



# KINDERGARTEN READINESS 2019

ALAMEDA COUNTY  
Comprehensive Report

In partnership with:



Prepared by:





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Chief of Learning & Accountability

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### Shirley Clem

Coordinator of  
Elementary Education

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### Nina Goldman

Manager, Berkeley's 2020 Vision:  
Equity in Education

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### Maggie Riddle

Director of Schools

### Brent Stephens

Superintendent

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### Kathryn Singh

Director, Assessment, Research,  
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Director, Hayward Promise  
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## Neighborhoods Ready for School Agencies

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Management Analyst,  
ALL IN Alameda County

### Allison Staulcup Becwar

President & CEO, Lincoln

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### John Mattos

Director of Assessment and Evaluation

### Tracie Noriega

Director, K-12 Instruction,  
Teaching and Learning

## Oakland Unified School District

### Rinat Fried

Data Analyst, Research,  
Assessment, and Data Department

### Christie Herrera

Director of Early Childhood Education

### Maria Sujo

Kindergarten Readiness Manager

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Executive Director, Research,  
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Director

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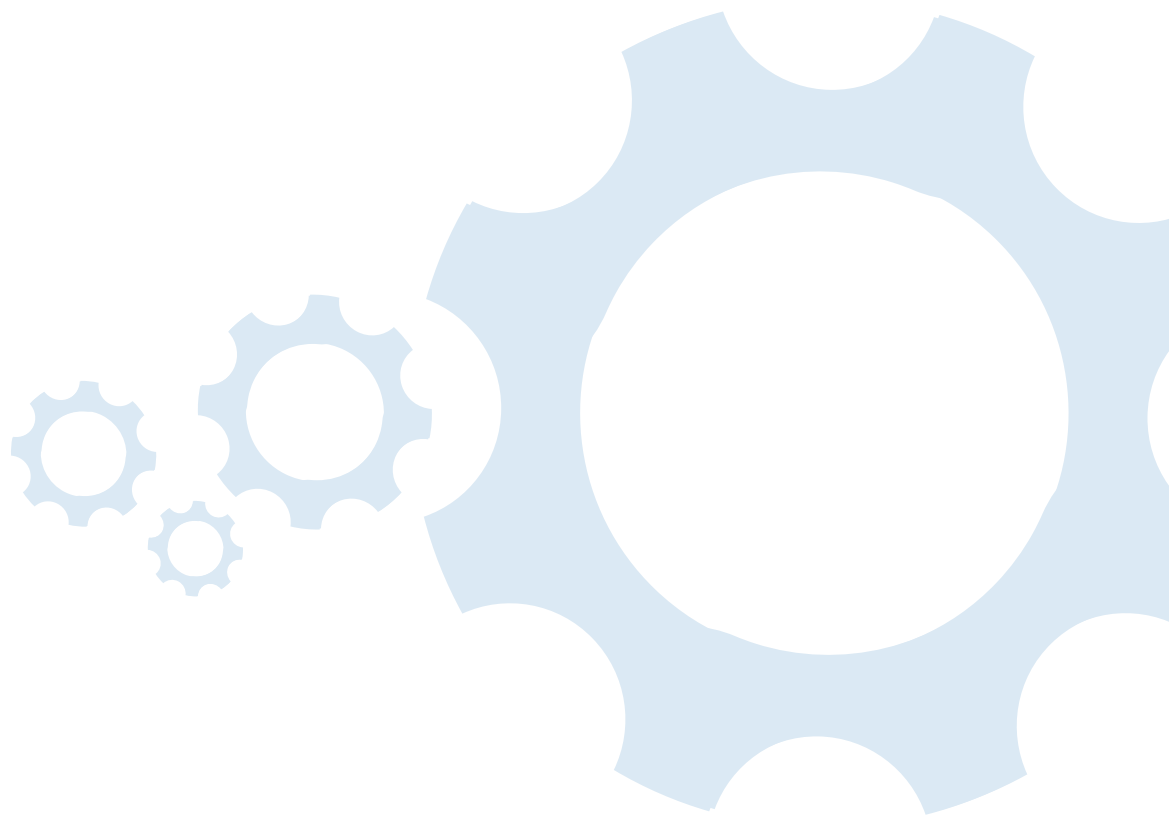
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## Participating Alameda County Districts, Schools, and Teachers

Schools	Teachers	Schools	Teachers	Schools	Teachers
<b>ACOE</b>		<b>Fremont Unified</b>		<b>New Haven Unified</b>	
CSCE	Hanna Forde	Ardenwood	Andrea Sanchez	Delaine Eastin	Corynn Buxton
<b>Alameda Unified</b>		Forest Park	Megan Huey		Erica Sims
Love	Kimberley Hare		Stephanie Chan		Zack Long
		Nicole Strom	Leitch	Laura (Ya-Ling) Wu	Hillview Crest
Paden	Christine Schnetz	Mandi Boni			
		Lianna Girshman		Martha Sivertsen	
<b>Berkeley Unified</b>				Shirley Gunawan	<b>Oakland Unified</b>
Emerson	Marci Bella	Mattos	Chanel O'Brien	Crocker Highlands	Jennifer Doersam
	Michelle Luu		Farah Moayer		Joanna Martinez
Malcolm X	Sara Carver		Melissa Means	East Oakland Pride	Jennipher Carpenter
Muir	Debbie Rogers		Monique Manjarrez	Encompass	Steven Valadez
	Gwen Rogers		Olivia Pickett	Garfield	April Hawkins
Sylvia Mendez	Lourdes Rivas		Patterson		Evelina Chao
	Rocio Guzman	<b>Hayward Unified</b>			Megan Stimpson
	Stephanie Hernandez-Jarvis	Glassbrook	Alice Wagner	MLK, Jr.	Maketa Daniels
Washington	Ashleigh Talbott		Kelly Rien	Prescott	Rebecca Bootes
	Denisia Wash		Maria Christina Aguilera	Vincent Academy	Jennifer Quint
	Hannah Kessel	Ben Hinchman	<b>Pleasanton Unified</b>		
<b>Castro Valley Unified</b>		Palma Ceia	Jeanne Vidal-Smith	Hearst	Janet Miller
Chabot	Laura Hohn & Simren Murphy		Marie Echaves		Kelly Maher
		Susan Israel	Ruus	Pam Bozant	<b>San Leandro Unified</b>
Marshall	Henna Bianchini	Strobridge	Cynthia Shay	Monroe	Diane Marasigan
	Jamie Hora	Tyrrell	Aracely McKimmey	Roosevelt	Diedre Reed
	Maria Leyson		Martha Jayme		Jeni Engler
<b>Dublin Unified</b>			<b>Livermore Valley Joint Unified</b>		<b>San Lorenzo Unified</b>
Dublin	Judie Greenhouse	Jackson Avenue	Bonnie Sanders	Bay	Stephanie Scarper
John Green	Joanne Palia		Carol Voegele		Susan Schuchardt
			Ceci Temores	Colonial Acres	Nancy Katen
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# Overview of Findings and Recommendations

Every two years, First 5 Alameda County (First 5) measures kindergarten readiness in the county. In 2019, it partnered with Applied Survey Research (ASR) to examine the factors associated with children’s kindergarten readiness skills, the readiness of families and communities to support children’s development, and the readiness of elementary schools to meet the needs of children entering their classrooms. We find differences in kindergarten readiness are largely attributable to inequities in access to resources. First 5 is committed to implementing targeted, evidence-based policies and practices to address these inequities, and the study’s recommendations are closely aligned with First 5 policy priorities and investments.

Key Findings	Recommendations
<b>Readiness of Children and Families</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 44% of children were <i>Fully Ready</i>, demonstrating proficiency across multiple domains of readiness</li> <li>• Readiness was most strongly associated with child and family demographics and socioeconomics, as well as other factors that can be modified with interventions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Child health and well-being</li> <li>» Early childhood education (ECE) attendance</li> <li>» More reading at home</li> <li>» Less screen time</li> <li>» Child resilience</li> <li>» Father’s use of community resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Help Me Grow and Quality Counts ECE sites supported the readiness of children by conducting developmental screenings and linking families to interventions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies that support families’ basic needs and expand access to high-quality early childhood education experiences</li> <li>• Early identification and intervention systems for children at risk for special needs and those experiencing trauma</li> <li>• Programs and policies that encourage father involvement and support families so they have the time and resources to engage in enriching activities with their children such as reading</li> </ul>
<b>Readiness of Communities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children living in neighborhoods with a greater number of assets (e.g., parks, libraries, and mutual support) had higher readiness than children living in neighborhoods with fewer assets, even after controlling for family income; parents wanted to see increased access to these resources, as well as affordable ECE and support for basic needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies that build livable communities with neighborhood assets like parks and libraries, affordable housing, and safe, reliable transportation</li> <li>• Investment in evidence-based kindergarten readiness supports, coordination of navigation programs, and alignment of family support programs like family resource centers</li> </ul>
<b>Readiness of Schools</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively few teachers were bilingual or had received training related to trauma-informed care, cultural humility, and family engagement</li> <li>• Classrooms with a high proportion of <i>Fully Ready</i> children tended to be in schools that offer more transition supports compared to classrooms where children had lower readiness levels</li> <li>• Parents wanted schools to ease the transition for children and offer resources like libraries and health and family support services at school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts to recruit a diverse teacher workforce and investment in teacher professional development, including training in equity and implicit bias</li> <li>• Family engagement policies at schools and school-based programs that address basic needs</li> <li>• Expansion of kindergarten transition supports like parent-teacher meetings and school events</li> </ul>





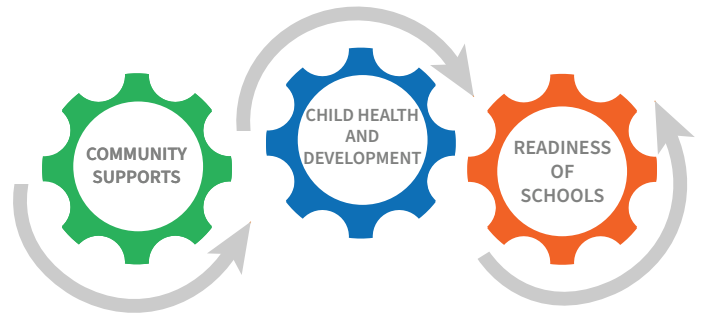
# Introduction

## What is Kindergarten Readiness?

According to many scholars and educators, kindergarten readiness (also commonly referred to as school readiness) is multifaceted and means that children are ready for kindergarten, families and communities are ready to support children’s growth and development, and schools are ready to meet the needs of children entering their classrooms.

## Ready Children and Families

This framework expands the definition of kindergarten readiness beyond the child to include the preparation of families and communities to support children’s kindergarten readiness. As stated in a widely cited study of readiness:



3 COMPONENTS OF READINESS

*Children are not innately “ready” or “not ready” for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before coming to school.<sup>i</sup>*

Ensuring children are adequately supported from birth through kindergarten entry is vital given research connecting kindergarten readiness to an array of long-term outcomes. The 2018 Alameda County longitudinal study found kindergarten readiness scores strongly predicted children’s proficiency in third grade,<sup>ii</sup> and other research has linked it to high school completion, career success, and earnings as an adult.<sup>iii</sup>

## Ready Communities

“Ready” communities, which provide support and resources to children and families, positively influence the development of children’s kindergarten readiness skills. Since the 2015 Alameda County Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), **formal early childhood education (ECE) has been a leading factor in predicting kindergarten readiness.** This 2019 study points to the particular importance of ECE for African-American and Latinx children – all other things held equal, participation in ECE significantly narrowed readiness gaps. However, while 83% of children in this study participated in ECE, still only 44% were found to be ready for kindergarten, a stubborn trend. The KRA finds that other factors also play an important role in kindergarten readiness. Each year of this study, and in our longitudinal research, the **greatest moveable factor continues to be child health and well-being, which is tied to socioeconomics, housing stability, and stress among parents/caregivers.**

In the current study we also found that **neighborhood assets, like parks, libraries, and mutual support among community members, significantly boosted children’s readiness.** “Ready” communities are rich with supports to help families meet their basic needs and promote children’s development. Yet the availability of these assets is tied to family income, highlighting the need to invest in low-income communities.

## Ready Schools

Finally, readiness also entails the capacity of elementary schools to receive young children entering kindergarten. “Ready” schools smooth the transition between home and school, by demonstrating sensitivity to cultural differences and engaging parents in the education of their children.<sup>iv</sup> **Ready schools are committed to the success of each child.** They acknowledge the effects of poverty and institutional racism and engage in inclusive practices that meet diverse learning needs. Unfortunately, schools may inadvertently reproduce societal inequities and exacerbate readiness gaps, as children living in poverty and children of color are more likely to attend less resourced and lower performing schools.<sup>v</sup> Conversely, longitudinal research in Alameda County shows that **schools that are more socioeconomically advantaged and higher performing overall are more likely to help children** who are not yet ready in kindergarten catch up to their peers by third grade.<sup>vi</sup>

### What Parents Say

Parents participating in the study’s focus groups said the academic expectations for kindergartners are much higher than they used to be, but to them, “kindergarten readiness” is about much more than children being prepared academically. It also includes the child’s ability to social-emotionally adapt to the new school environment, as well as the availability of school and community supports to smooth the transition and meet the basic needs of children and families.

## About This Study

The model of kindergarten readiness used to frame the Alameda County KRA recognizes the effects of structural poverty and racism as well as implicit bias on children’s outcomes. The study examined not only children’s readiness, but the readiness of their communities and schools to support them.

To measure kindergarten readiness, teachers assessed children’s skills using the *Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF)*, which was developed in 2001 based on the National Education Goals Panel multidimensional definition of readiness.<sup>vii</sup> The *KOF* sorts readiness skills into three primary domains, termed the *Basic Building Blocks of Readiness (Building Blocks)*: *Self-Regulation, Social Expression, and Kindergarten Academics*. Additionally, motor skills are included on the *KOF* as foundational elements of readiness. Teachers also completed a teacher survey, parents completed a parent survey, and two focus groups were conducted with parents. The results presented here are from a representative countywide sample and illustrate the readiness of children, families, communities, and schools in Alameda County.

The key research questions examined in this year’s study and addressed in this report are the following:

1. How ready for kindergarten were children, families, communities, and schools in Alameda County?
2. What child, family, and neighborhood factors are associated with higher levels of kindergarten readiness?
3. What types of experiences and family backgrounds were characteristic of the incoming kindergarten students?
4. What programs, policies, and systems changes will help to “turn the curve” on kindergarten readiness in Alameda County?

The findings will help guide and inform strategies that community leaders can undertake to achieve more equitable kindergarten readiness outcomes for Alameda County children, families, communities, and schools.





