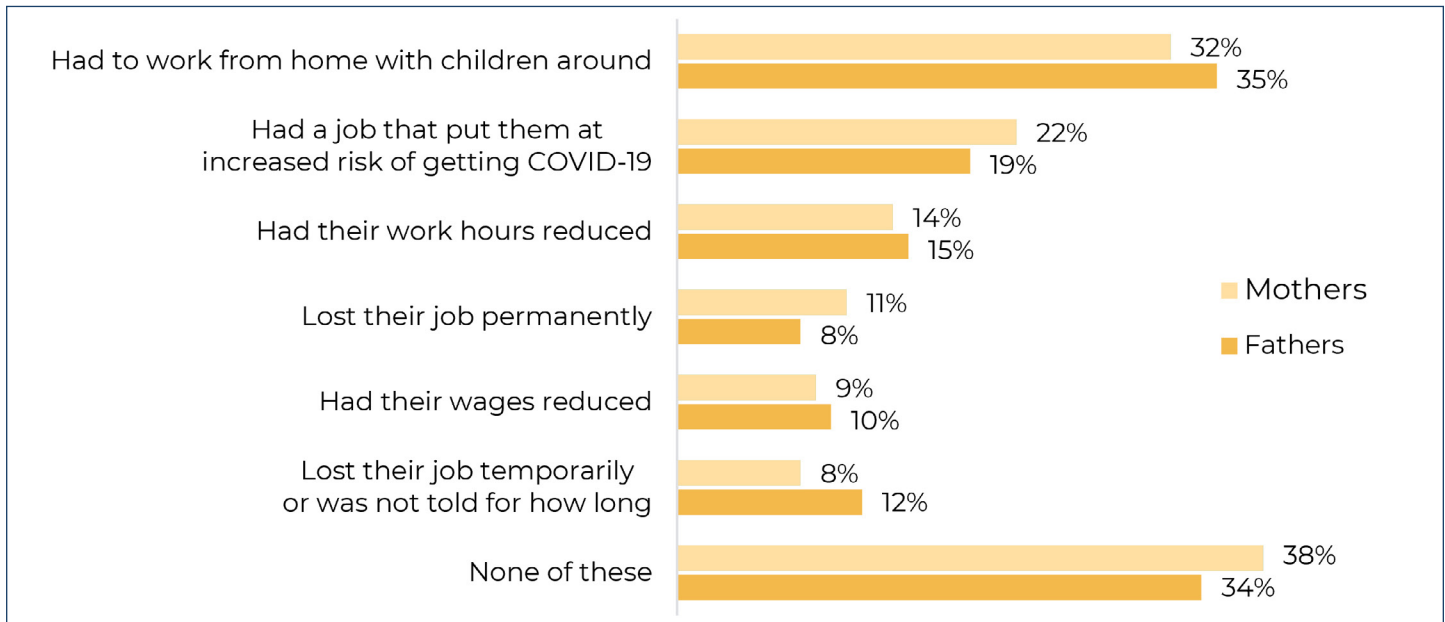
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 298 (2020); N = 528 – 537 (2023). Percentages sum to more than 100 because more than one category could be selected. Question not asked in 2018.

HOUSING SECURITY

Families' reported experiences of housing security were consistent over time. Residential mobility was common, with over half of families in both studies having lived at more than one address since the child was born. In addition, 6% of parents/caregivers in both years said they had experienced homelessness at some point in their child's life.

Figure 19: Housing Stability in Child's Lifetime
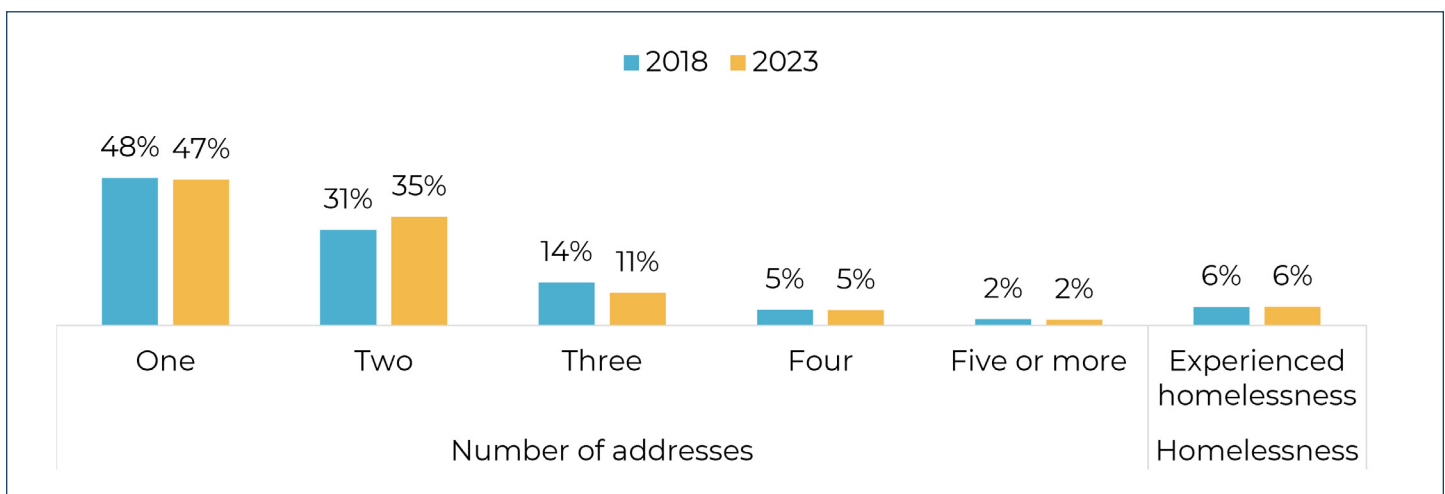
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 945 (2018); N = 679- 689 (2023). Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Homelessness included staying in a public place, shelter, hotel, or with friends or family due to economic hardship.

PARENTING EFFICACY

The parent/caregiver survey included a set of questions to assess parenting self-efficacy. Most parents/caregivers (89%) reported that they are able to soothe or calm their child. Over 8 in 10 parents/caregivers (81%) were also confident in their ability to support their child's learning at home.

**Figure 20: Percentage of Parents/Caregivers Reporting High Parenting Efficacy**
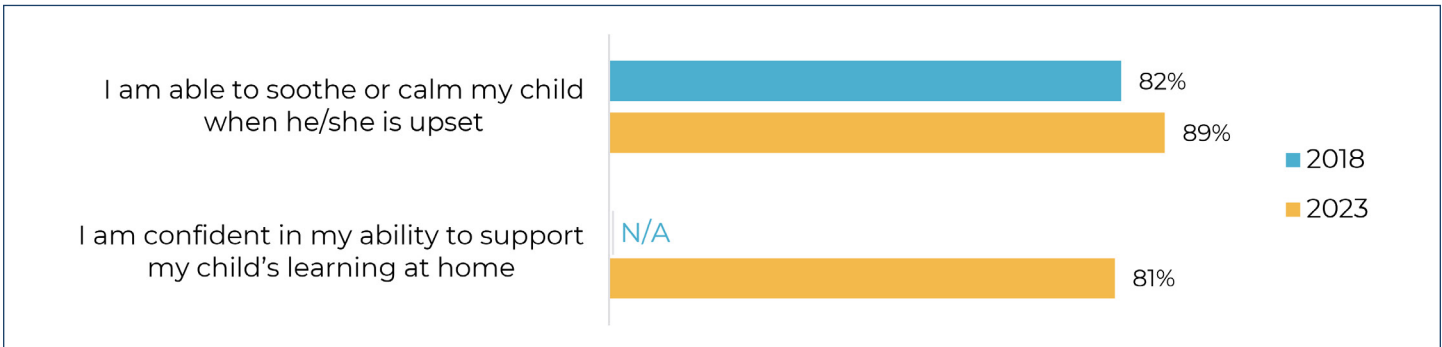
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 926 - 945 (2018); N = 698 (2023). N/A: Question not asked in 2018. Reflects proportion who marked "often" or "almost always"; proportion who marked "rarely" or "sometimes" not shown.

USE OF PARENTING PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND SUPPORTS

Parents/caregivers were also surveyed about their use of a variety of parent/caregiver programs and services. The most common service received in both study years was education about effective parenting, though somewhat fewer parents/caregivers reported receiving this service in the 2023 study than in the 2018 study. Fewer parents/caregivers reported receiving FIRST 5 Santa Clara County services this year as well.

