2018

School Readiness

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS
FROM THE FALL 2018 ASSESSMENT IN

Santa Clara County

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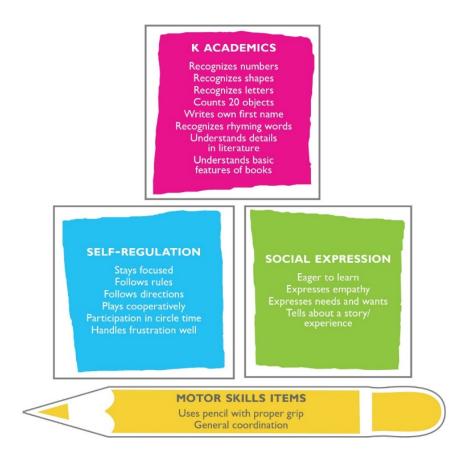
Snapshot of the 2018 School Readiness Assessment

Background

This report describes the state of school readiness and related findings for kindergarten students across Santa Clara County who started school in Fall 2018. This is the first countywide assessment conducted in the county since 2008.

The report is based on data collected about children and families at 42 schools in the county. Teachers at these schools rated their students' proficiency levels on 20 kindergarten readiness skills on a scale from 1 (*Not Yet* demonstrating the skill) to 4 (*Fully Proficient* in the skill). These readiness skills are sorted into 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*. The pyramid below illustrates the theoretical progression of readiness skills, with foundational motor skills preceding the more advanced self-regulation and social-emotional skills. The top of the pyramid contains early academic skills, like counting and shape and letter recognition.

Figure 1. *Basic Building Blocks of Readiness* and Motor Skills Items

In addition to the teacher ratings, the study involved a survey of parents/caregivers pertaining to their child's demographics, family background, and child care experiences. Please note that the information presented in this report describes only those students and families who participated in the assessment.
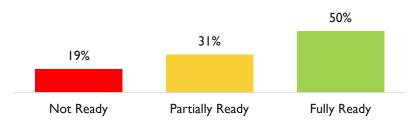
Key Findings

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

Students were considered *Fully Ready* for kindergarten in all areas if they scored at or above 3.25 out of 4 on the three *Building Blocks* – that is, if they were *Proficient* or nearing proficiency in *Self-Regulation, Social Expression,* and *Kindergarten Academics*.

1 in 5
Children is *Not Ready* for K

Students were considered *Partially Ready* if they were *Proficient* or nearly proficient in one or two *Building Blocks*, and considered *Not Ready* if they were still progressing in all three areas. Using these criteria, **50%** of children in the sample were *Fully Ready* for kindergarten. Close to one in five children was *Not Ready* on any of the *Building Blocks of Readiness*. These children are at risk for a poor transition to kindergarten, as well as academic difficulties later in elementary school.

Figure 2.   Percent *Fully Ready* for Kindergarten

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2018).

Note: N=1,184. Sampling weights were applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and English Learner status of Santa Clara County, and the clustering effects of districts and schools were adjusted for.

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

The factors that were strongly and independently associated with readiness are illustrated in the following diagram. Although many of these predictors are related to one another, each factor in the diagram contributes to readiness even after taking into account the contributions of the other factors. For example, the impact of preschool on readiness is significant, regardless of the child's age, race/ethnicity, or gender. The size of the circle corresponds to the strength of the relationship between the factor and readiness, after holding constant all other child and family characteristics.
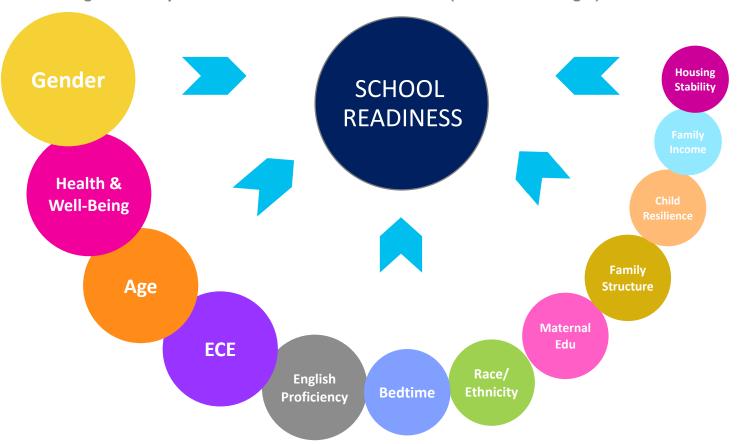
Figure 3. Key Predictors of Overall School Readiness (in Order of Strength)

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2018), Parent Information Form (2018).