# Methodology

## Data Collection Instruments and Administration

Three instruments were used to collect data for the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). Kindergarten teachers completed the *KOF* and a teacher survey, while parents/caregivers provided information about their child and family circumstances on the *Parent Information Form (PIF)*.

The *Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF)* uses teacher observation as the method of assessment across 20 readiness skills. To minimize variability in teacher ratings, the *KOF* includes measurable indicators (items), clear assessment instructions, a clearly defined response scale, a comprehensive scoring guide describing appropriate proficiency levels for each of the 20 readiness skills, and thorough teacher trainings, where teachers were instructed to follow the detailed rubric and scoring guide in order to make their ratings consistent. For social-emotional items, teachers were instructed to measure the child's typical behavior, not first impressions, keeping in mind that children's behavior varies from day to day. Furthermore, teachers were encouraged to be sensitive to the child's personality and culture in conducting the assessment. In the analysis phase, several steps were taken to reduce the likelihood of bias in our findings. First, anomalous ratings from two teachers were removed from the analyses. We also controlled for inter-teacher variability in our analyses and checked for variation in ratings based on the teachers' demographic background, finding no systematic differences in how teachers rated students.

Teachers also completed a two-page teacher survey about their background and education and training experience. In addition, teachers reported on the kindergarten transition activities that are offered at their school and the number of parent-teacher conferences conducted during the kindergarten year.

To better understand how family and neighborhood factors are related to children's levels of readiness, a *PIF* survey is completed by parents/caregivers. The *PIF* collects a wide variety of information about the child's experience prior to kindergarten entry. Versions of the form were offered in English, Spanish, Arabic, Tagalog, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Parents/caregivers were given a children's book as an incentive to complete the *PIF*.

## Who Completed the Study?

The 2019 assessment involved teachers, children, and families from 12 school districts and the Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE). Within these districts, 39 schools and 75 classrooms participated. Kindergarten readiness assessments using the *KOF* were conducted with 1,560 children (94% of all children in the participating classrooms), and 1,150 parents/caregivers completed the *PIF*. Seventy-four of the teachers completed the teacher survey. The largest share of classrooms was in the Berkeley, Fremont, Oakland, and Hayward Unified School Districts.

**Figure 1 — Number of Schools, Classrooms, and Students**

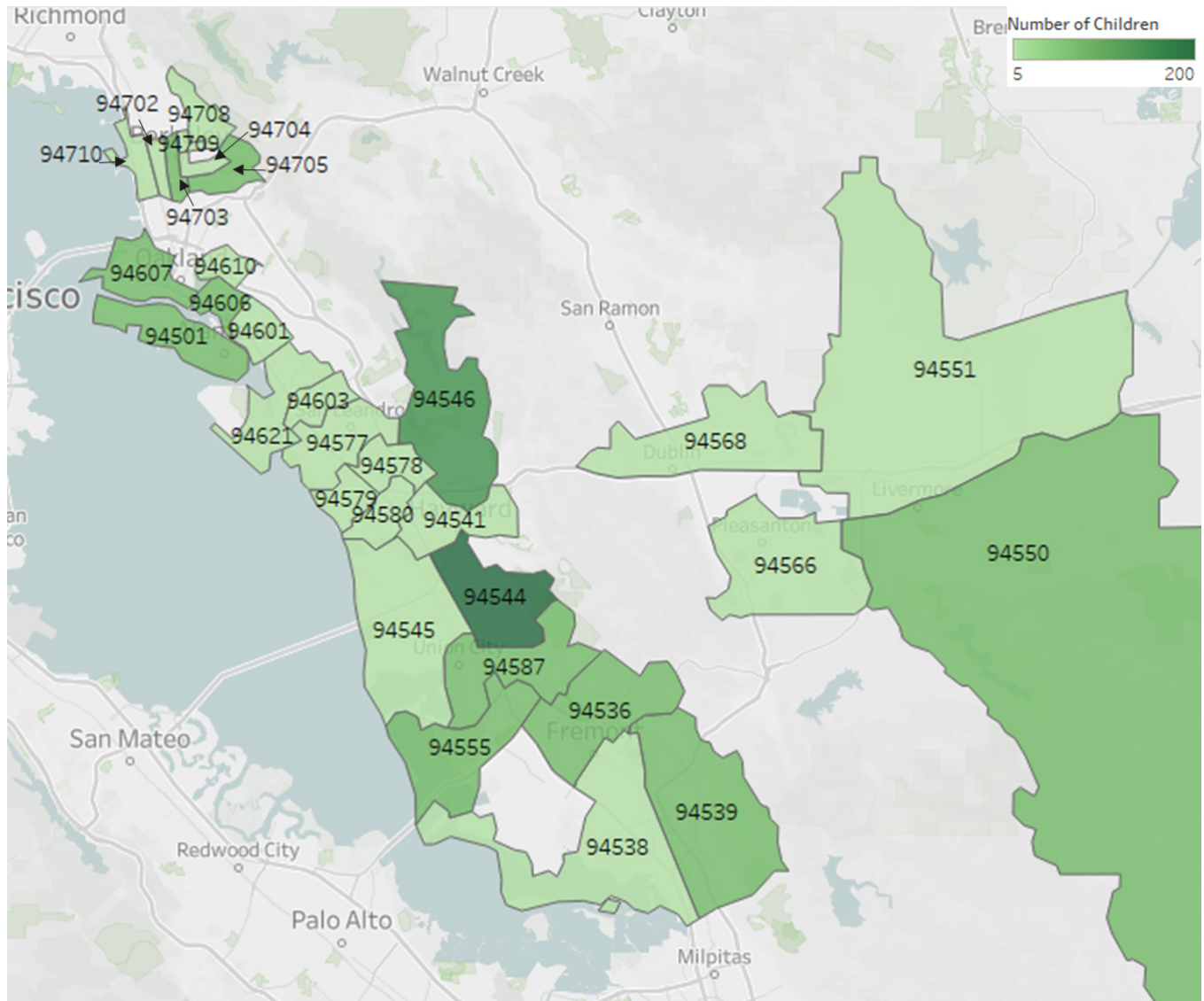
District	Schools	Classrooms	Students
ACOE	1	1	23
Alameda Unified	2	4	81
Berkeley Unified	5	11	235
Castro Valley Unified	2	5	111
Dublin Unified	2	2	30
Fremont Unified	5	13	247
Hayward Unified	5	9	199
Livermore Valley Unified	1	4	88
New Haven Unified	2	4	103
Oakland Unified	7	10	215
Pleasanton Unified	1	2	41
San Leandro Unified	2	3	68
San Lorenzo Unified	4	7	119
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>1,560</b>

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019)

As shown in the map that follows, the greatest number of children participating in the study lived in 94544 (Hayward) and 94546 (Castro Valley).



**Figure 2 — Map of Participants in the Study**



Note: ZIP Codes with fewer than five participants not shown.

Teachers and parents/caregivers participated in the readiness study voluntarily. This means that the information presented in this report describes only the students and families assessed, who may differ in important ways from students and families who did not participate. However, the sample was representative of the county in terms of key demographics, including race/ethnicity, English Learner status, and proficiency on the Smarter Balanced assessments, making it possible to draw conclusions about the readiness levels of children countywide.

## Parent Focus Group

In January 2020, First 5 Alameda County, in partnership with the San Antonio Family Resource Center, hosted two 2-hour focus groups with 23 parents at a participating school in Oakland. The purpose of the focus groups was to engage families in the evaluation process and to gather feedback from parents about the results of the KRA, particularly with respect to First 5's policy agenda. Parents were provided with refreshments, child care, and a gift card for participation, and translation in Spanish and Cantonese was made available. Topics discussed included the definition of kindergarten readiness, as well as school and community assets that could improve readiness. Findings from the focus groups are incorporated throughout this report in quotes and text boxes titled, "What Parents Say."

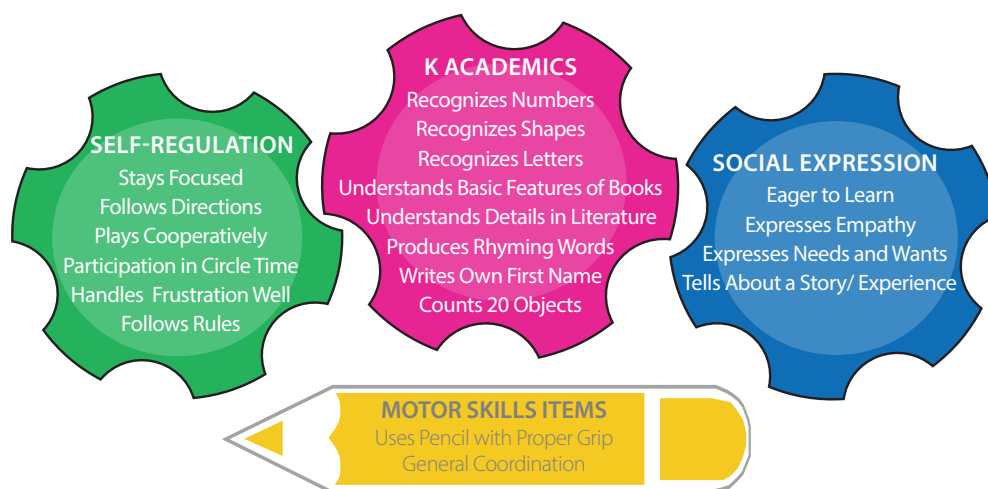


# Readiness of Children

This section describes children’s kindergarten readiness as measured by the Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF) and perceived by parents/caregivers and discusses the characteristics and experiences most strongly associated with children’s readiness.

## Readiness Levels According to the *Kindergarten Observation Form*

Previous analysis of child readiness data has shown that the underlying dimensions of readiness on the *KOF* are best represented by three main skill groups that have been labeled the *Basic Building Blocks of Readiness* – *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. A fourth area includes two items related to fine and gross motor skills, important foundational skills for the primary readiness domains and included in the calculation of overall average readiness scores, but not measured as a separate *Building Block*. Although all the skill dimensions are important, basic motor skills are at the base of the diagram because they are likely to precede the more advanced self-regulation and social-emotional skills, as well as the early academic skills that are a foundation for academic content covered in kindergarten and beyond.





## How Many Students Were Ready for Kindergarten?

Students' average scores overall and on each of the *Basic Building Blocks* dimensions were calculated (scores could range from 1.00=*Not Yet* to 4.00=*Proficient*). Students were considered *Fully Ready* for kindergarten in all areas if they scored at or above 3.25 out of 4 in the three *Building Blocks* – that is, if they were *Proficient* or nearing proficiency in *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. 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, **44% of students were Fully Ready** for kindergarten, while another 38% were *Partially Ready*, having scored at or above 3.25 in some but not all of the *Building Blocks*. The remaining 18% were *Not Ready*, having scored below 3.25 in all three *Building Blocks*.

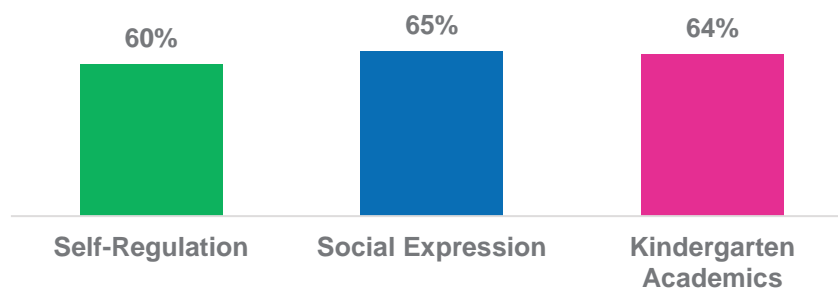
**Figure 3 — Percent Ready Across Building Blocks**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019)  
Note: N=1,487.

When each *Building Block* is considered separately, we find that the highest percentage of children were *Proficient* or nearing proficiency in the *Social Expression* domain (65% scored at least 3.25 out of 4 in this domain). Sixty percent of the children were *Proficient* or nearly proficient in *Self-Regulation*, and 64% met this benchmark in *Kindergarten Academics*.

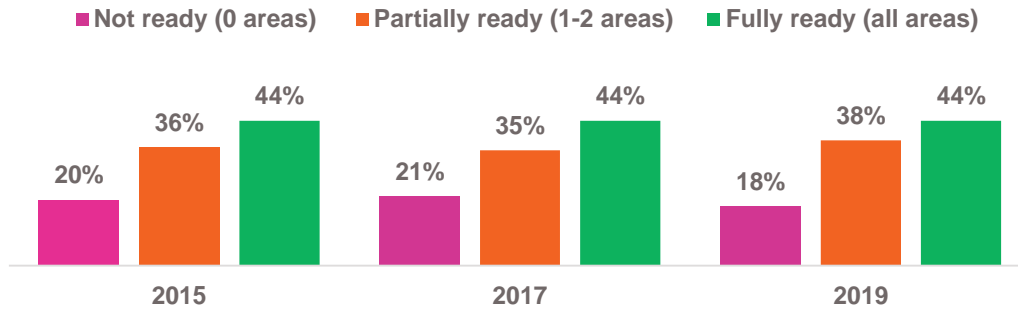
**Figure 4 — Percent Ready by Building Block**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019)  
Note: N=1,493-1,556.

This year's readiness levels were very similar to those of kindergartners participating in the last two assessments, which took place in 2015 and 2017. However, there was a slight, marginally significant increase in the proportion of children who were *Partially Ready* and decline in the proportion of children who were *Not Ready* between 2017 and 2019. The increase in readiness this year was primarily due to an increase in *Kindergarten Academics* scores, perhaps because in 2019, a larger share of students participated in transitional kindergarten (TK), came from higher income families, and were bilingual or native English speakers, compared to prior years.

**Figure 5 — Percent Ready over Time, 2015-2019**

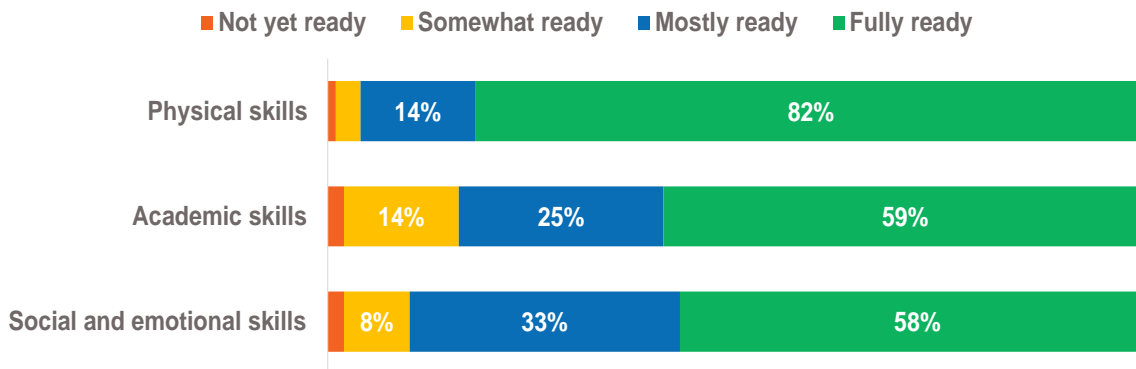


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2015, 2017, 2019)

Note: N=1,460 (2015); 1,303 (2017); 1,487 (2019). Differences in percent *Not Ready* and *Partially Ready* between 2017 and 2019 marginally significant ( $p < .10$ ).