Figure 21: Percentage of Families Using Parenting Programs, Services, and Supports
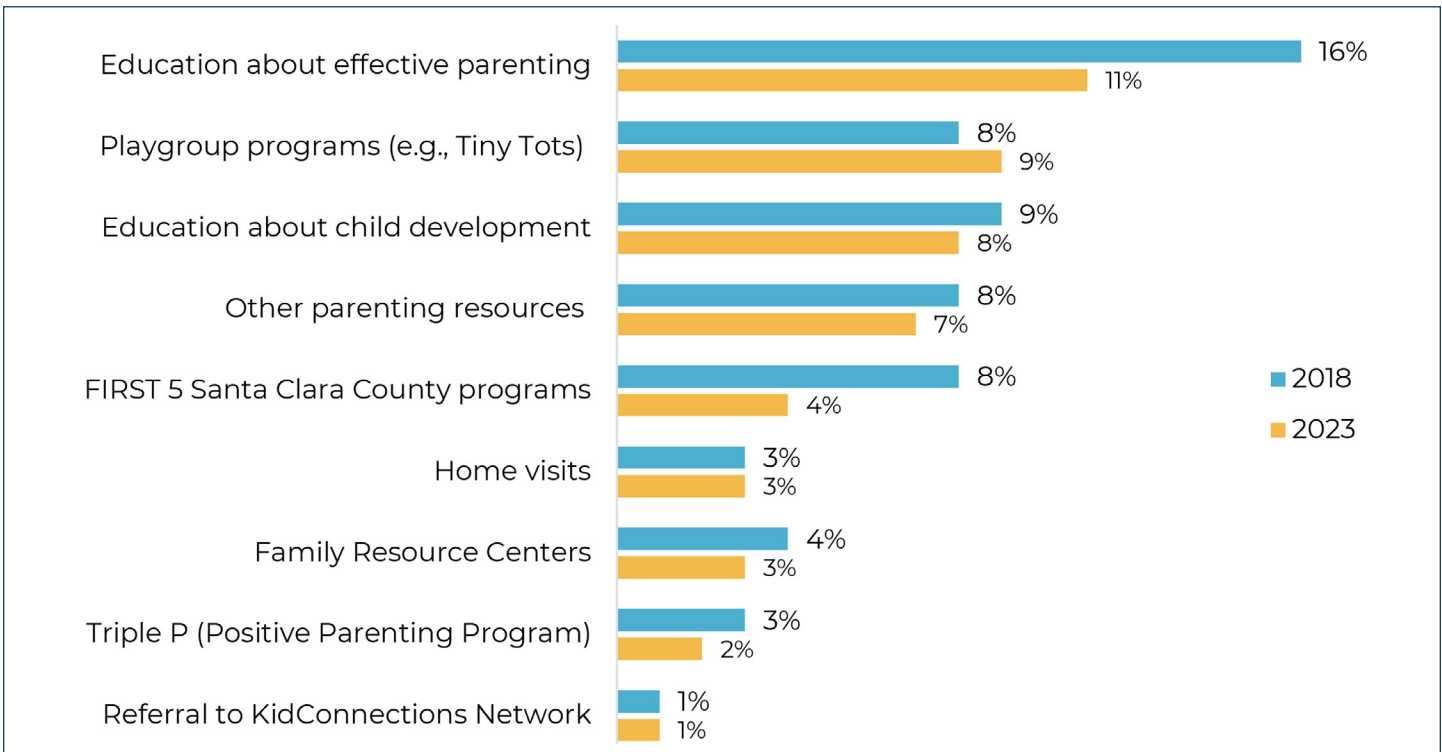
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 890 (2018); N = 664 (2023). "Other parenting resources" included parenting books, moms groups, library activities and books, and websites and social media. "Family Resource Centers" included those funded by FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and those funded by other agencies.
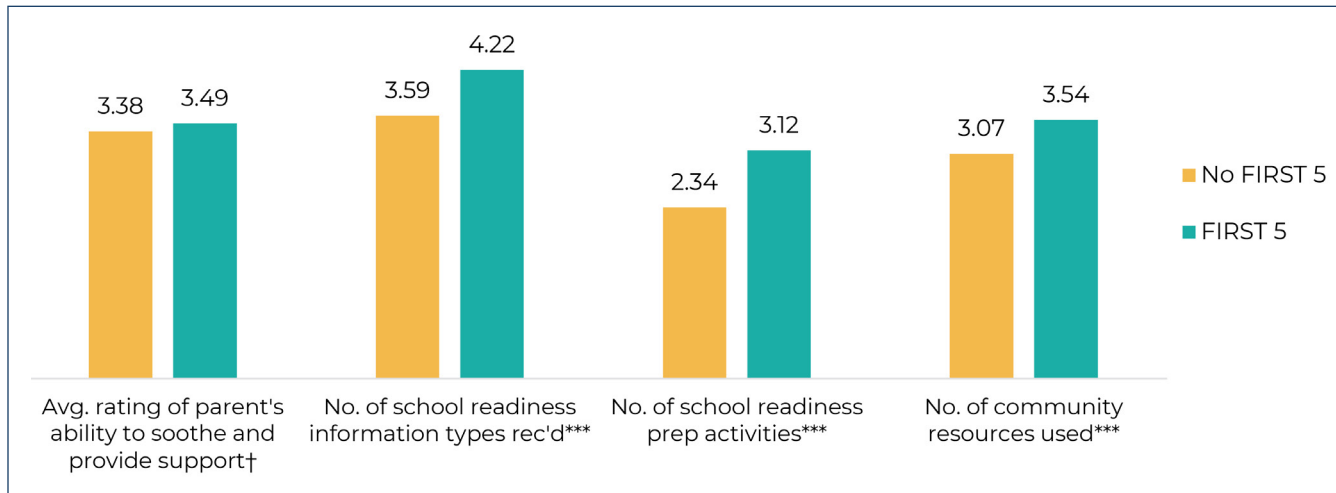
BENEFITS OF FIRST 5 SANTA CLARA COUNTY

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County provides a range of services and supports to children from birth to age five and their families. These services include quality improvement supports for early education; developmental screenings for children; home visiting; parent/caregiver workshops on health, child development, and parenting; parent/caregiver leadership and advocacy training; and literacy programs. Research has demonstrated wide-ranging positive effects of such early childhood interventions.[xvii] This section explores the relationship between participation in FIRST 5 Santa Clara County Family Resource Center (FRC) services and child and parent/caregiver outcomes measured in the school readiness assessment.

As shown in the chart that follows, families who received FIRST 5 FRC services received more school readiness information, engaged in more school readiness activities, and used more community resources. These families also had a greater ability to soothe their child compared to families who did not receive FIRST 5 FRC services.

Figure 22: Preparation for Kindergarten and Screenings, by FIRST 5 Santa Clara County FRC Participation

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2023), Parent Information Form (2023), FIRST 5 Santa Clara County service records.
Note: N = 577. Estimates are adjusted for race, income, gender, age, English Learner status, and special needs. Differences are statistically significant at †p < .15; Differences are statistically significant at ***p < .001.

These benefits are similar to those found in the 2018 study. In that study, utilization of FIRST 5 Santa Clara County 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. The connection between FIRST 5 services and kindergarten readiness highlights the importance of these kinds of investments in the community, particularly in light of the readiness-related challenges children exhibited in 2023.
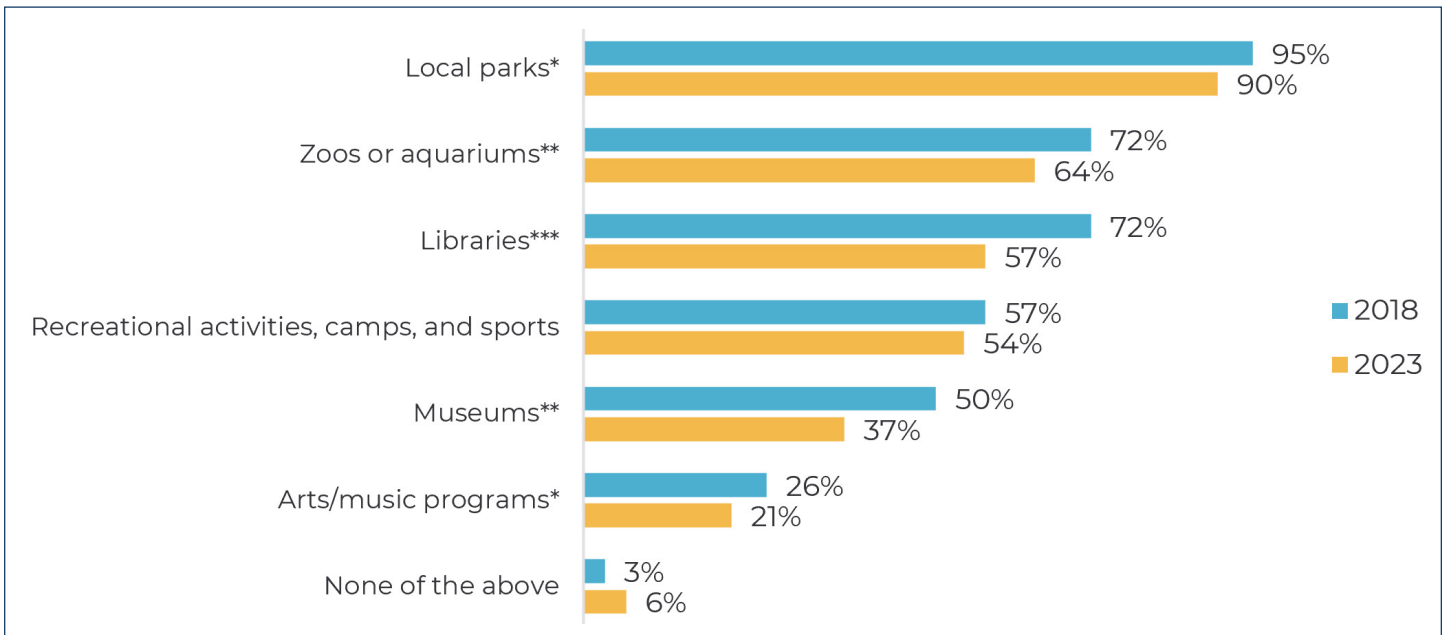
USE OF LOCAL FAMILY RESOURCES

Parents/caregivers indicated whether they had ever used several types of local family resources. The most common resources used were parks, zoos or aquariums, and libraries. Significantly fewer families in the 2023 study used these resources compared to families in the 2018 study.