Note: N=729. Multi-level linear model was used to control for the clustering effects of districts and schools. All variables were significant at $p < .05$. Not shown: presence of special needs; although this factor was correlated with lower readiness, there is significant variability in the types of needs students with disabilities have at kindergarten entry and therefore we do not make generalizable conclusions about their readiness.

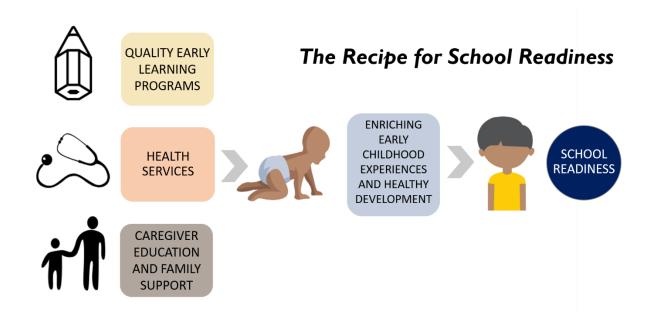### *What types of experiences and family backgrounds were characteristic of the incoming kindergarten students?*

53% of children were female, and girls had higher readiness scores than boys.

25% of children came to school with at least one health and well-being concern (i.e., either tired or hungry) on at least some days, and these children had lower levels of readiness than their healthy peers.

5.6 years old: children's average age when they entered school. Older children had higher readiness levels.

81% of children attended preschool, licensed family child care, or Transitional Kindergarten (TK) in the prior year; these experiences predicted higher readiness.

34% of children were English Learners and they had lower readiness scores than children who were proficient in English.

28% of children tended to go to bed after 9:00 PM; children who went to bed later had lower readiness scores.

34% of children were Latino/a, and they had lower readiness scores than children of other races/ethnicities.

23% of mothers had no more than a high school education. Lower maternal educational attainment was related to lower readiness.

13% of parents/caregivers considered themselves to be single. Overall, children of single parents/caregivers had lower readiness than children with more than one parent/caregiver in the home.

85% of children showed an average resilience score indicating that the child is able to adapt well to challenges and regulate their emotions. Children with higher resilience had higher readiness scores.

30% of families made under $50,000 per year. Children from lower income families had lower readiness scores than children from higher income families.

7% of children had experienced homelessness at some point in their life. These children had lower readiness scores.

What will it take to "turn the curve" on school readiness in Santa Clara County?

The findings inform approaches the community can take to help address gaps in school readiness in the county, including – but not limited to – the following:

- Quality early childhood education experiences for all children.

- Health services that promote optimal development and well-being, including developmental screenings, referrals to early intervention, and responsive early intervention systems.

- Caregiver education and family support services to help parents/caregivers provide their children with healthy, enriching early experiences.

- Regular kindergarten readiness assessments in the county to inform early childhood policies and services, determine the effectiveness of community efforts to improve readiness, and help schools be ready to receive young children.

- A K-12 system that engages in high-quality, evidence-based, and inclusive practices to meet diverse learning needs and is committed to the success of each child who enters kindergarten.

Partners in all sectors have a role to play in addressing readiness gaps, which can be partly traced to community factors, like neighborhood poverty and disinvestment and structural racism. Community partners have a responsibility to implement policies and practices that promote universal access to high-quality early childhood experiences and achieve more equitable outcomes for all children. The efforts of education, health, and family support providers, in collaboration with communities and parents/caregivers, should ensure each child in Santa Clara County enters school ready to learn.

To learn more, access the full report here: https://tinyurl.com/StaClaraSRA2018

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 30 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 that communities need for effective strategic planning and community interventions.

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