In addition to capturing teachers’ perceptions of readiness, we asked parents/caregivers to rate their own child’s readiness for kindergarten on a four-point scale from “not yet ready” to “fully ready.” The vast majority of parents/caregivers felt that their children were well-developed in physical skills (82%), but just 59% said their children were fully ready academically, and 58% said they were fully ready social-emotionally. Parent/caregiver ratings were also associated with several key demographic and socioeconomic factors. For example, low-income parents/caregivers rated their children’s readiness lower than high-income parents/caregivers; Latinx parents/caregivers gave their children lower ratings than parents/caregivers of other races/ethnicities; and parents/caregivers of boys rated their children’s abilities lower than parents/caregivers of girls. Such differences in readiness can be partly attributed to disparities in access to resources and opportunities in early childhood, but the perceptions of parents/caregivers may also be affected by implicit biases and negative stereotypes about the behavior and aptitude of poor children, children of color, and boys.

**Figure 6 — Readiness Perceived by Parents/Caregivers, by Domain**



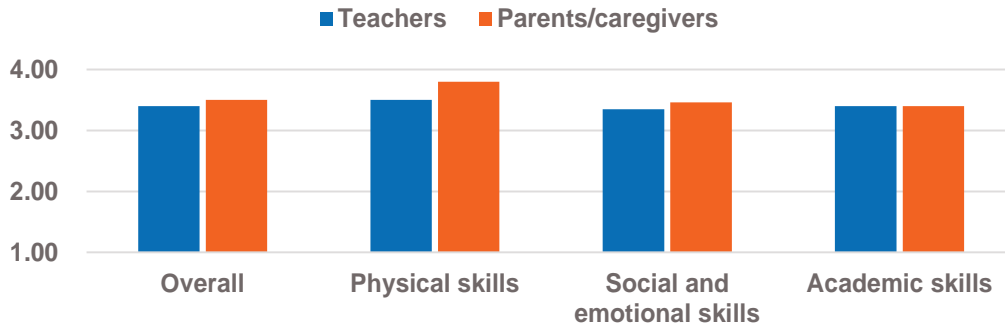
Source: Parent Information Form (2019)

Note: N=1,466. Proportions of less than 5% are not labeled.

The methods for rating children’s readiness differed between parents/caregivers and teachers, but we found similarities in their assessments of children’s skills. Although parents/caregivers rated children’s readiness higher than teachers in physical skills, there were strong, significant correlations between parent/caregiver ratings and *KOF* scores overall and in the primary *Building Blocks* of readiness (e.g., when children received a higher than average rating from their parent/caregiver, their teacher also gave them a higher than average rating). The correspondence between parent/caregiver and teacher ratings was particularly strong for children’s academic skills.



**Figure 7 — Average Kindergarten Readiness Scores, by Rater**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,466-1,556. Difference statistically significant for physical skills ( $p<.001$ ).

## Factors Associated with Overall Readiness

An additional analysis called *multiple regression* was conducted to examine the child, family, and neighborhood characteristics and experiences that are associated with children’s preparedness for school. The analyses conducted here can help us better understand why children’s readiness levels vary, but these are ultimately correlational – *not causal* – analyses, and there are likely many other variables that could affect readiness that are beyond the scope of this assessment.

The figure at right shows the factors that have a unique and significant association with KOF scores even after holding constant various other important child and family characteristics. For example, a child who had formal early childhood education (ECE) experience had higher readiness than a child who did not, when all other characteristics and experiences we measured were otherwise the same. The factors are arranged in the diagram according to the strength of their association with readiness, beginning with age (the strongest factor) and continuing clockwise.

The differences in readiness that we found based on demographic and socioeconomic factors are largely due to inequities in access to resources – this finding is consistent with other research on kindergarten readiness gaps that have used a variety of assessment methods, including the ratings of outside assessors rather than teachers.<sup>viii</sup> As shown in the previous section, we also found that parents/caregivers and teachers rated children similarly. Numerous steps were taken to minimize the effects of implicit bias on the results, including giving teachers a thorough training and detailed rubric for each skill, removing anomalous ratings, controlling for classroom-level variability in scores, and confirming that there were no systematic differences in ratings based on teacher demographics (see Methodology), yet it is possible teacher assessments of children’s skills were nevertheless influenced by gender, race, and class stereotypes.

**Figure 8 — Factors Associated with Overall Kindergarten Readiness**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=926. Relationships between all factors and readiness are statistically significant ( $p<.05$ ). The overall regression model was significant ( $p<.001$ ), explaining 34% of the variance in kindergarten readiness ( $R^2=.34$ ).

Older

***The strongest association was observed between age and kindergarten***

***readiness***: children develop rapidly at this age, and therefore children who were older were more developed in their physical, social-emotional, and cognitive skills.

Health & Well-being (Not Hungry or Tired)

***The second strongest factor associated with readiness was coming to school well-rested and well-fed***;

with their basic needs cared for, these children were more likely to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Some of the child and family characteristics associated with better health and well-being outcomes included higher family income, housing stability, and lower levels of stress among parents/caregivers.

Early Childhood Education Attendance

***Children who attended early childhood education (i.e., licensed preschool or family child care or transitional kindergarten [TK]) in the prior year had higher readiness than children without these enriching experiences***,

especially among African-American and Latinx children, for whom ECE was more strongly linked to readiness than it was for other children.

English Proficient/Bilingual

***Students who were native English speakers or were fully bilingual in English and another language had higher readiness than children who were monolingual non-English speakers***,

a group whose parents/caregivers were more socioeconomically disadvantaged and reported less social support, higher stress, engagement in fewer readiness activities with their children, and access to fewer neighborhood resources. Dual language learners who are supported to become bilingual have better academic performance and social outcomes and benefit the communities in which they eventually live and work.<sup>ix</sup>

No Special Need

***Readiness was higher among typically developing students compared to their peers with diagnosed special needs***,

who had delays in one or more skill domains.

Higher Income

***Higher income families had children with higher readiness***,

because they have more disposable resources to contribute towards their children's early education and development, report experiencing less stress, and have access to a greater number of resources in their communities.

Less Screen Time

***Less screen time exposure was associated with higher readiness***,

as it is correlated with better sleep and more time for children and families to engage in active play, reading aloud, and other high-quality social interactions.<sup>x</sup>

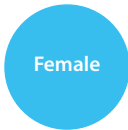
Higher Resilience

***Children who were highly resilient, as reported by their parents/caregivers (meaning they were able to adjust well to changes in routine and calm themselves when upset), had better readiness outcomes***,

especially in their social-emotional skills. Conversely, trauma affects children's ability to manage their emotions and adapt to stressful situations;<sup>xi</sup> children who had experienced trauma likely had lower resilience ratings and lower social-emotional readiness.



**Latinx children had lower readiness than white and multiracial children**, a disparity that may be partly explained by the fact that, in addition to having less disposable income, parents/caregivers of Latinx children reported higher degrees of stress, lower levels of social support, and access to fewer neighborhood assets compared to the parents/caregivers of white and multiracial children. The readiness scores of African-American and Asian/PI children were between those of white/multiracial and Latinx children, but only the difference between white/multiracial and Latinx children was statistically significant.



**Girls tended to have higher readiness.** Developmental researchers have noted that girls are more developed than boys at this age, particularly in their social and behavioral skills.<sup>xii</sup> The gender gap in readiness was larger for African-American, Asian/PI, and multiracial children than it was for white and Latinx children, and for children in families earning at least \$35,000 per year than for children in lower income families.



**More frequent reading with children predicted higher readiness.**<sup>xiii</sup> Research shows reading promotes children’s language and social-emotional development.

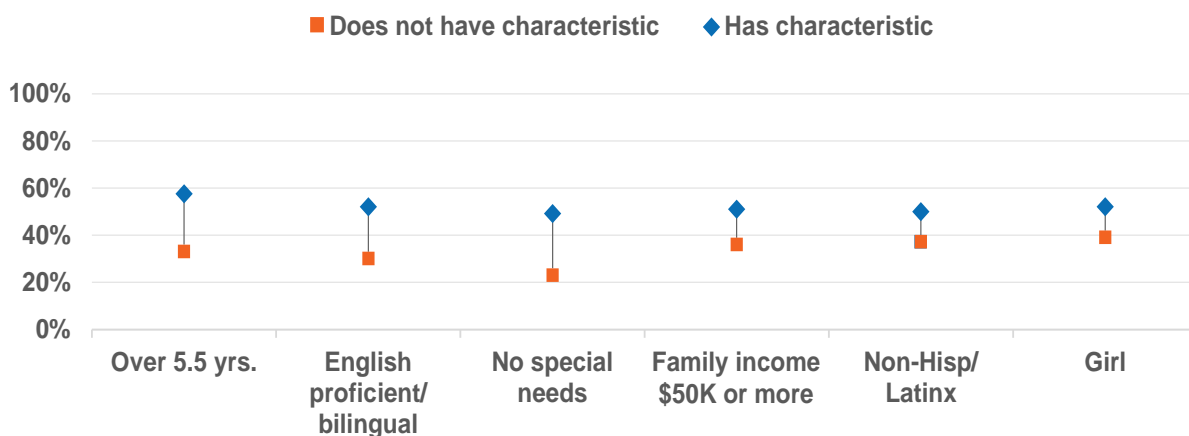


**Children had higher readiness when their fathers utilized a greater number of community resources**, like libraries, museums, and parks. Other research shows that fathers play an important and unique role in children’s early cognitive and regulatory development.<sup>xiv</sup>

## Demographic, Developmental, and Socioeconomic Readiness Gaps

In this section, we illustrate the gaps in readiness based on children’s demographic, developmental, and socioeconomic characteristics, after controlling for other factors significantly associated with readiness. Many characteristics we analyzed co-occur (e.g., race/ethnicity and family income), but the charts that follow help us see the gaps in readiness that remain after accounting for other factors. For instance, only 36% of children 5.5 years or younger were *Fully Ready*, compared to 56% of older children, when key characteristics, like gender, race/ethnicity, and family income, are otherwise the same. Here and in other instances in the report, we have selected \$50,000 as a cut-off for displaying data related to family income, as this approximates the income of two adults who are working full time at California’s minimum wage.<sup>xv</sup>

**Figure 9 — Adjusted Percent Fully Ready, by Child and Family Characteristics**



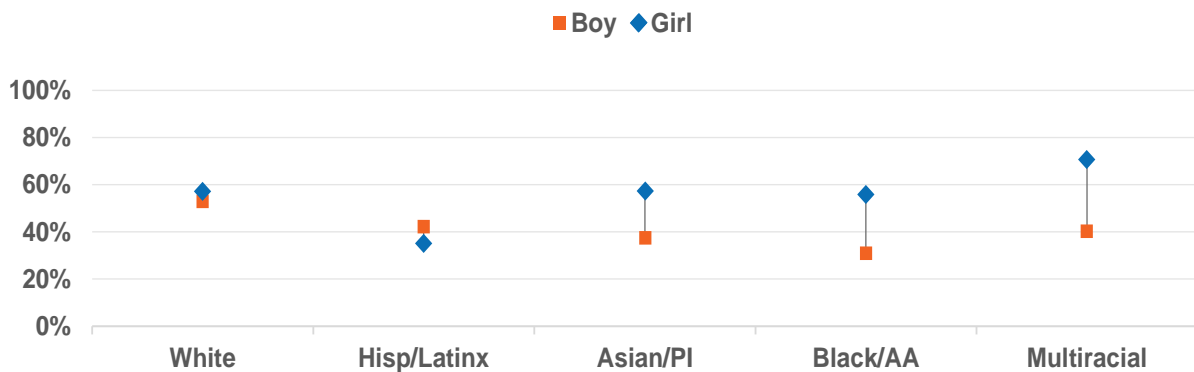
Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)

Note: N=983-1,013. All differences are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Adjusted for other significant factors in the regression model.

The gender gap in readiness varied by race/ethnicity, with larger gaps observed among African-American, Asian/PI, and multiracial children than among white and Latinx children. In fact, among Latinx children, the gender gap was reversed, with boys exhibiting higher readiness than girls.

The significant gender gap observed for some boys of color, particularly multiracial and African-American boys, may be related to disparities in children’s experiences in their early learning settings and communities. For example, preschool teachers often perceive behavior that is typical of boys’ play as “out of control,” resulting in louder reprimands and greater expression of disapproval.<sup>xvi</sup> The intersection of race, gender, and class helps explain the opportunity gap facing young African-American boys in particular. There is evidence that preschool teachers are more likely to view young African-American boys’ behavior negatively,<sup>xvii</sup> they are more likely to be disciplined than nurtured,<sup>xviii</sup> and they are suspended and expelled from preschool at significantly higher rates compared to other children.<sup>xix</sup> In addition, African-American children in Alameda County are over six times as likely as white children to grow up in poverty,<sup>xx</sup> which adversely affects their health and development.<sup>xxi</sup> **Gender, race, and class disparities interact to produce early opportunity gaps that contribute to the observed kindergarten readiness gaps.**

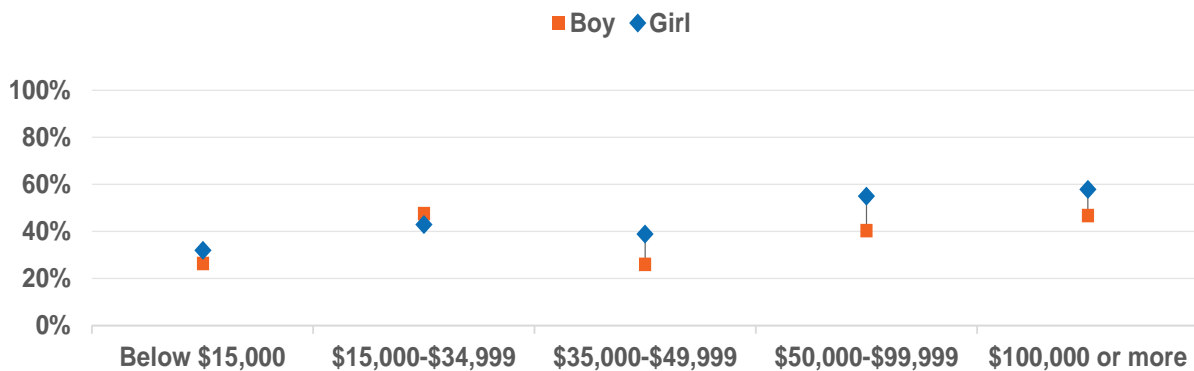
**Figure 10 — Adjusted Percent Fully Ready, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,560. Difference in readiness gap statistically significant (p<.05). Adjusted for other significant factors in the regression model.