Fewer families accessed community resources in the 2023 study compared to the 2018 study

Figure 23: Percentage of Families Using Local Resources

Resource	2018	2023
Local parks*	95%	90%
Zoos or aquariums**	72%	64%
Libraries***	72%	57%
Recreational activities, camps, and sports	57%	54%
Museums**	50%	37%
Arts/music programs*	26%	21%
None of the above	3%	6%

Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 947 (2018); N = 691 (2023). Percentages sum to more than 100 because more than one resource could be selected.
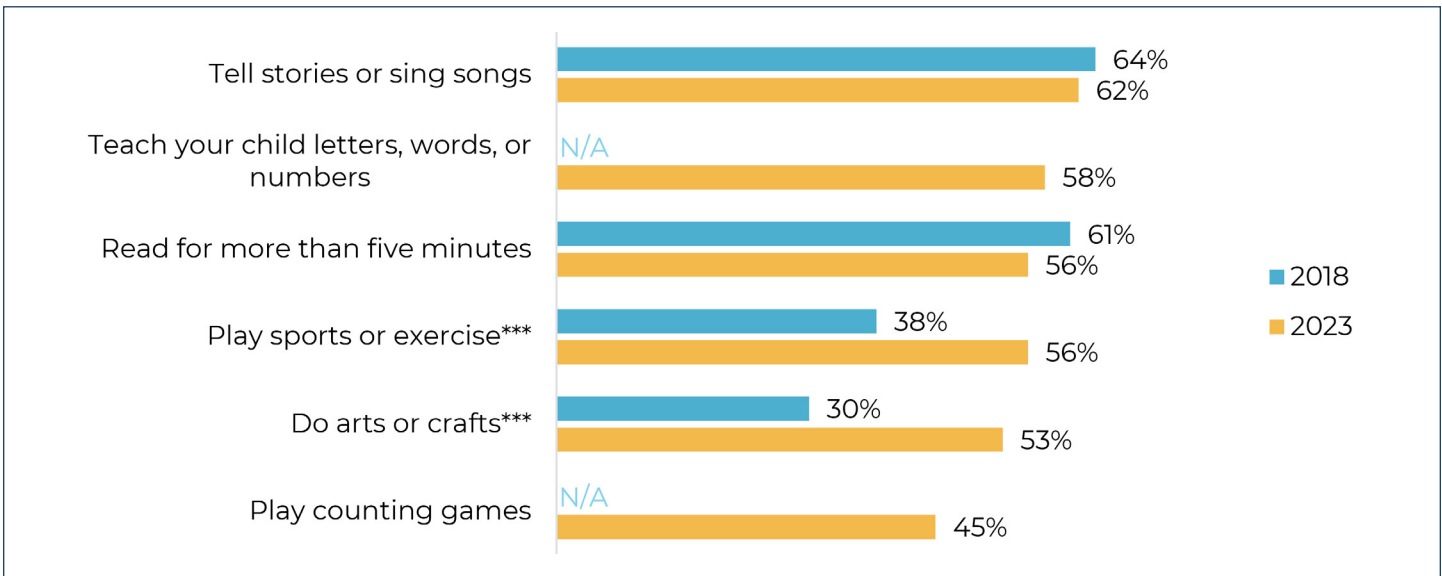Differences are statistically significant at *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

FAMILY ACTIVITY ENGAGEMENT

The survey asked parents/caregivers to report how often they spent time doing a variety of activities with their child during a typical week, including reading, telling stories or singing songs, and playing sports or exercising. In each study year, families were most likely to report telling stories and singing songs together. Families were significantly more likely to report engaging in sports or exercise and doing arts or crafts with their children in the 2023 study than they were in the 2018 study.

> Families in the 2023 study were **more likely to do sports and arts/crafts** than they were in the 2018 study

Figure 24: Percentage Engaging in Family Activities At Least Four Days per Week

| Activity	2018	2023
Tell stories or sing songs	64%	62%
Teach your child letters, words, or numbers	N/A	58%
Read for more than five minutes	61%	56%
Play sports or exercise***	38%	56%
Do arts or crafts***	30%	53%
Play counting games	N/A	45%

Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 871 - 915 (2018); N = 679 - 688 (2023). Numbers reflect the percentage of respondents who engaged in family activities at least four days per week. N/A: Question not asked in 2018. Differences are statistically significant at ***p < .001.

The chart below shows which family members engaged in these activities with the child. Almost all families reported that the child's mother(s) engaged in family activities with the child, while in 80% of families father(s) did (parents/caregivers could select multiple response options). In 35% of families, grandparents participated in the activities, while in one-quarter (24%), other family members, such as foster parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and stepparents, did. This question was not asked in 2018.

Figure 25: Family Members Participating in Family Activities, 2023

| Family Member	Percentage
Mother(s)	96%
Father(s)	80%
Grandparent(s)	35%
Other family members	24%
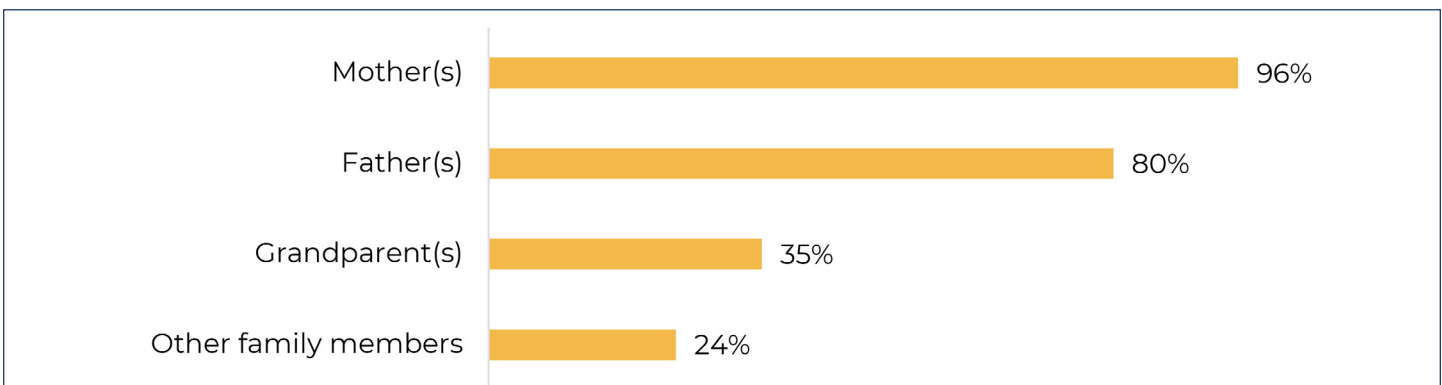
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 698. Question not asked in 2018.

FAMILY ROUTINES

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that young children ages 2-5 get no more than one hour of "screen time" per day, which includes time spent watching television or videos or playing video or computer games.[xviii] Based on data collected for this study, it appears exposure to screen time is now returning to pre-pandemic levels, but remains high on the weekends, with over half of children exposed to at least one hour per day.

In addition, in both the 2018 and 2023 samples, about three-quarters of children went to bed by 9:00 PM. However, in 2023, parents/caregivers also indicated the number of hours of sleep children had each night and just 22% of children had at least 10 hours of sleep, the minimum recommended for children ages 3-5.[xix]

**Figure 26: Screen Time, Bedtimes, and Hours of Sleep**
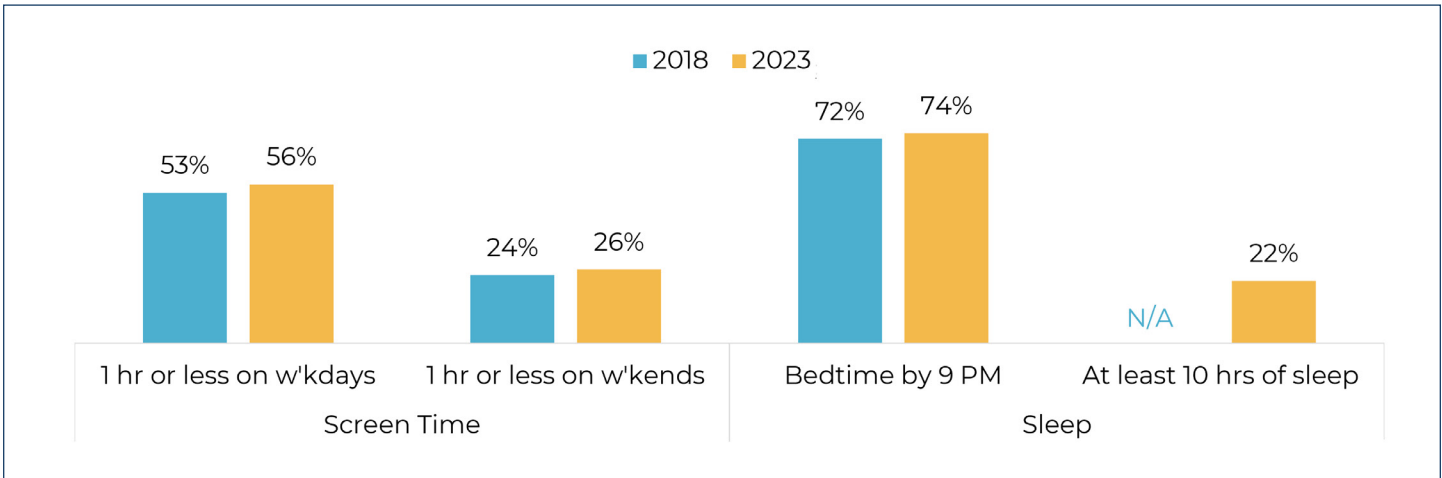
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 931 (2018); N=690-703 (2023). N/A: Question not asked in 2018. *The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends children 3-5 sleep 10-13 hours per night.

HEALTH CARE ACCESS

Most children were up-to-date on their required immunizations (97%) and had received a well-child check-up in the past year (95%). Fewer children had received a dental check-up in the past year (89%) and the COVID-19 vaccine (45%). Delays in accessing health care during COVID-19 were reported by 18% of parents/caregivers.

Figure 27: Children's Use of Health Care, 2023
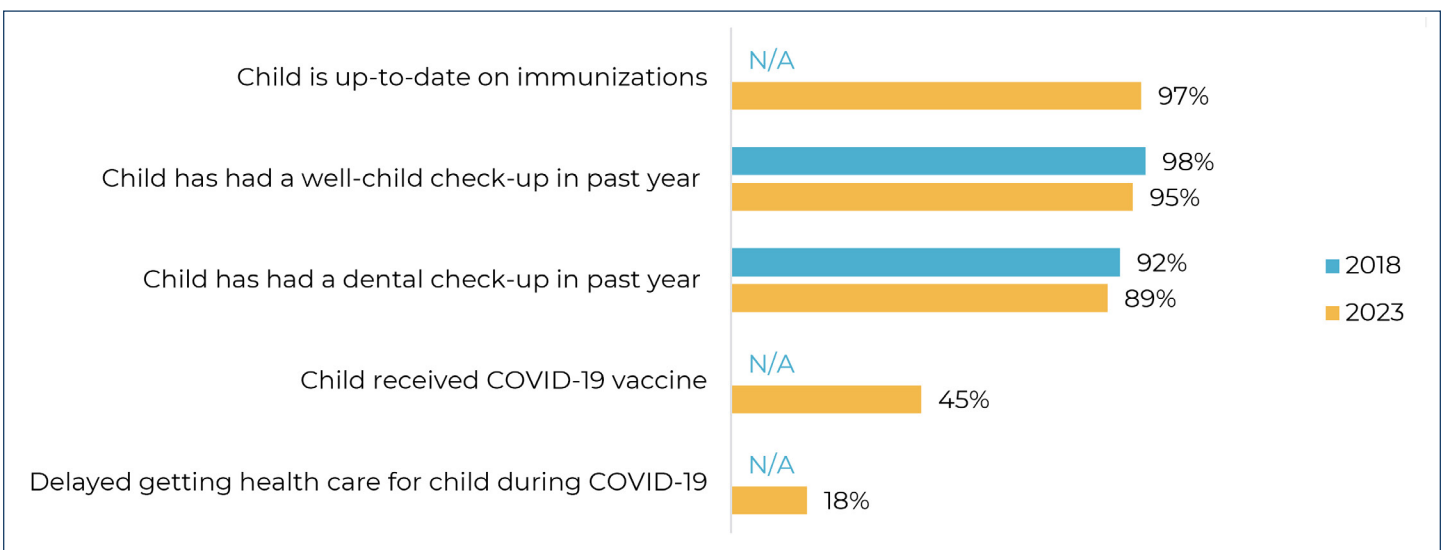
Source: Parent Information Form.
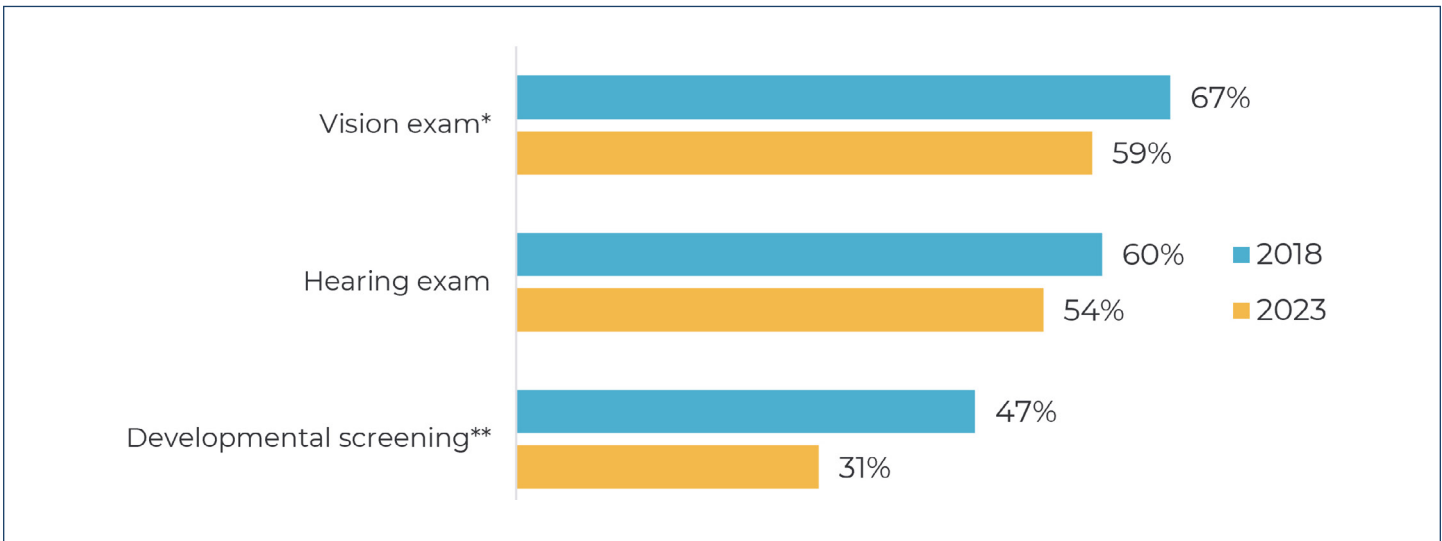Note: N = 644 – 693 (2023). N/A: Question not asked in 2018.

Children in the 2023 SRA sample **were less likely to receive developmental screenings** than children in the 2018 sample

Parents/caregivers also reported whether the child had received a screening in the prior year. Over half of children had received a vision screening (59%) and hearing screening (54%), but under one-third (31%) had received a developmental screening in the past year. Children in the 2023 sample were less likely to have received screenings than children in the 2018 sample.

Figure 28: Children's Access to Screenings in the Past Year
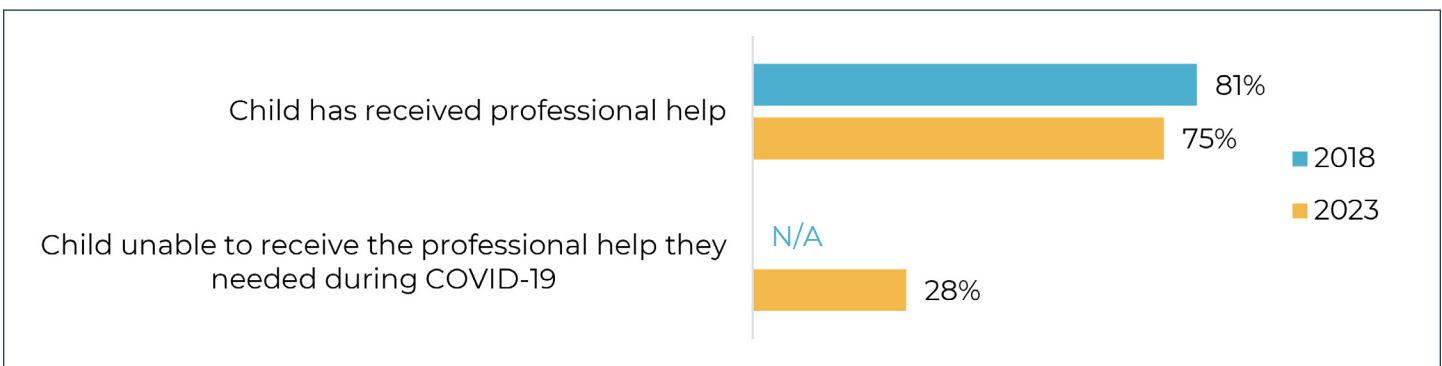

Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 894 - 983 (2018); N = 686 (2023). N/A: Question not asked in 2018. Differences are statistically significant at *p < .05, **p < .01.

SPECIAL NEEDS AND ACCESS TO INTERVENTION SERVICES

According to parents/caregivers, 7% of children in the 2023 sample had a special need diagnosed by a professional, similar to the proportion reported by parents/caregivers in the 2018 study (6%). Among children with special needs in the 2023 sample, 75% had received professional help for their special need, down from 81% who had received help in the 2018 sample. About a quarter of children (28%) with special needs in the current study were unable to receive the professional help they needed during COVID-19.

Figure 29: Access to Intervention Services

Source: Parent Information Form.
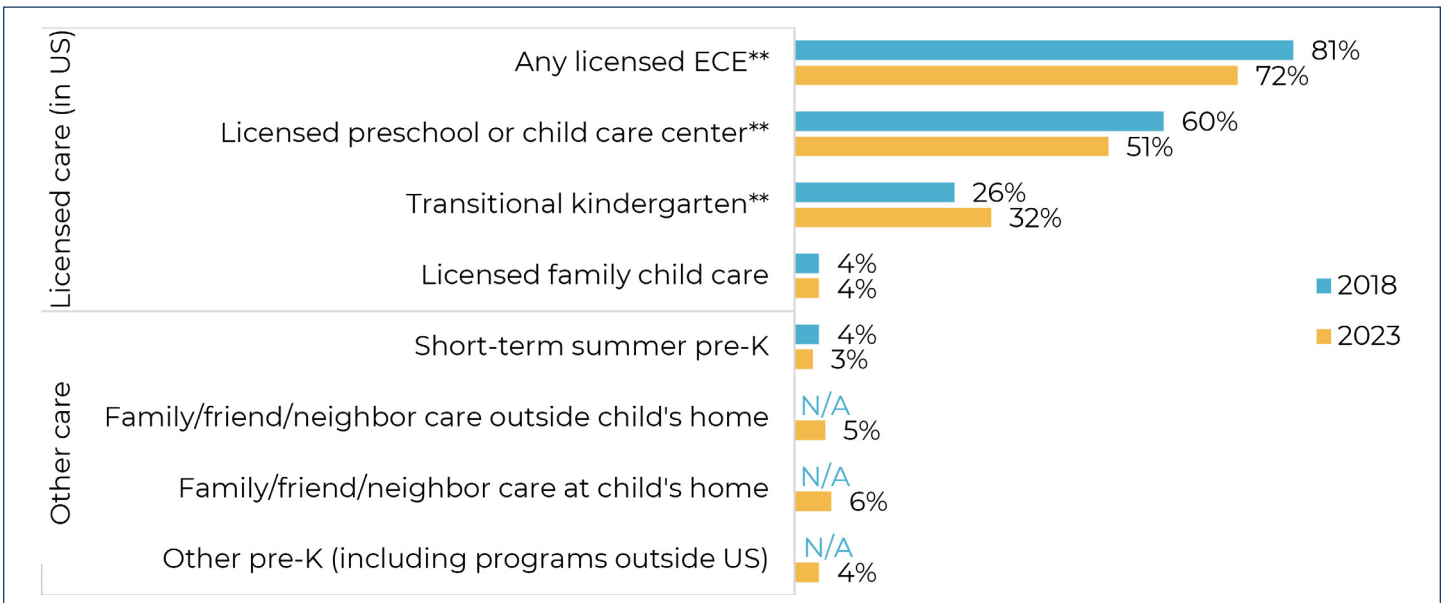Note: N = 75 (2018); N = 60 - 67 (2023). N/A: Question not asked in 2018.