Differences in the gender gap in readiness were also observed for children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Although there was a gender gap favoring girls for children living in families earning at least \$35,000 per year, there were no gender differences among children in lower income families. It appears that at the lowest end of the income distribution, boys and girls are equally disadvantaged, with their socioeconomic circumstances playing a larger role in their readiness than their gender.

**Figure 11 — Adjusted Percent Fully Ready, by Income and Gender**

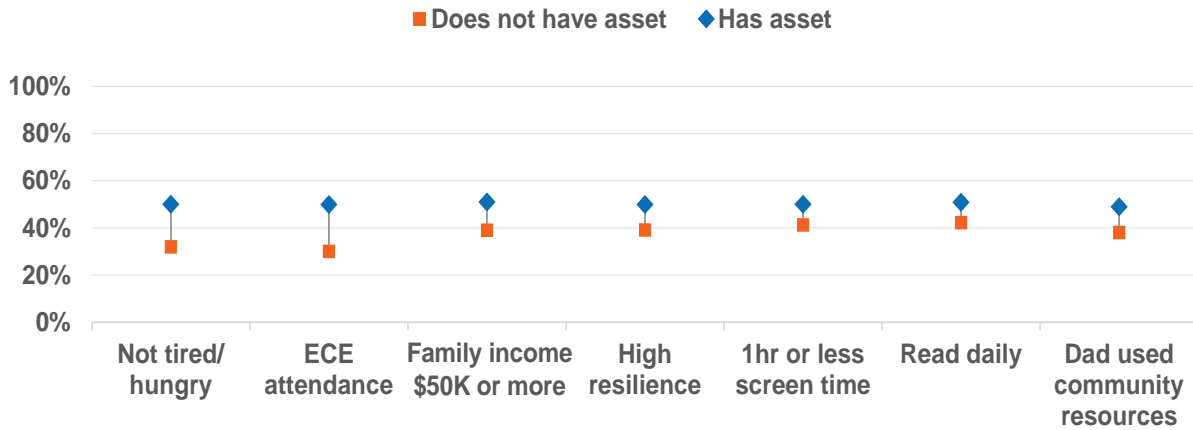


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,013. Difference in readiness gap statistically significant (p<.05). Adjusted for other significant factors in the regression model.

## Readiness Gains Associated with Malleable Assets

Several of the factors strongly related to readiness can be impacted with intervention, especially health and well-being, ECE attendance, family income (considered both a socioeconomic characteristic and a malleable factor), resilience, screen time, reading with the child, and father’s use of community resources. The chart below shows the extent to which these factors were independently associated with likelihood of being *Fully Ready*, after controlling for the other correlates, including demographics and socioeconomic status.

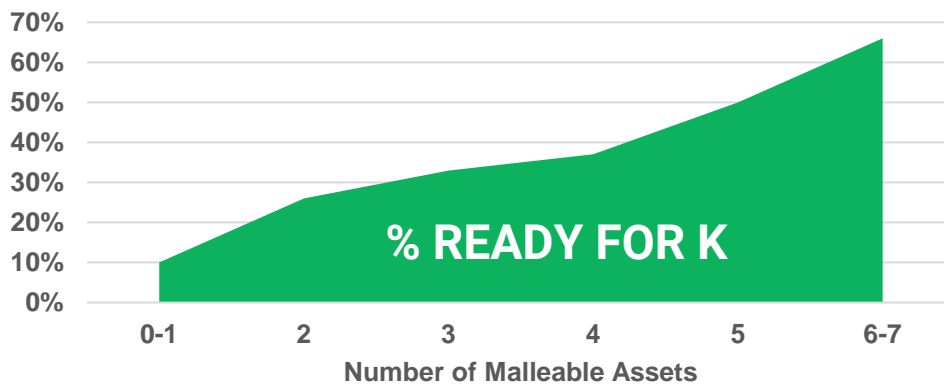
**Figure 12 — Adjusted Percent Fully Ready, by Malleable Assets**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=983-1,013. All differences are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Adjusted for other significant factors in the regression model.

Although boys of color, particularly African-American boys, tended to have lower readiness scores, **their readiness improved substantially if they had access to a greater number of these seven malleable assets.** When no more than one of the assets was present, 10% of boys of color were *Fully Ready*. In contrast, 66% of boys of color were *Fully Ready* when they had at least six assets, well above the 44% who were *Fully Ready* in the county overall.

**Figure 13 — Percent of Boys of Color Fully Ready, by Number of Malleable Assets**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=363. Boy of color defined as any non-white male participant. Relationship between assets and readiness statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ).

## SUMMARY

- In 2019, 44% of children in Alameda County were *Fully Ready*, demonstrating a combination of social-emotional and academic readiness skills
- Between 2017 and 2019, there was a marginally significant decrease in the percent of children who were *Not Ready* (i.e., were not yet proficient in any domain of readiness)
- In addition to child and family demographics, kindergarten readiness was most strongly associated with the following malleable assets:
  - » Health and well-being (not tired or hungry)
  - » Formal early childhood education attendance (TK or licensed preschool or family child care)
  - » Higher family income
  - » Less screen time (e.g., TV, video games, and mobile device usage)
  - » Higher resilience (e.g., ability to adapt well to changes)
  - » More reading at home with the child
  - » More use of community resources (e.g., parks, libraries, and museums) with the child among fathers
- Gender gaps in readiness favoring girls were largest for African-American, Asian/PI, and multiracial children; the gender gap was also larger among children in families earning at least \$35,000 per year
- There was a cumulative, positive effect of malleable assets on readiness, significantly boosting the readiness of boys of color





# Readiness of Families...

## ...and Other Child and Family Characteristics

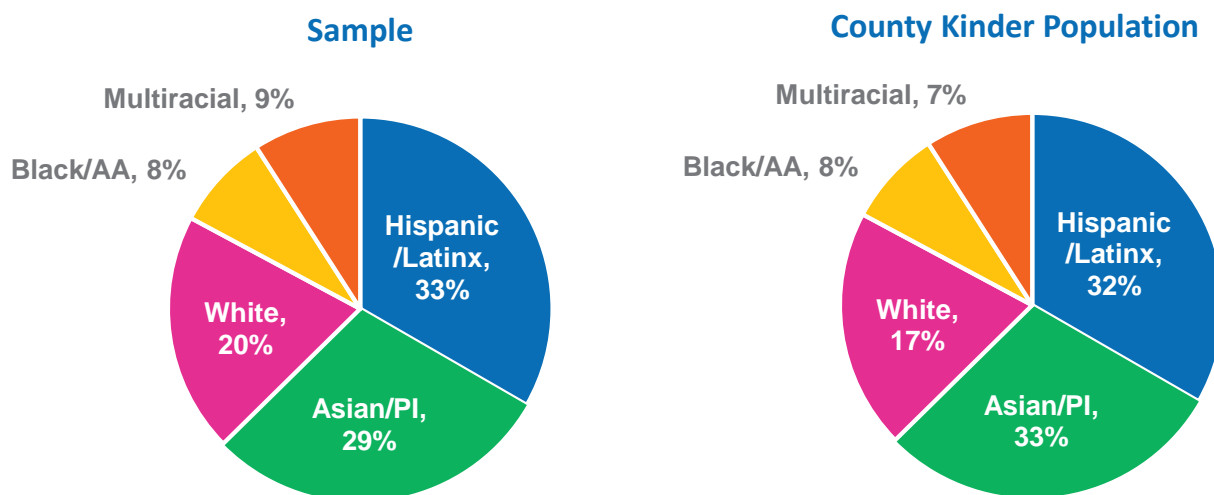
Parents/caregivers completed the *Parent Information Form (PIF)*, providing information on an array of child and family characteristics and experiences to help us gauge the readiness of families and better understand the backgrounds of participants in the study. Data illustrating these characteristics and experiences are presented in this section.

### Child and Family Demographics

The sample had slightly more boys (52%) than girls (48%), and children were 5.5 years old on average when they entered kindergarten. According to teachers, 31% of children were English Learners; the same proportion who were English Learners in the county overall in 2018-19.<sup>xiii</sup> About half of these children (49%) spoke Spanish as their preferred language, and 11% spoke Chinese; other languages were significantly less common.

Latinx students comprised the largest racial/ethnic group in the sample – 33% were Latinx of any race. Twenty-nine percent of students were Asian/Pacific Islander (the majority of whom were either South Asian or East Asian), 20% were white, 9% were multiracial, and 8% were African-American. The racial/ethnic makeup of the sample was nearly identical to that of the kindergarten population countywide in 2018-19.

**Figure 14 — Kindergarten Students’ Race/Ethnicity**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019), California Department of Education (2018-19)  
 Note: N=1,534.

The majority of mothers in the study (77%) had at least some college, and approximately two-thirds of families earned at least \$50,000 per year. The socioeconomic status of families in the sample was similar to that of families in the county overall, although mothers in the study were somewhat more likely to have had at least some college compared to countywide female population (70% of whom had at least some college), and households in the sample were somewhat less likely to earn at least \$50,000 per year (75% of households countywide earned this much).

**Figure 15 — Maternal Educational Attainment and Family Income**

Mother's Education	Sample	County (all females <sup>^</sup> )	Family Income	Sample	County
Less than High School	11%	11%	Below \$15,000	7%	7%
High School Diploma	12%	18%	\$15,000-\$34,999	14%	10%
Some College	15%	16%	\$35,000-\$49,999	11%	8%
Associate's Degree	6%	7%	\$50,000-\$74,999	9%	13%
Bachelor's Degree	28%	29%	\$75,000-\$99,999	7%	11%
Advanced Degree	28%	20%	\$100,000 or more	51%	51%

Source: Parent Information Form (2019), US Census, American Community Survey (2018)  
 Note: N=1,084-1,101. <sup>^</sup>Data unavailable for mothers only.

## Children's Health, Development, and Well-Being

### Health and Developmental Needs

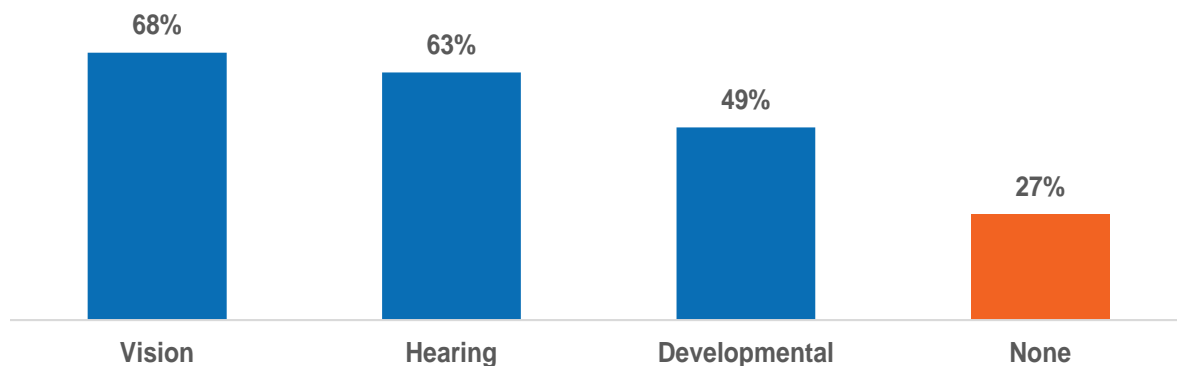
According to parents/caregivers and/or kindergarten teachers, 9% of children had an IEP or a special need diagnosed by a professional. Speech and language challenges were the most common concerns, affecting 71 children. In addition, 9% of children had been born low birth weight (i.e., less than five pounds, eight ounces), and about 10% had been diagnosed with asthma.

### Health Insurance and Health Care Access

The *PIF* contained several questions relating to children's access to and use of various health services. Nearly all students had health insurance (99%), a regular doctor (98%), and a regular dentist (92%).

Next, parents/caregivers reported on the health and developmental screenings their children had received. While 68% had received a vision screening, and 63% had received a hearing screening, only 49% had received a developmental screening; 27% had not received any screening at all.

**Figure 16 — Children's Health and Developmental Screenings**



Source: Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,097.

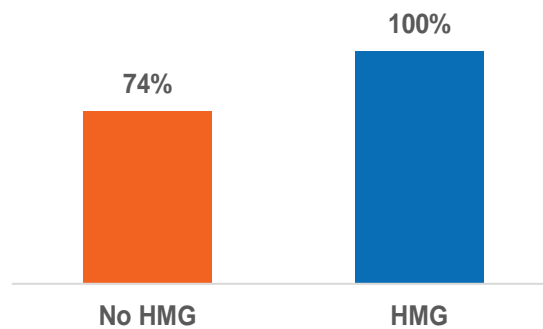
## Help Me Grow and Quality Counts Support for Developmental Needs

First 5 Alameda County supports Help Me Grow (HMG), an early identification and intervention program that provides families tools to detect and address developmental, social-emotional, and learning concerns in young children. HMG conducts developmental screenings and connects families to needed health, education, and special needs services. These services are particularly important in light of the fact that fewer than half of children in the study had received a developmental screening.

In the 2019 sample, 80 children had received HMG services, including 26 who had received “light-touch” services (i.e., provided educational resources and materials), and 54 who had received “standard” services (i.e., provided resources and materials, referrals to services, and support in accessing needed services).

HMG appears to be successful in connecting children with special needs to treatment: among children who had a special need, **HMG participants were significantly more likely to be accessing professional help for that need compared to non-participants**. All HMG participants with a special need were receiving treatment, while only three-quarters of other children with special needs were accessing treatment at the time of kindergarten entry.

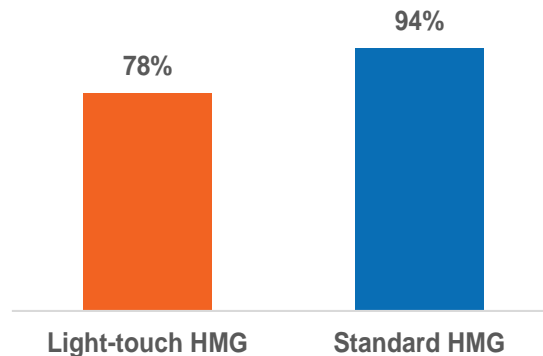
**Figure 17 — Percent of Children with Special Needs Receiving Treatment, by HMG Participation**



Source: Parent Information Form (2019), Alameda County HMG Data (2019)  
Note: N=109. Difference statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

Also, when provided in the standard dosage, rather than the light-touch dosage, **HMG appears to help families better understand child development**. Ninety-four percent of participants receiving standard services said that they knew what to expect about their child’s growth and development, compared to 78% of participants receiving light-touch services.