EARLY LEARNING ACCESS

Quality early care and education (ECE) attendance is one of the most consistent predictors of higher kindergarten readiness. About 7 in 10 children (72%) in the 2023 sample attended either licensed preschool, licensed family child care, or transitional kindergarten (TK). This overall ECE attendance rate is lower than it was in the 2018 study, and the type of ECE used has changed—more children are now participating in TK and fewer children are attending preschool in the year prior to kindergarten.

Relative to children in the 2018 study, children in the 2023 study were **less likely to attend ECE in general, and preschool in particular, but more likely to attend TK**

Figure 30: Students' Early Care Experiences

Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N=941-1,183 (2018); N=674 (2023). Percentages sum to more than 100 because more than one source of care could be selected. N/A: Question not asked in 2018. Differences are statistically significant at **p < .01.

One in four (23%) parents/caregivers said they had experienced changes to their child's child care arrangements or their child attended more than one program in the past year. This question was not asked in 2018.

Figure 31: Changes to Child Care Arrangements or Attended More than One Program in Past Year, 2023
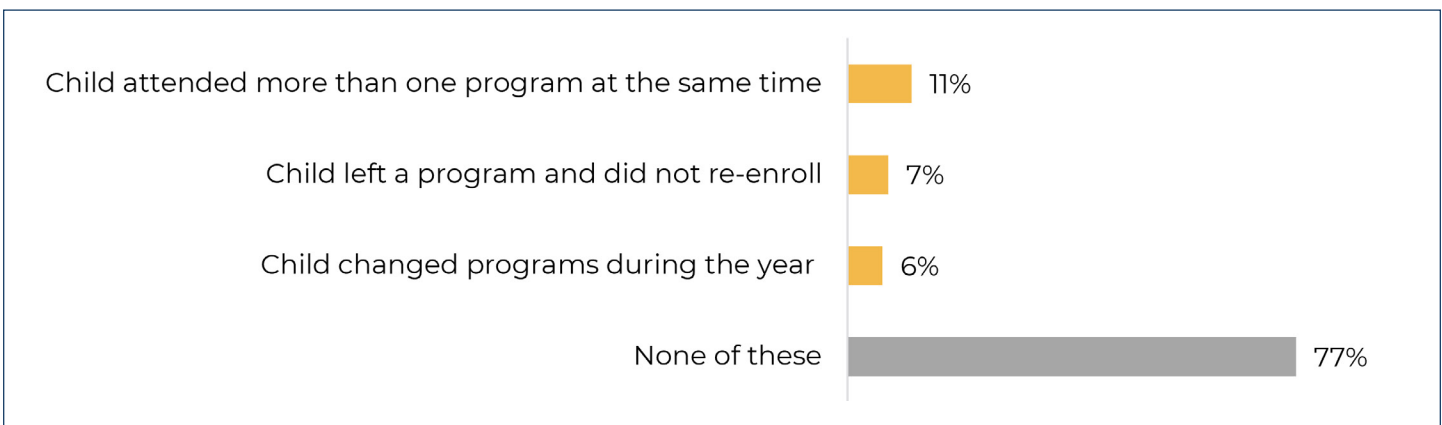
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 676. N reflects the total number of parents/caregivers who had a child who attended ECE in the previous year and replied to this question. Question not asked in 2018.

Among the 109 families who reported that their child had changed or attended more than one child care or preschool program in the past year, the most common reason was needing additional hours of care.
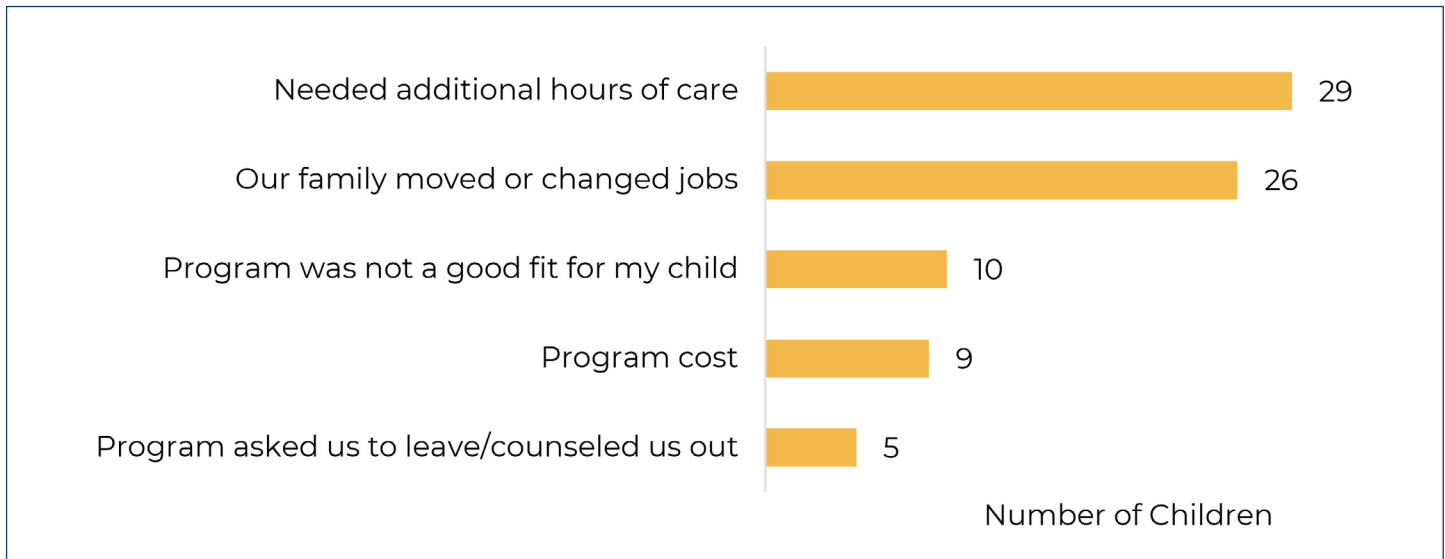
11% of families reported their child attended more than one ECE program; the majority said it was because they needed additional hours of care

Figure 32: Reasons Child Changed or Attended More Than One Child Care Program in Past Year, 2023

Reason	Number of Children
Needed additional hours of care	29
Our family moved or changed jobs	26
Program was not a good fit for my child	10
Program cost	9
Program asked us to leave/counseled us out	5

Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 109. Question not asked in 2018.

SECTION SUMMARY

Key Findings

- Relative to families in the 2018 study, families in the 2023 study reported:
  - Fewer concerns about work, basic needs, and family issues;
  - More engagement in exercise/sports and arts/crafts at home;
  - Less utilization of community resources;
  - Fewer vision and developmental screenings; and
  - Lower participation in ECE.

- Families who received FIRST 5 Santa Clara County Family Resource Center services received more school readiness information, engaged in more school readiness activities, and used more community resources. These families also reported a greater ability to soothe their child compared to families who did not receive FIRST 5 services.

Recommendations

- Increase access to supports that address children's health and development and families' well-being, including those provided by FIRST 5 Santa Clara County. Expand the availability of community resources, screenings, and high-quality, affordable ECE, and align support systems to help parents/caregivers navigate and access available services and resources.

READINESS OF SCHOOLS

ASR
SCHOOL READINESS

In the final section, we summarize data on the kindergarten transition and readiness of schools to support their youngest learners.
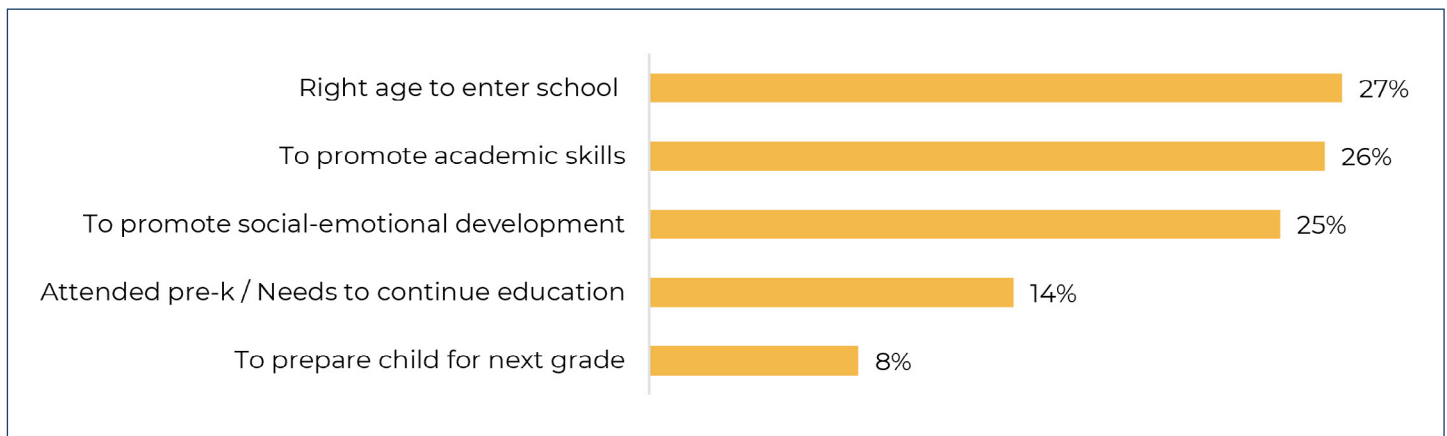
WHY FAMILIES ENROLLED THEIR CHILD IN SCHOOL

Close to 580 parents/caregivers indicated the reasons why they enrolled their child in kindergarten. A few themes emerged; the most commonly provided reasons included their child being the right age to enter school as well as the desire to promote their child's academic and social-emotional development. Although kindergarten is optional, these responses suggest parents/caregivers nevertheless consider it to be the right time for their child to enroll.