**Figure 18 — Percent of HMG Participants with Child Development Knowledge, by HMG Intensity**

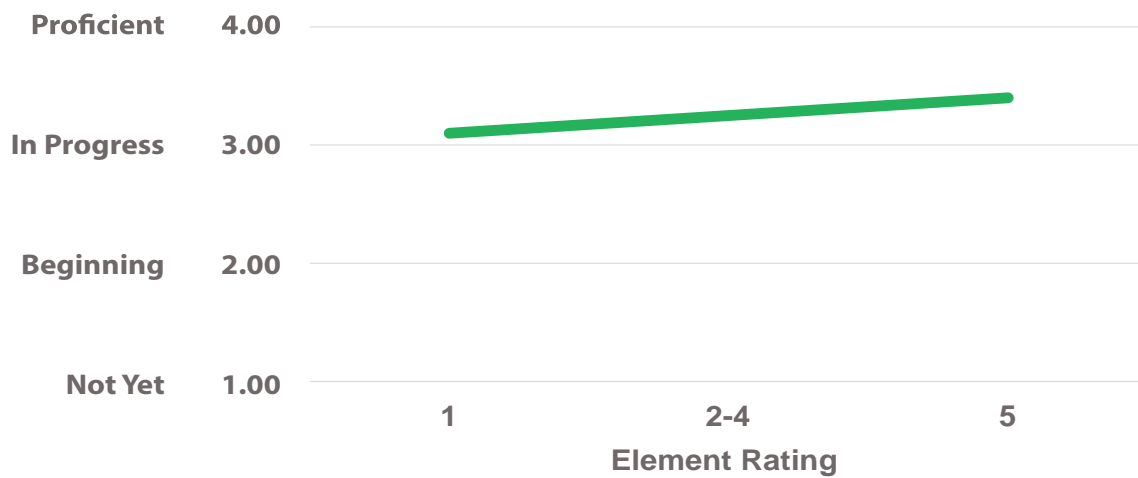


Source: Parent Information Form (2019), Alameda County HMG Data (2019)  
Note: N=51. Difference statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

The study also found evidence that the Alameda County Quality Counts (QRIS) program, supported by First 5 Alameda, is helping early childhood education (ECE) providers support the developmental outcomes of children in their programs. The Quality Counts program assesses quality in ECE sites and provides supports to improve the quality of care in these sites. Sites are rated on seven elements of quality and given an overall rating on a scale from 1 (lowest quality) to 5 (highest quality). In the 2019 sample, 154 children attended a Quality Counts-rated site.

One of the elements of quality measured involves the use of screening tools to identify and address the health and developmental needs of children. Within Quality Counts-rated sites, **children attending a site that received the highest rating (5) in their use of developmental and health screenings had higher Social Expression scores** than children attending a site that received the lowest rating (1). Sites receiving the highest rating work with families to ensure developmental and health screenings are conducted with all children using a valid and reliable screening tool (e.g., Ages and Stages Questionnaire [ASQ-3] and Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional [ASQ:SE]), and they use the screening results to make referrals and implement intervention strategies and adaptations. These efforts may have contributed to their students’ social-emotional readiness.

**Figure 19 — Social Expression Scores, by Quality Counts Developmental and Health Screenings Rating**



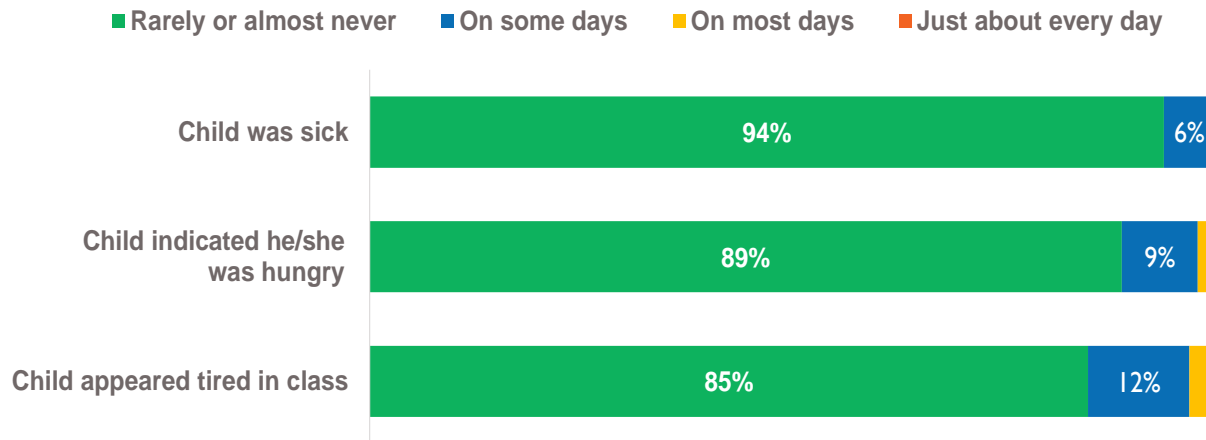
Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019), Alameda County QRIS data (2019)  
 Note: N=154. Difference between rating of 5 and rating of 1 statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). No site received a rating of 3. Adjusted for age, gender, race/ethnicity, special needs, English Learner status, and family SES.

### Teacher Reports of Health and Well-Being

Children who came to school with well-being concerns, particularly those exhibiting signs of tiredness or hunger, had lower readiness levels than their healthy peers. Just over one in five children appeared tired, sick, or hungry on at least some days, according to their teachers. Some of the child and family characteristics associated with better health and well-being outcomes included higher income, housing stability, and lower levels of stress among parents/caregivers. Children without special needs also tended to have higher levels of health and well-being.

*Child health and well-being was correlated with higher income, housing stability, and lower caregiver stress.*

Figure 20 — Health and Well-Being

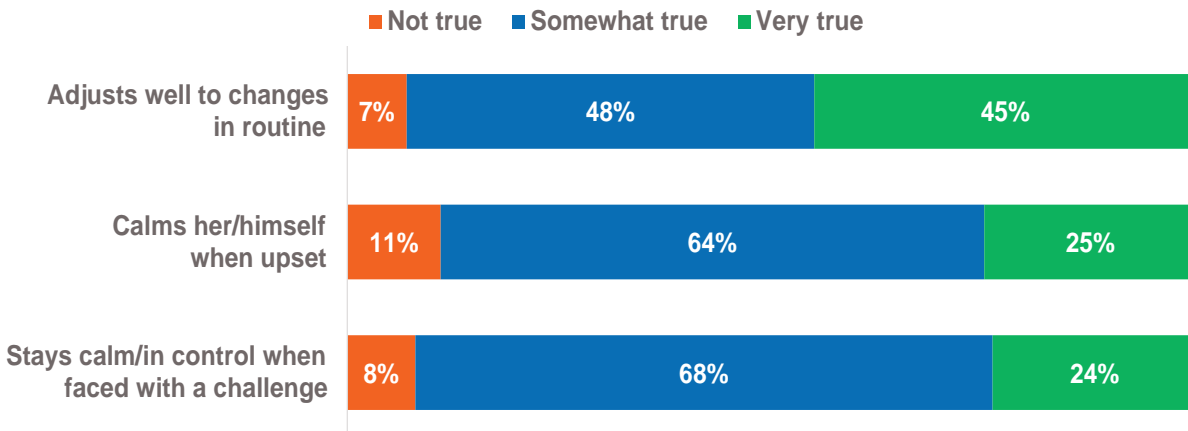


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,522-1,526. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Proportions of less than 5% are not labeled.

## Child Resilience

The current study found that children with higher resilience scores also had significantly higher kindergarten readiness scores. Resilience was measured using three questions on the parent survey. Approximately 81% of parents/caregivers said that their child adjusts well to changes in routine, is able to calm him or herself when upset, and stays calm and in control when faced with a challenge.

Figure 21 — Parents/Caregivers’ Perceptions of Child Resilience

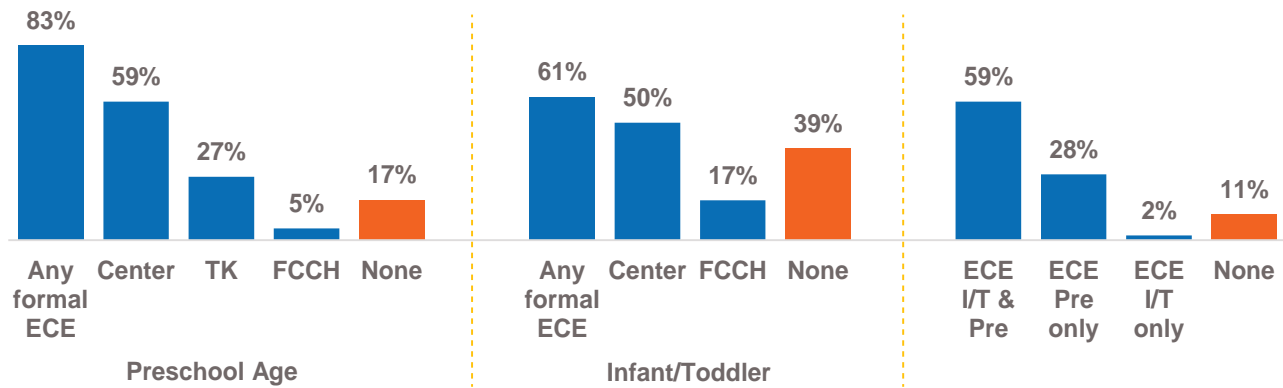


Source: Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,097. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

## Early Childhood Education Experiences

ECE experience was one of the factors most strongly associated with readiness in the current assessment. More than four out of five children (83%) attended either licensed preschool, licensed family child care (FCCH), or transitional kindergarten (TK), in the year prior to kindergarten. In the infant and toddler years, children were less likely to attend formal ECE; 61% of children had formal ECE experience in these years. About **25% of families said they would have chosen a different child care arrangement if they could have afforded it.**

**Figure 22 — Children’s Preschool/Child Care Experience**

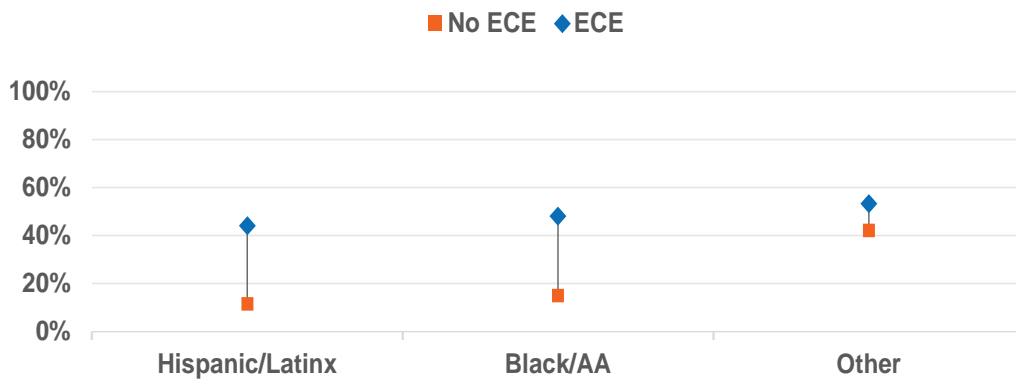


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,003-1,469.

Although the vast majority of children had some form of formal early childhood education experience, ECE attendance was not uniform across subgroups of children in the sample. Children in low-SES and single-parent families, English Learners, and Latinx and African-American children were less likely to have access to formal ECE than their peers. Yet, we also found that attending **ECE was more strongly linked to readiness for young African-American and Latinx children** than for children of other races or ethnicities. The readiness gap between children with and without ECE experience was 33 percentage points for Latinx and African-American children, but only 11 percentage points for the remainder of the sample.

*Black and Latinx children were less likely to attend ECE, but when they did, it had a stronger positive effect on their readiness.*

**Figure 23 — Adjusted Percent Fully Ready, by Child Race/Ethnicity and ECE Attendance**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,013. Difference in readiness gap statistically significant (p<.05). Adjusted for age, gender, special needs, English Learner status, and family SES.

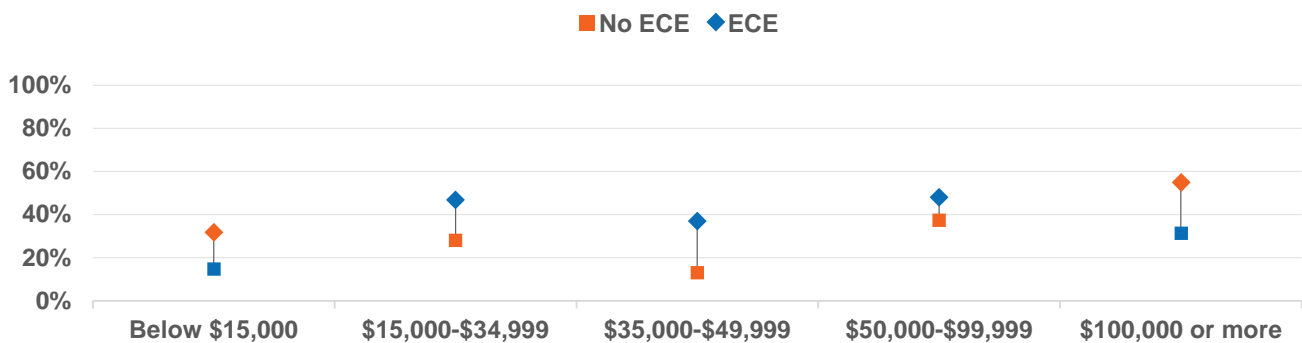
*“[It is] very important that children enter school at an early age because then when they start [kindergarten], they don’t feel as afraid. They’re prepared.”*

– Parent focus group participant



As mentioned previously, low-income children were less likely to attend ECE than high-income children. However, **when they did attend ECE, children in families earning below \$50,000 per year had significantly higher readiness levels than their peers who did not have ECE experience** – a finding that is in line with other research demonstrating the numerous short- and long-term benefits of ECE for disadvantaged children.<sup>xxiii</sup> ECE attendance also greatly raised the readiness of children in families earning at least \$100,000 per year. Attending ECE improved the readiness of children in families earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000, but to a somewhat lesser extent, perhaps because families at the highest end of the income distribution were better able to afford high-quality care to support their children's readiness. We did not have complete data on the quality of care children received, but **parents/caregivers in our study who earned below \$100,000 per year were twice as likely as those earning more to say they would have chosen a different child care arrangement if they could have afforded it.**

**Figure 24 — Adjusted Percent Fully Ready, by Income and ECE Attendance**

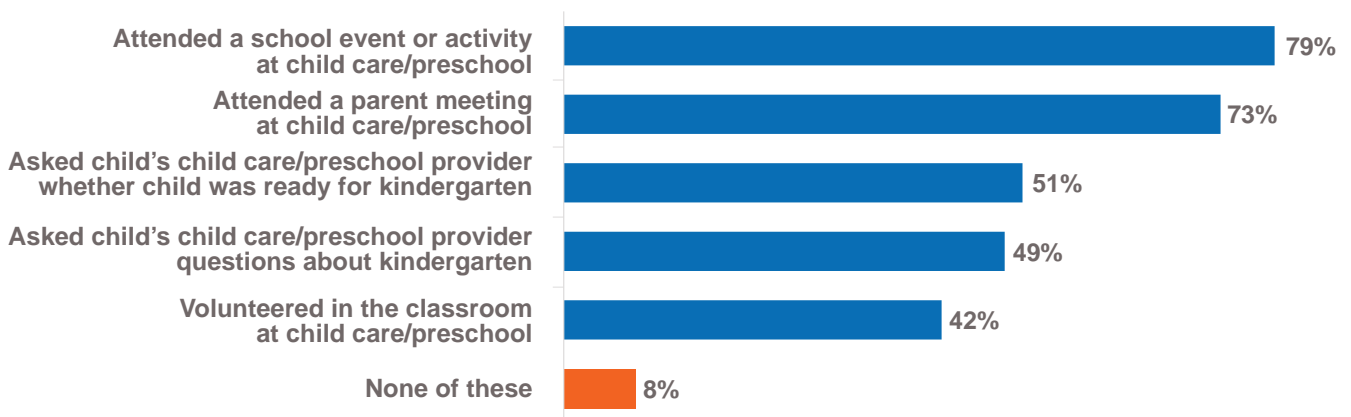


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,013. Difference in readiness gap statistically significant (p<.05). Adjusted for age, gender, race/ethnicity, special needs, and English Learner status.

## Families' Preparation for Kindergarten

Parents/caregivers were asked about their engagement in their child's child care or preschool setting. Seventy-nine percent of parents/caregivers attended a school event or activity at their child's child care or preschool, 73% attended a parent meeting, 51% asked the child care/preschool provider whether their child was ready for kindergarten, 49% asked them questions about kindergarten, and 42% volunteered in the classroom.

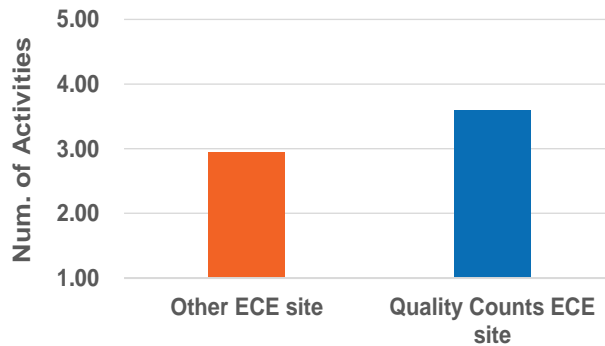
**Figure 25 — Engagement in Child Care/Preschool Setting**



Source: Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,017.

**Families of children in Quality Counts ECE settings were more engaged in those early learning sites compared to families of children in other ECE settings.** Families with children in Quality Counts ECE sites were more likely to attend meetings and events at the site, volunteer in the classroom, and ask the provider questions about kindergarten and their child’s readiness. Despite being more socioeconomically disadvantaged than children in other ECE settings, children attending Quality Counts ECE sites also had readiness levels that were on par with children attending other ECE programs, and their scores were higher than children who had similar demographic and socioeconomic profiles but did not attend ECE. Thus, **Quality Counts appears to be offering a support to vulnerable families that helps bring children’s readiness in line with their peers.**

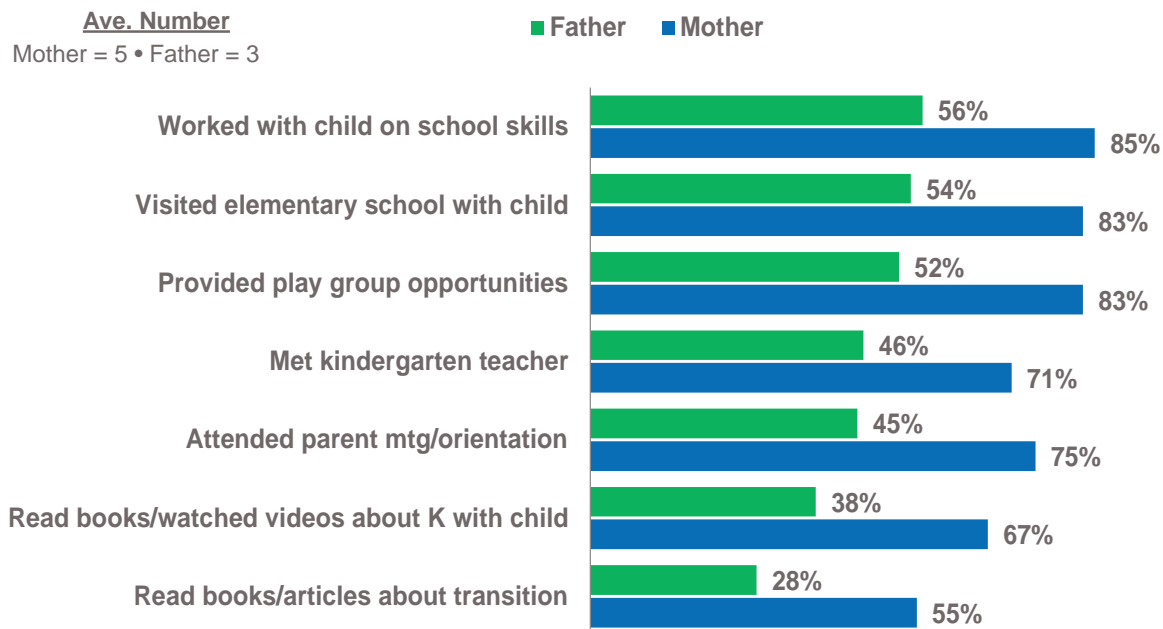
**Figure 26 — Engagement in Child Care/Preschool Setting, by Site Participation in Quality Counts**



Source: Parent Information Form (2019), Alameda County QRIS data (2019)  
 Note: N=894. Difference statistically significant (p<.001). Adjusted for age, gender, race/ethnicity, special needs, English Learner status, and family SES.

The parent survey also asked about parent/caregiver engagement in various kindergarten transition activities. The majority of parents/caregivers had worked on school skills with their child (85% of mothers and 56% of fathers), visited the elementary school with the child (83% of mothers and 54% of fathers), and provided opportunities for the child to play in small groups with other children (83% of mothers and 52% of fathers). Other transition activities were less common.

**Figure 27 — Kindergarten Readiness Activities**



Source: Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,109

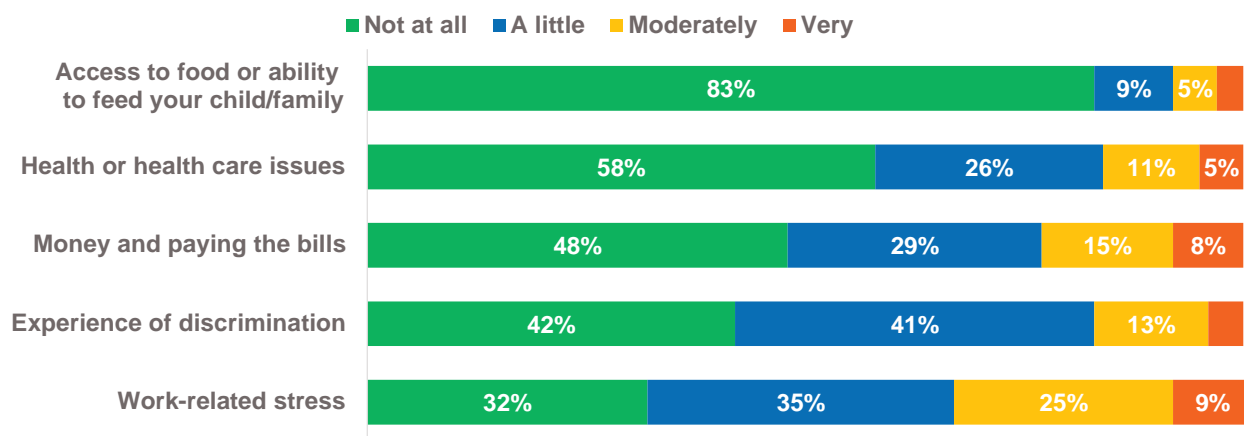
# Family Stressors and Supports

## Family Stress

In the current year, nearly two-thirds of families reported at least some work-related stress, and over half reported concerns about money and paying the bills. Additionally, close to six in 10 parents/caregivers reported that they had experienced discrimination because of their race/ethnicity. Many families also said they were at least a little concerned about health or health care issues, but concerns about access to food were less commonly reported. We found that **reports of stress were significantly more common among parents/caregivers of color and those in low-income families.**

*High levels of stress were more commonly reported by parents/caregivers of color and those in low-income families.*

Figure 28 — Parent/Caregiver Reports of Concerns



Source: Parent Information Form (2019)

Note: N=1,094-1,105. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Proportions of less than 5% are not labeled.

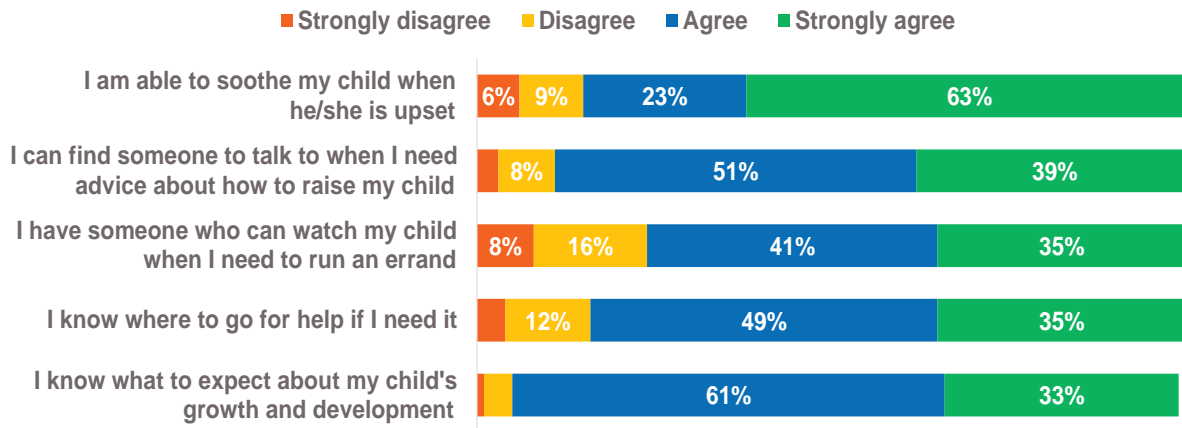
## Housing Instability: Family Mobility & Homelessness

Over half of families had moved at least once in the child’s lifetime, including 19% who had moved three or more times. In addition, 7% of families reported that they had experienced homelessness at some point in the child’s lifetime. Most of these families (69 of the 80 reporting homelessness) had lived temporarily with friends or family due to economic hardship. Housing instability was significantly more prevalent among low-income families. Homelessness was correlated with lower readiness, but this relationship was no longer significant after accounting for family income. **Experiencing homelessness was also related to other challenges, including greater parent/caregiver stress, more limited access to ECE, and child health and well-being concerns.**

## Protective Factors

The PIF included a set of questions to assess parents’/caregivers’ perceptions of being supported in their parenting and confidence in their parenting abilities. The vast majority of parents/caregivers felt they were able to soothe the child when he or she was upset (86%). Nearly all agreed that they know what to expect about their children’s growth and development (94%) and they had someone to talk to for advice about parenting (90%). Over three-fourths of parents/caregivers had someone who can watch their child if they needed to run an errand, and 84% said they know where to go if they needed help with things like food, housing, and employment. **Low-income and Latinx families reported that they had less support than other families.**

Figure 29 — Protective Factors



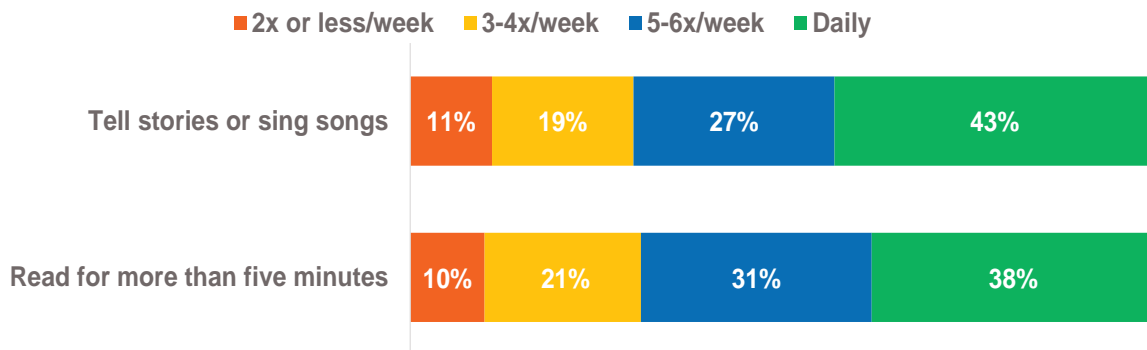
Source: Parent Information Form (2019)

Note: N=1,082-1,099. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Proportions of less than 5% are not labeled.