> *"[My child] is ready to learn and make connections with other kids with different backgrounds."*
>
> *- Santa Clara County kindergarten parent/caregiver*

Figure 33: Top Reasons Parents/Caregivers Enrolled Their Child in Kindergarten, 2023

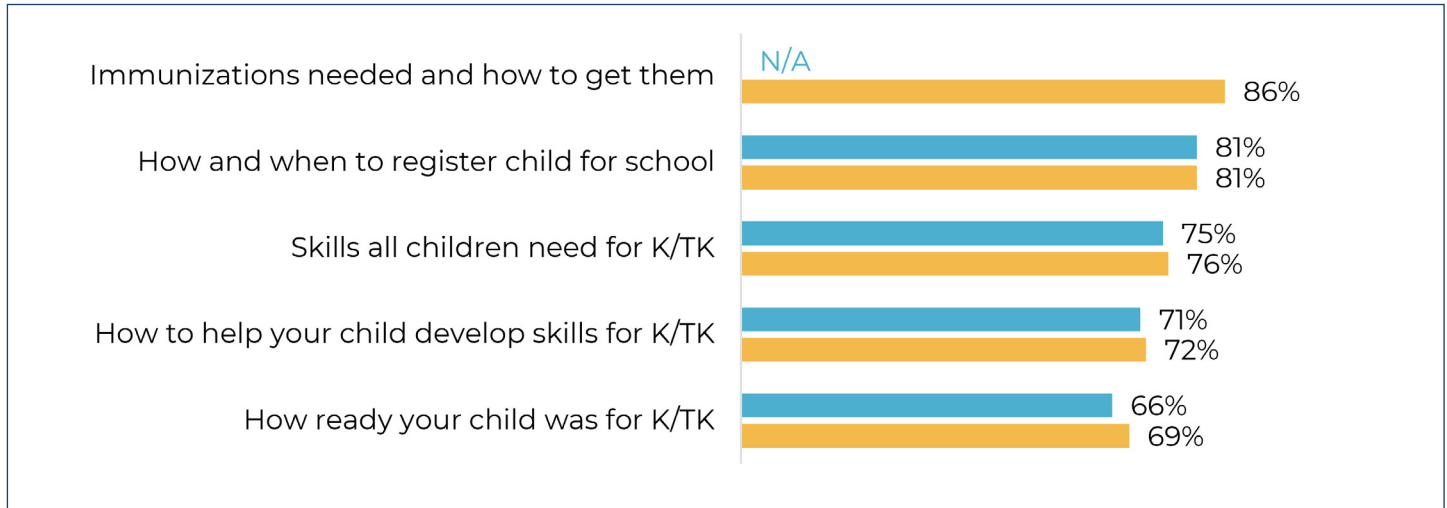| Reason	Percentage
Right age to enter school	27%
To promote academic skills	26%
To promote social-emotional development	25%
Attended pre-k / Needs to continue education	14%
To prepare child for next grade	8%

Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 579.

FAMILIES' EXPOSURE TO KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION

Parents/caregivers in the study indicated whether or not they had received various types of information to prepare themselves and their children for kindergarten. There were minimal changes over time in the proportion of families who received this information. In both study years, over 80% of parents/caregivers received information about kindergarten registration, and over two-thirds received information about school readiness skills and how ready their child was for school. In 2023, 86% of caregivers said they received information about the required immunizations for kindergarten; this question was not asked in 2018.

Figure 34: Receipt of Information Related to Kindergarten Transition

|	
Immunizations needed and how to get them	N/A; 86%
How and when to register child for school	81%; 81%
Skills all children need for K/TK	75%; 76%
How to help your child develop skills for K/TK	71%; 72%
How ready your child was for K/TK	66%; 69%

Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 960-967 (2018); N = 587 - 685 (2023). N/A: Question not asked in 2018.

When asked to indicate who provided kindergarten transition information, around 4 in 10 parents/caregivers reported receiving information from the child's kindergarten/TK teacher or school (42%) or the child's preschooler child care provider (38%). Fewer families reported receiving information from family or friends (27%), parenting resources (19%), their child's pediatrician (14%), social media (8%), or a Family Resource Center (1%). This question was not asked in 2018.

Figure 35: Source of Kindergarten Transition Information, 2023

|	
My child's kindergarten/TK teacher or school	42%
My child's preschool/child care provider	38%
Family or friends	27%
Parenting websites, books, or articles	19%
Pediatrician	14%
Social media	8%
Family Resource Center (FRC)	1%
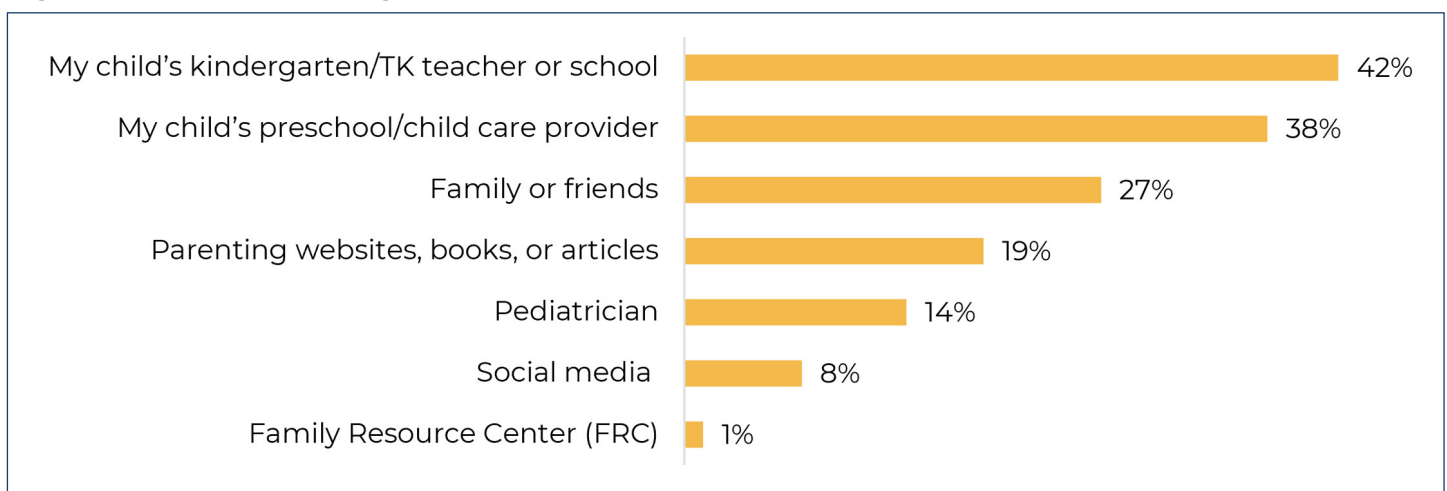
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 674. Question not asked in 2018.

TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

Parents/caregivers were also asked to report on kindergarten transition activities they had engaged in prior to the start of school. Across both study years, the most common activities were visiting the school with the child and working on school skills. Engagement in kindergarten transition activities was less common in the 2023 study than in the 2018 study, with the exception of reading books or articles about kindergarten.

Figure 36: Percentage of Families Engaging in Transition Activities
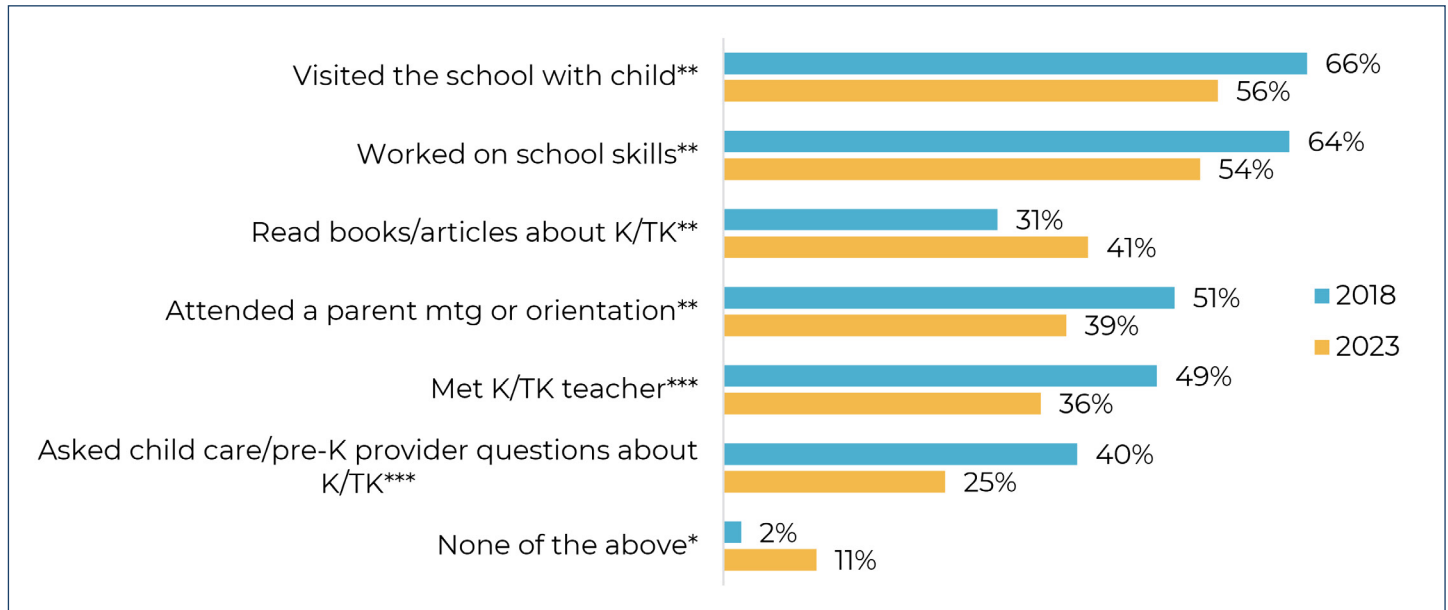
Source: Parent Information Form.
Note: N = 969 (2018); N = 694 (2023). Differences are statistically significant at *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

SECTION SUMMARY

Key Findings

- The most common reason families enroll their child in kindergarten is that the child is the right age to enter school.