## Family Activities and Routines

Parents/caregivers were asked to report how often they spent time reading or telling stories and singing songs with their children during a typical week. In the current study, the frequency with which families read to their children was positively associated with kindergarten readiness. About seven in 10 families did these activities five or more times a week. Just over 85% of mothers engaged in these activities with their children compared to 60% of fathers. **Low-income and Latinx families (especially families of English Learners) reported less engagement in family activities on average, likely because they had less time, experienced more stress, and had more limited access to books in the home.** Immigrant parent/caregivers may have also been hesitant to read to their children in their native language, despite evidence that doing so improves children’s English reading proficiency.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Figure 30 — Frequency of Family Activities per Week



Source: Parent Information Form (2019)

Note: N=1,048-1,068. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

## Bedtime and Screen Time

Half of children went to bed before 9PM on weeknights, 41% had a bedtime between 9PM and 9:30PM, and 9% went to bed at 10PM or later. Although the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) does not have a recommended bedtime, they suggest that children aged 3-5 sleep 10 to 13 hours each day.<sup>xxv</sup>

The AAP also recommends that young children aged 2-5 get no more than one hour of “screen time” per day, which includes time spent watching television or videos, using mobile devices, or playing video or computer games.<sup>xxvi</sup> We found that greater exposure to screen time was linked to lower kindergarten readiness levels. Among children in this assessment, 38% of children were exposed to more than the recommended amount of screen time during the school week, and 66% of children were exposed to more than the recommended amount on weekends. We also found that **children who had more screen time also tended to have later bedtimes**, similar to the findings of other studies that have shown that screen time among infants and toddlers is associated with going to bed later and sleeping less overall.<sup>xxvii</sup>

*66% of children had more “screen time” on weekends than recommended by the AAP.*

*“If the parks were safe and inviting, I wonder if kids would have less screen time and be outside more.” – Parent focus group participant*

## SUMMARY

- The sample was diverse and representative of the countywide kindergarten population on key demographic characteristics
- Children with special needs who received HMG services were significantly more likely to be accessing professional help for their special need, and families who received standard HMG services were more likely than families receiving light-touch services to know what to expect about their child’s growth and development
- ECE sites participating in the Quality Counts program had children with higher *Social Expression* scores if they conducted health and developmental screenings with all children and used the results to make referrals and implement interventions
- Over one in five children appeared tired, sick, or hungry, on at least some days
- Approximately eight in 10 parents/caregivers said their child is able to stay calm when faced with a challenge, adjust well to changes in routines, and calm him/herself when upset
- Over four in five children attended formal ECE in the year prior to kindergarten; Latinx and African-American children were less likely to have access to formal ECE, but ECE attendance was more strongly linked to readiness for these children than for children of other races/ethnicities
- Attending ECE was associated with a significant increase in the likelihood of being *Fully Ready* for children in families earning less than \$50,000 per year
- Families of children at Quality Counts sites were more engaged in the child care setting than families of children at other ECE sites

- The majority of parents/caregivers engaged in kindergarten preparation activities; mothers were more likely to engage in kindergarten preparation activities than fathers
- Parents/caregivers were most affected by work-related stress, discrimination, and difficulty making ends meet; these concerns were more likely to be reported by parents/caregivers of color and those in low-income families
- Seven percent of families had experienced homelessness at some point in the child's life, and these families were more likely to report high levels of stress, limited access to ECE, and their children had more health and well-being concerns
- About seven in 10 parents/caregivers read or told stories or sang songs with their child at least five times per week; mothers were more likely to engage in these activities than fathers
- Most children went to bed by 9PM and did not have more than one hour of screen time during the week, but 66% of children were exposed to over an hour of screen time on weekends; more screen time was associated with later bedtimes

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement policies that promote child health and well-being and reduce food insecurity, such as expanded food subsidies, free meal programs, and quality medical care
- Expand support for basic needs, such as income and housing support, so that families experience less stress and have sufficient resources to invest in their children's early education and development
- Expand early identification and intervention systems, like the First 5 Alameda-supported Help Me Grow (HMG) program and universal developmental screenings in ECE sites
- Provide quality ECE experiences for all children, including bilingual instruction for dual language learners
- Invest in ECE quality improvement efforts, like First 5 Alameda's Quality Counts initiative, including coaching and training for ECE providers
- Implement policies to address pay equity, provide a living wage for ECE professionals, and promote the development of a diverse ECE field
- Support family education and support policies and programs that:
  - » Welcome and encourage father involvement
  - » Understand and address barriers to the replacement of screen time with enriching activities like reading (e.g., stress, time, adult education and literacy, and access to books, including multilingual books)





# Readiness of Communities

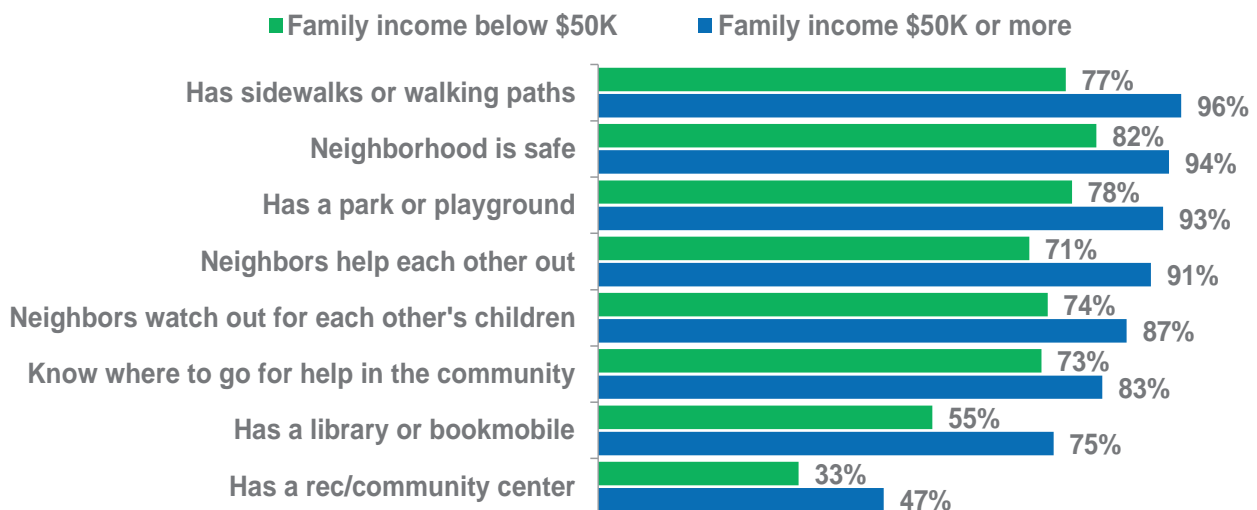
To help assess the readiness of communities to support children and families, parents/caregivers in the study reported on the presence of assets in their neighborhoods and whether they utilized local community resources. We also looked at the relationship between resources and supports in the community and children’s kindergarten readiness. Findings on the readiness of the communities in which participants lived are described in this section.

*“Playgroups, preschools, parks, and libraries – these resources help children to play together [and] face problems and cope with them, automatically making them resilient.”* – Parent focus group participant

## Neighborhood Assets

The vast majority of parents/caregivers reported neighborhood strengths and opportunities, indicating that their neighborhood is safe, well-connected, and has basic resources like sidewalks and parks or playgrounds. Somewhat fewer parents/caregivers reported that their neighborhood has a library or a recreation or community center. **Families earning at least \$50,000 per year were significantly more likely than lower income families to report the availability of each asset in their neighborhood, pointing to the need to invest in assets for low-income communities.**

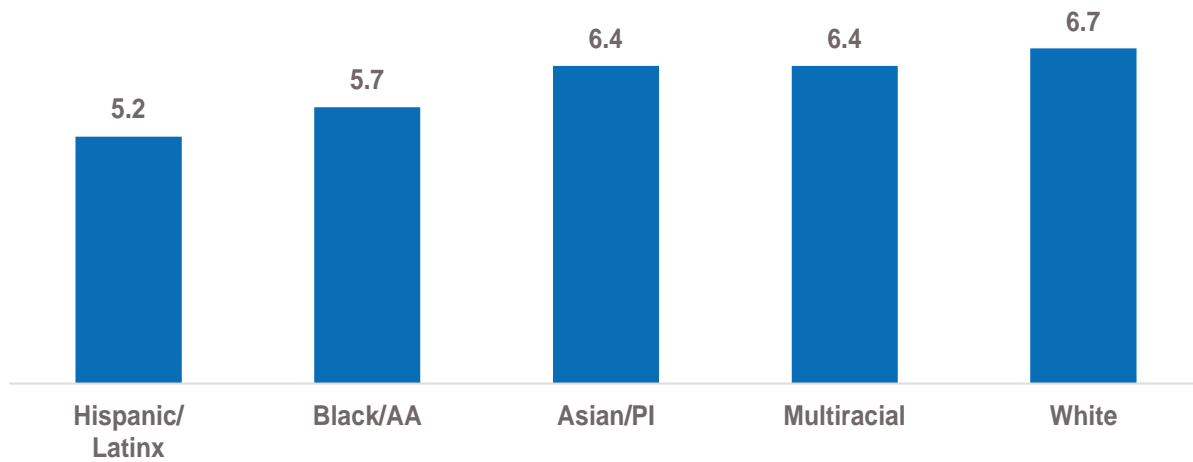
Figure 31 — Prevalence of Neighborhood Assets



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,017-1,078. Differences statistically significant (p<.01).

The number of neighborhood assets reported by parents/caregivers was compared across race/ethnicity and income. **Latinx and African-American families tended to live in communities with fewer assets than Asian/PI, multiracial, and white families.** English Learners, most of whom were Latinx, also lived in communities with fewer assets.

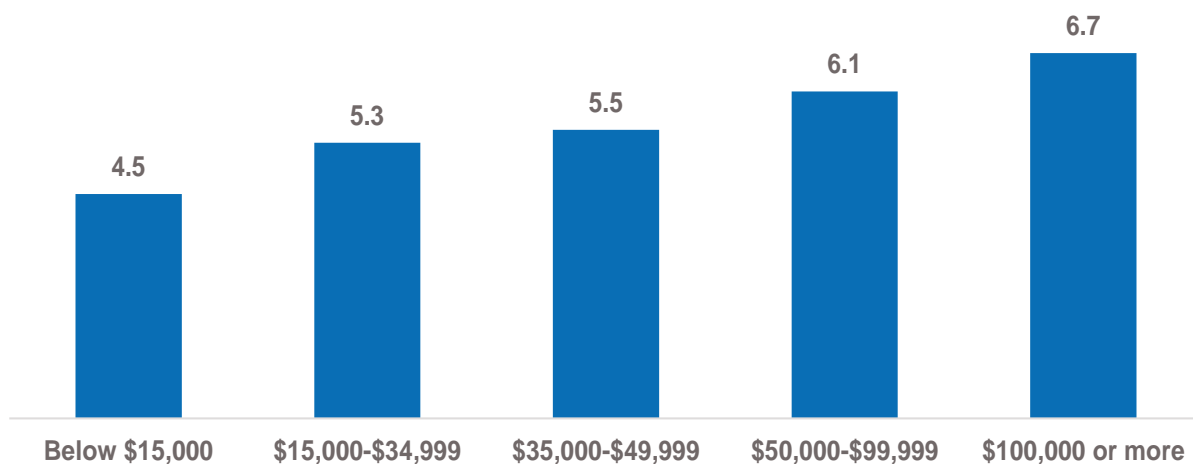
**Figure 32 — Neighborhood Assets, by Race/Ethnicity**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,134. Differences statistically significant (p<.001).

**As family income rose, so did the number of neighborhood assets reported by families.** For example, families earning below \$15,000 per year reported fewer than five assets in their neighborhoods, while families earning \$100,000 or more reported close to seven assets.

**Figure 33 — Neighborhood Assets, by Family Income**

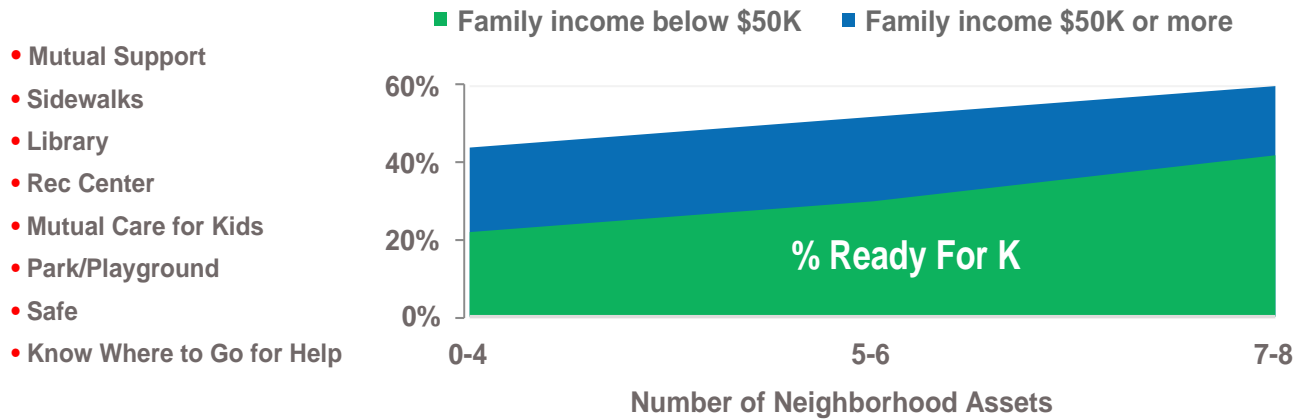


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,078. Differences statistically significant (p<.001).

*“Our neighborhoods are overlooked.”* – Parent focus group participant



Figure 35 — Percent Fully Ready, by Number of Neighborhood Assets



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,036. Relationship between assets and readiness statistically significant (p<.05).

## Parent/Caregiver Use of Community Resources and Services

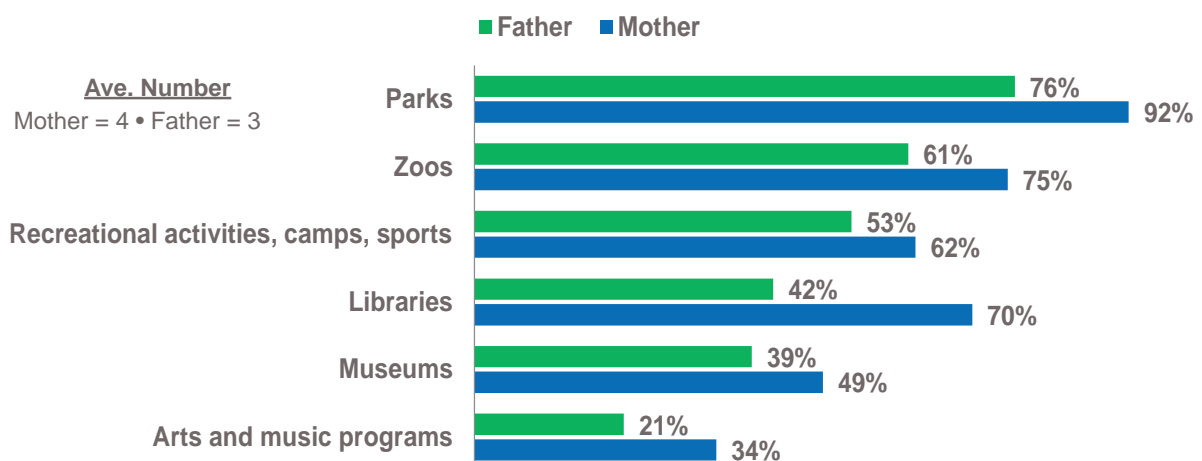
In addition to asking parents/caregivers about the characteristics of their neighborhoods, the parent survey asked them to indicate the types of community resources, programs, and services they utilized. The data reported here reflect families' engagement with community supports, but this engagement is likely related to the availability and accessibility of resources in the community. Further exploration of and investment in community resources is called for.