- Most families receive kindergarten readiness information, and the majority of them receive it from the child's preschool, child care, or kindergarten/TK teacher.

- 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.

Recommendations

- Expand access to kindergarten readiness information and assist families in navigating the kindergarten transition process.

INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FAMILIES AND TEACHERS

In March 2024, two listening sessions (in English and Spanish) were organized to engage parents/caregivers of children ages 3-6 in a discussion about the Santa Clara County School Readiness Assessment results. A total of 22 parents/caregivers participated in the listening sessions (11 parents/caregivers attended the English session and 11 parents/caregivers attended the Spanish session). In addition, five teachers from five different districts participated in a listening session on the results. The goal of the sessions was to solicit feedback on how reflective the results were of their personal experiences and observations, and their views on what is most important to communicate to decision-makers about school readiness programs and policies affecting families. Below is a summary of the themes that emerged from these conversations.

High-quality and affordable early care and education (ECE)

Participants in the listening sessions highlighted the importance of high-quality, affordable ECE programs, including programs that serve children with disabilities. Parents/caregivers mentioned that they observed improvements in their children's speech, reading abilities, social skills, and overall readiness for kindergarten when their child attended ECE, including TK. They mentioned a particular need for programs that had highly-qualified teachers, but that were affordable for middle-income families who do not qualify for a child care subsidy. ECE options were limited during the pandemic, and while access has improved and TK has expanded to include all 4-year-olds, families discussed ongoing challenges in finding a TK or preschool program that had availability and needing to secure their child's spot in ECE programs far in advance. Similarly, teachers noted a decline in ECE participation among their entering kindergartners and said it is imperative to highlight the importance of ECE in building school readiness.

> *"Having quality teachers [in ECE] is very important, but it needs to be affordable as well."*
>
> **- Santa Clara County kindergarten parent/caregiver**

Child development, health, and well-being interventions to address impact of pandemic

The pandemic led to increased reliance on screen time as a means of engagement for children and fewer socialization opportunities for young children. Parents/caregivers who had children both before and after the pandemic observed that their younger children entered kindergarten with more speech and language and social-emotional challenges than their older children had because of these effects. They were also frustrated by the lack of services available to address such concerns during the pandemic. Similarly, teachers were concerned about the increased number of kindergartners entering school with unaddressed special needs. Parents/caregivers and teachers advocated for increased access to early intervention services for special needs and more enriching activities and kindergarten readiness services like FIRST 5 Family Resource Center programs that could help children build self-regulation, social skills, and resilience. They also wanted more outreach about such programs so families know they are available and can take advantage of them.

> *"It would be nice if there were more active groups for kids to socialize. Our youngest kids have speech issues due to a lack of interaction."*
>
> **- Santa Clara County kindergarten parent/caregiver**

More support for families around the kindergarten/TK transition and for income and basic needs

Parents/caregivers said they were surprised by the level of skill children in TK and kindergarten were expected to master and wished they had been better informed of school readiness expectations and what their child would learn in school prior to their child entering TK and kindergarten. They also desired parent workshops to learn more about strategies they could use at home to help their child be more ready for kindergarten as well as how to learn the early signs of a disability and intervene when needed. One participant mentioned that she had been given resources to support her child's learning at home after the child had started kindergarten and wished she'd had such resources in the spring and summer before he entered so she could have helped him prepare. Likewise, 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.

The complexity of enrolling in kindergarten/TK and finding the right school was also a significant concern for listening session participants. They also said families need more information on who is eligible for TK and which schools offer it. Parents/caregivers wished the enrollment process was more streamlined and found it difficult to find answers to their questions. Families indicated that they were often directed to websites that lacked the information they needed or to personnel who couldn't address their questions. They called for more well-informed district or school staff who could walk them through the process. They also recommended districts hold outreach events at local community hubs like libraries to provide kindergarten readiness and transition information.

Participants in the listening sessions also discussed needing help to pay for basic needs and school readiness supports for their children. For example, they mentioned wanting help covering the cost of activities for their children like art, sports, and enrichment programs as well as ECE. In addition, some families needed transportation to help their child get to school and internet access to help them learn at home. Teachers and parents/caregivers wanted comprehensive resource lists or websites families could use to easily find needed services.

> *"I would like more education for parents on ways to prepare their kids. Tips and tricks to support kids' readiness."*
>
> **- Santa Clara County kindergarten parent/caregiver**

> *"[I need] free transportation so my child can go to school."*
>
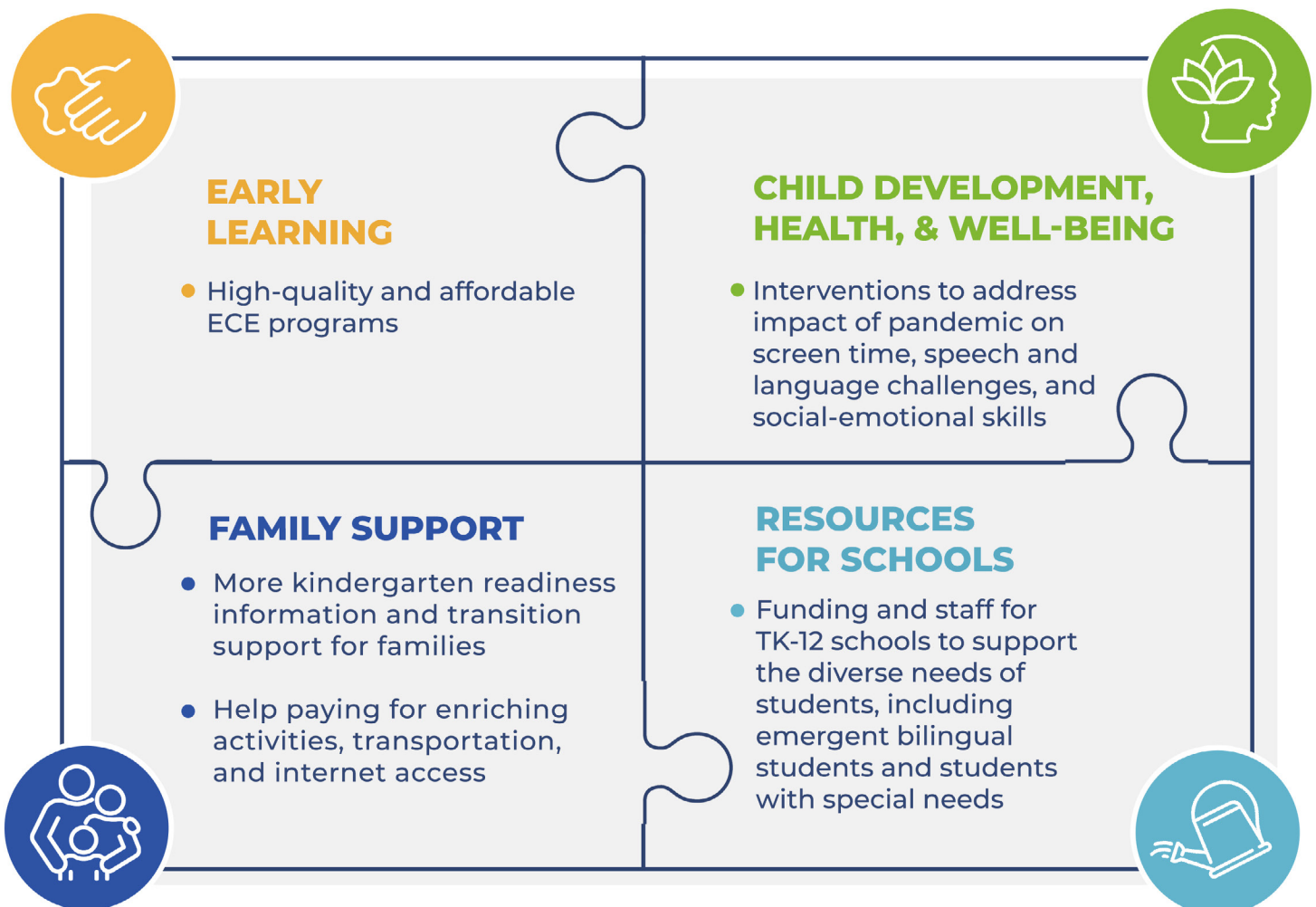> **- Santa Clara County kindergarten parent/caregiver**

Funding and staff for TK-12 schools to support the diverse needs of students

Families recommended TK-12 schools be adequately funded so they can keep student-to-teacher ratios low and support the diverse needs of all incoming students, including those with disabilities and emergent bilingual students. One parent/caregiver was pleased with the extra support her emergent bilingual son received to learn English at school and called for the continuation of such support services as well as more dual language immersion programs in the county. Likewise, another parent/caregiver was grateful for progress she saw when her son received special education services at school for speech problems, while others argued for an increase in qualified support staff to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Some felt that staff at their school were not properly trained to understand and address the needs of young children with attention or behavioral challenges. Similarly, teachers called for more school counselors and other specialists (e.g., speech pathologists) to address the needs of students entering kindergarten.

> *"We need additional help for children with special needs. That needs to be staffed accordingly."*
>
> **- Santa Clara County kindergarten parent/caregiver**

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FAMILIES AND TEACHERS

EARLY LEARNING

- High-quality and affordable ECE programs

CHILD DEVELOPMENT, HEALTH, & WELL-BEING

- Interventions to address impact of pandemic on screen time, speech and language challenges, and social-emotional skills

FAMILY SUPPORT

- More kindergarten readiness information and transition support for families
- Help paying for enriching activities, transportation, and internet access

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS

- Funding and staff for TK-12 schools to support the diverse needs of students, including emergent bilingual students and students with special needs

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

HOW READY WERE CHILDREN, FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND SCHOOLS?

The 2023 Santa Clara School Readiness Assessment (SRA) was the first countywide, representative school readiness study conducted since 2018 and provided a comprehensive portrait of the state of child, family, community, and school readiness in Santa Clara County as the community emerges from the pandemic. The study found some improvements compared to the 2018 study, but also ongoing challenges, many of which can be traced to the widespread negative impacts of the pandemic on child well-being and development.

Just 37% of children in the 2023 SRA sample were *Fully Ready* for kindergarten, and they exhibited lower school readiness, especially in social-emotional domains, relative to children assessed in the 2018 SRA. Families and teachers in the study's listening sessions stated that this finding matched the increased readiness challenges they have personally observed since the onset of COVID-19. National research has likewise shown a negative impact of COVID-19 on young children's social emotional well-being[xx,xxi] and school readiness.[xxii] Some of these effects can be attributed to the increased stressors families faced and their limited access to services and resources, including health care, early intervention, ECE[xxiii,xxiv,xxv] and community resources like libraries.[xxvi] These effects of COVID-19 appear to have persisted for families in our sample, with families being less likely to access health screenings, community resources, kindergarten transition supports, and ECE in the current study than they did in 2018. Families and teachers in our listening sessions discussed at length the difficulties they faced in accessing needed readiness supports during COVID-19, as well as the challenges they continue to experience in the pandemic's wake.

Despite these ongoing readiness challenges, several hopeful outcomes were also observed in the 2023 SRA. For example, children were more likely to be ready for school if they and their families had more "malleable assets"— that is, experiences that can be modified with intervention, like access to early learning and kindergarten transition supports, community resources, and basic needs. However, we also found there are significant inequities in access to these assets, which should be rectified through targeted investment in young children and families in communities most affected by historic racism and community disinvestment (i.e., communities of color and lower-income neighborhoods). Similarly, the benefits of FIRST 5 Family Resource Center services observed in this study and in 2018 further illustrate how investment in early childhood can effectively address families' needs and boost readiness.

Other positive findings from the 2023 study included the increased proportion of families who engaged in family activities together relative to the 2018 sample. This may be a lingering effect of families staying home and spending more time together during the pandemic (in the current study, the most common impact COVID-19 had on employment was working at home with children around). Families also reported fewer concerns about work, employment, and family stressors this year than in 2018. This is somewhat surprising because although unemployment has declined in the county, it has not yet dropped to pre-pandemic levels.[xxvii] Similarly, national surveys of families with young children have found concerns about material hardship have dropped significantly since the height of the pandemic but remain high.[xxviii] When responding to the survey, families in our study may have been favorably comparing their current circumstances to their circumstances during the pandemic or may have benefited from the range of pandemic-related supports implemented to address the stressors of the pandemic. Other research has found these supports have greatly alleviated the hardships families with young children faced.[xxiv, xxx]

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. For a list of available resources, please see Appendix B.

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.

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**

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.[xxxi] 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.

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

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

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.

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.

Child Development, Health, and Well-being Interventions

CHILDREN FAMILIES

SCHOOLS COMMUNITIES

Family Support

Early Learning

Resources for Schools to Support the Kindergarten Transition

District	Sample	County K Population
Alum Rock Union Elementary	5%	5%
Berryessa Union Elementary	4%	4%
Cambrian	2%	2%
Campbell Union	9%	4%
Cupertino Union	0%	8%
East Side Union High	0%	<1%
Evergreen Elementary	3%	5%
Franklin-McKinley Elementary	5%	6%
Gilroy Unified	4%	4%
Lakeside Joint	1%	<1%
Loma Prieta Joint Union Elementary	0%	<1%
Los Altos Elementary	5%	2%
Los Gatos Union Elementary	2%	2%
Luther Burbank	0%	<1%
Milpitas Unified	4%	5%
Moreland	2%	2%
Morgan Hill Unified	3%	4%
Mount Pleasant Elementary	4%	1%
Mountain View Whisman	0%	3%
Oak Grove Elementary	10%	5%
Orchard Elementary	0%	1%
Palo Alto Unified	0%	4%
San Jose Unified	9%	11%
Santa Clara County Office of Education	0%	7%
Santa Clara Unified	18%	7%
Saratoga Union Elementary	3%	1%
Sunnyvale	9%	4%
Union Elementary	0%	3%

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form. California Department of Education (2023-24)

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

QUALITY MATTERS...a STRONG START for Kids increases the quality of early learning programs in the county with professional development and resources for providers. It is an initiative of FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE).

San José Public Library's Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Caregiver Support Network connects FFN caregivers to resources as well as professional development and peer support opportunities. Caregivers can call 408-808-2617 or email EarlyEducation@sjlibrary.org for more information.

Santa Clara County Office of Education provides a range of services to children, families, ECE sites, and school districts throughout the county, including health and wellness services, trainings to improve the climate of schools, and direct services for young children through Special Education, Head Start, State Preschool, and Migrant Education.

SCCOE Resource and Referral Program connects families to child care that meets their needs via an online Childcare Portal. They can also be reached at 669-212-5437 or childcarescc@sccoe.org.

SCCOE Universal Prekindergarten Initiative builds the capacity of school districts and community agencies to expand access to equitable, high-quality learning opportunities and supports for young children.

SCCOE Steps to Success provides resources for families and school leaders to facilitate enrollment in early learning programs.

Strong Start of Santa Clara County connects community leaders to ensure access to high-quality early care and education opportunities for children ages 0-8 in Santa Clara County.

FAMILY AND PARENTING SUPPORT

2-1-1 connects families to various health, education, and wellness services and supports throughout the county. Families can call 2-1-1 to get support.

Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) Be Strong Families - Parent Café helps parents/caregivers build on their strengths to navigate parenting challenges through monthly meetings with other parents at local community agencies.

DFCS Differential Response links families to services like case management, therapeutic services, care coordination, basic needs resources, and counseling, to meet families' needs and prevent abuse and neglect.

DFCS Sacred Heart Community Service - Resilient Families - Safe, Secure and Loved offers parent education and peer support to promote resilience among parents/caregivers with children 0-5.

Families First Initiative increases access to supports and services for families so children can remain safely with their parents and kinship caregivers.

FindHelp maintains an online database of service providers to connect families to a variety of services and supports.

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County Family Resource Centers are community agencies throughout the county that provide parents/caregivers and children 0-5 with a range of resources and services to promote health, development, and well-being.

HEALTHCARE AND PERINATAL SERVICES

Black Infant Health Program honors the unique history of Black women and supports Black women to have healthy babies with educational group sessions, individualized case management, home visits and referrals. Women can enroll by calling 408-937-2270.

Children's Health Initiative connects families to free and low-cost health insurance for their children. Parents/caregivers can call 888-244-5222 for more information.

Healthier Kids Foundation provides health screenings to low-income children, connects children to health coverage, and provides nutrition and health education to parents/caregivers. They can be contacted at 408-564-5114 or **info@hkidsf.org.**

Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Program (MCAH) oversees the Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program to provide pregnant people care coordination, referrals, screenings, assessments, education, and other services that promote their health and well-being. They can be reached by calling 800-310-2332.

Public Health Nursing Home Visitation Programs provide monthly home visits to families with infants up to age 6 months, developmental screenings, postpartum health assessments, and pregnancy and health education. From ages 6 months to 6 years, the program supports families with bimonthly visits. Families can call 408-937-2231 to enroll.

Public Health Oral Health Program links children and families to oral health screenings, education, health coverage, and a dental home. Their phone number is 408-793-2700.

Public Health Perinatal Equity Initiative aims to eliminate disparities in Black infant mortality with evidence-based or evidence-informed interventions throughout the county. For more information, call 669-263-2828 or email **PerinatalEquity@phd.sccgov.org.**

Santa Clara County Home Visiting Collaborative connects home visiting providers to increase access to resources and improve cross-system service coordination.

Universal Screening Initiative aims to ensure all Santa Clara County children, prenatal through age 6, access routine prenatal, developmental, and behavioral health screenings and connection to early intervention services. Partners for this work are FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and the Santa Clara County Public Health Department.

HOUSING AND FOOD

Santa Clara County Homelessness Prevention System assists low-income families at risk of losing their housing with case management, legal support, and temporary financial assistance. Families can call 408-926-8885 or email **info@preventhomelessness.org** for more information.

Second Harvest of Silicon Valley operates a network of food distribution programs, provides cooking demonstrations and food safety presentations, and partners with schools to ensure students and families have year-round access to healthy food. Families can call 800-984-3663 for assistance.

SNAP/CalFresh provides benefits to purchase food for families earning up to 185% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). Families can call 408-758-3800 to enroll.

Universal Free School Meals guarantees every K-12 public and charter school student free breakfast and lunch at school.

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides benefits to purchase healthy food as well as nutrition education and breastfeeding support to women who are pregnant, postpartum, or breastfeeding, and children 0-5. Women can call 408-792-5101 or text 888-413-2698 to see if they qualify.

INCLUSION AND EQUITY

Inclusion Collaborative supports ECE sites, schools, and community agencies to implement inclusive practices for children of all abilities.

Parents Helping Parents supports families raising children with disabilities with an electronic learning library, webinars, and support groups. Families can call 408-727-5775 for one-on-one support.

WarmLine offers support, information, and referrals to families and providers of children with disabilities. They can be contacted at 408-453-6651 and **Inclusionwarmline@sccoe.org.**

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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.

For questions about this report, please contact:

Applied Survey Research
Lisa Colvig-Niclai, MA, Vice President of Evaluation
Christina Branom, MSW, PhD, Director of Research and School Readiness Specialist
Jordan Katti, PhD, Project Director
Liat Sayfan, PhD, Senior Data Manager
Claire Miller, PhD, Senior Research Analyst

Email
SRA@appliedsurveyresearch.org

www.AppliedSurveyResearch.org

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