*Alameda County has identified eliminating poverty and hunger as a Vision 2026 goal, and Oakland Unified School District has adopted the Early Development Instrument (EDI) to further explore access to community resources and understand place-based disparities in investment and outcomes.*

As mentioned earlier in the report, use of community resources, specifically among fathers, was significantly associated with children's kindergarten readiness. The most widely used resources by parents/caregivers were local parks and zoos. **Mothers were more likely than fathers to use each resource, and this caregiver gap in engagement was greatest for libraries.** Community resource use was lower among African-American and Latinx families, as well as among low-income families, likely in part due to the fact that these families tended to live in neighborhoods with fewer assets and resources available to them.

*"[We] need more resources for dads."* – Parent focus group participant

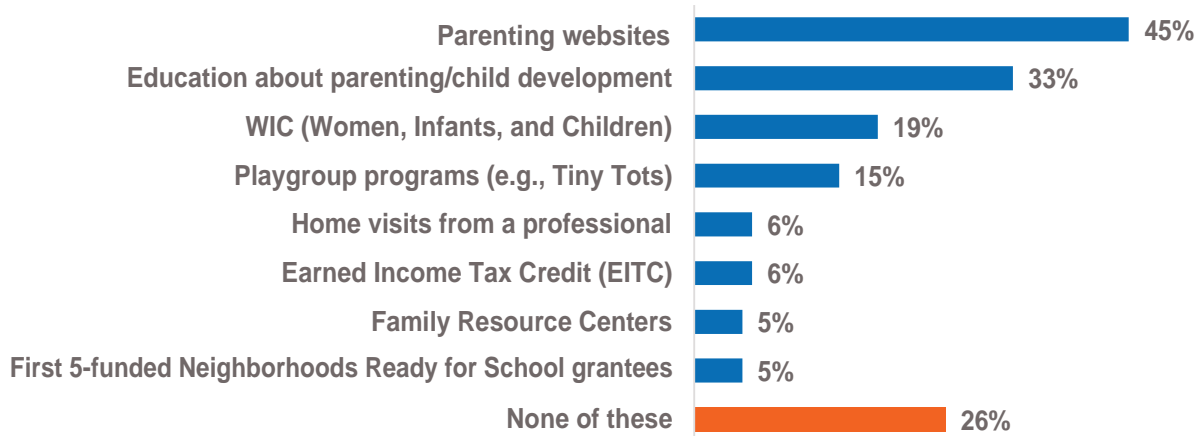
Figure 36 — Use of Community Resources



Source: Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,124.

Parents/caregivers were also surveyed about their use of a variety of parent programs and services. The most commonly used parenting resources were parenting websites (45%), followed by education about child development or parenting practices (33%) and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children, 19%). About 15% had participated in playgroup programs, and fewer than 10% of respondents had utilized other types of programs and services. Just over one-quarter of families had not used any of the supports or services listed.

**Figure 37 — Use of Parenting Programs, Services, and Supports**



Source: Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,090.

### What Parents Say

Focus group parent participants wanted to see more of the following assets in their communities to help build kindergarten readiness:

- Support for basic needs, like food pantries, free clothing, and affordable housing; help with finding and accessing these supports (e.g., resource lists and family navigators); and more funding for resource programs
- Affordable child care, preschool, and after school programs, as well as changes to income eligibility requirements for subsidized care (including Head Start) that take into account the high cost of living in Alameda County, so more families qualify
- Playgroups to promote child development
- Libraries (and longer hours for those libraries, so working families can use them); access to more free books, including bilingual and multicultural books; engaging reading programs for kids; and parent education on how to read with kids
- Safe and inviting parks and organized sports and outdoor activities
- Free community events and activities for children and families, including recreational programs that operate during school breaks
- Parent groups to build social support
- Programs, resources, and activities specifically for fathers

## SUMMARY

- The vast majority of parents/caregivers reported that their neighborhood has basic assets and resources, but parents/caregivers of color and those in lower income families reported fewer assets than white parents/caregivers and those in higher income families
- Parents/caregivers were most likely to visit local parks and zoos with their children; readiness was more strongly associated with use of community resources among fathers than among mothers, but fathers were also less likely to use each resource type
- Children living in asset-rich neighborhoods had higher kindergarten readiness, even after controlling for family income
- The most common programs, services, and supports accessed by parents/caregivers included parenting websites and parent education programs
- Parents wanted more investment in community resources, including support for basic needs; affordable child care, preschool, and after school programs; playgroups; libraries and other literacy resources; safe and inviting parks; community events and activities; parent groups; and resources specifically for fathers

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop and implement policies that build livable communities rich with neighborhood assets, ensuring communities have resources and supports families can utilize to help promote their children's development
- Invest in evidence-based kindergarten readiness supports that promote equity
- Coordinate and align the kindergarten readiness supports in the county





# Readiness of Schools

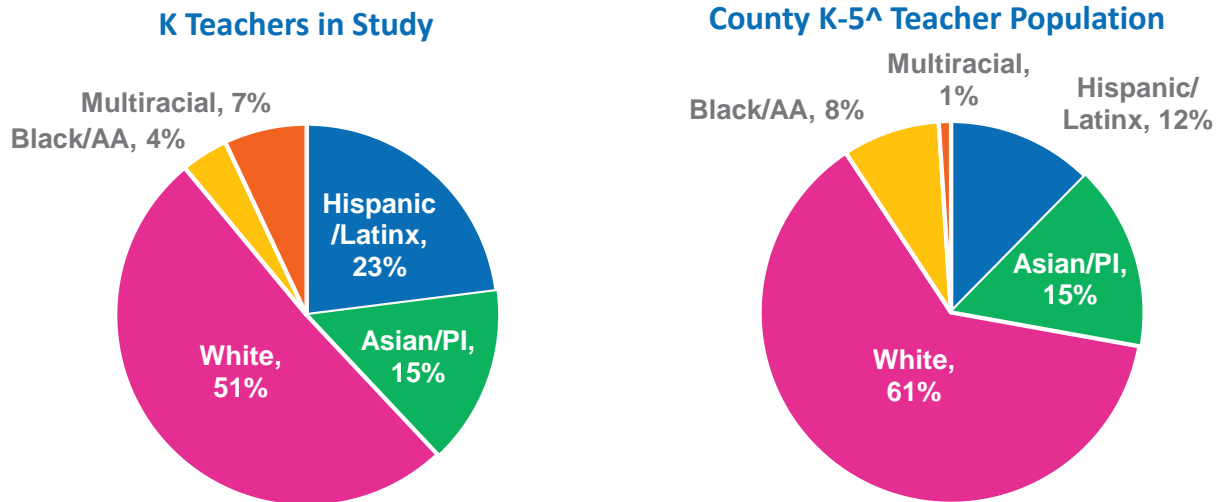
A variety of data were gathered to illustrate the readiness of elementary schools to support entering kindergartners. We examined teachers' background, training, and experience, as well as the degree to which schools were prepared to support the kindergarten transition, particularly for children with lower kindergarten readiness levels. This section summarizes our findings on the readiness of schools participating in the study.

*"[It is] good [for schools] to meet children where they are. Some kids never even go to preschool."* – Parent focus group participant

## Teacher Background, Training, and Experience

Nearly all teachers in the study were female (96%), and over half (51%) were white. Compared to elementary school teachers in the county overall, kindergarten teachers in the sample were less likely to be white or African-American and more likely to be Latinx.

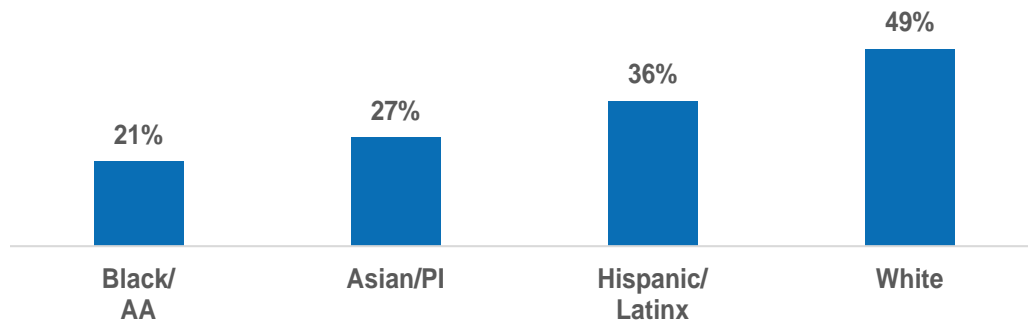
Figure 38 — Teacher Race/Ethnicity



Source: Teacher Survey (2019), California Department of Education (2018-19)  
 Note: N=74. \*Alameda County teacher demographic data by grade level were not publicly available.

Overall, **33% of children were taught by a teacher of the same race/ethnicity**. White and Latinx children were more likely than Asian/PI and African-American children to be taught by a teacher of the same race/ethnicity.

**Figure 39 — Percent of Children Taught by a Teacher of the Same Race/Ethnicity**



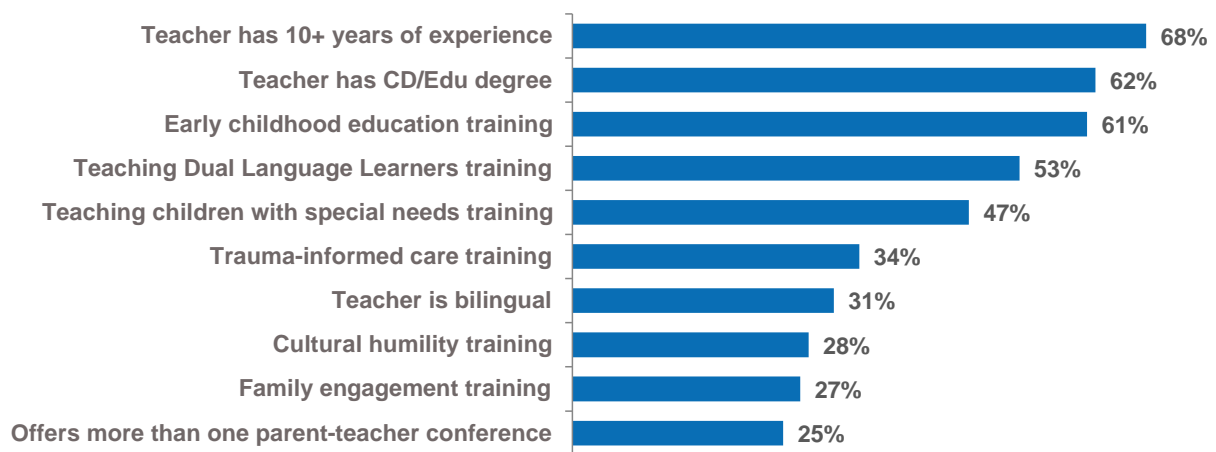
Source: Teacher Survey (2019), Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Parent Information Form (2019)  
 Note: N=1,446.

*“Kids know their ABCs and can count to 10, but kindergarten readiness is also about the child having a relationship with their teacher.”* – Parent focus group participant

Most teachers (62%) had a Bachelor’s degree or higher in child development or education. Teachers were also highly experienced; over two-thirds had been teaching for at least 10 years. Six in 10 had received ECE training, and 53% had received Dual Language Learner training, but fewer than half of teachers had received other types of trainings. Also, just 31% teachers were bilingual, the majority of whom spoke Spanish; just under half of English Learners (45%) in the assessment were taught by one of these bilingual teachers. The home language skills of dual language learners who do not have a bilingual teacher may not be cultivated at school, yet bilingualism improves academic and social outcomes for children and benefits their communities in the long run.<sup>xxviii</sup> Finally, most teachers (75%) said they offer only one official parent-teacher conference, but will offer more if needed.

*45% of English Learners had a bilingual teacher.*

**Figure 40 — Teacher Credentials, Training, and Family Engagement**



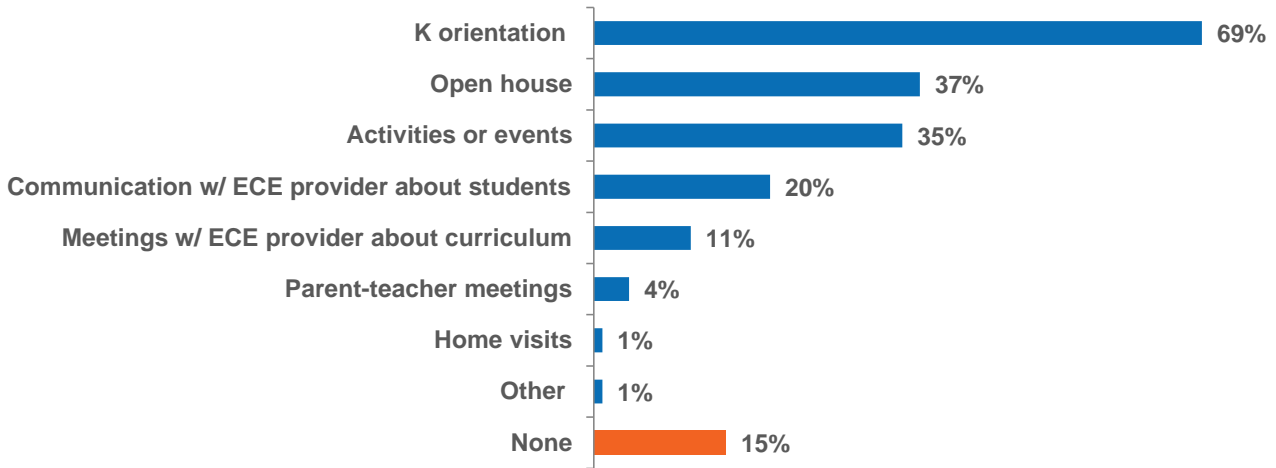
Source: Teacher Survey (2019)  
 Note: N=68-74.

Children with lower than average kindergarten readiness levels tended to enter classrooms that were taught by teachers with *more* years of experience, but no other teacher characteristic was related to the readiness of entering kindergartners. It is possible that more experienced teachers were intentionally placed in classrooms with children who had higher levels of need or that more experienced teachers rated children differently than novice teachers, but more research is needed to better understand this relationship.

## Kindergarten Transition Supports

The most common kindergarten transition support offered by schools was an orientation session, reported by 69% of teachers. Fewer than half of teachers indicated that their school provided other types of transition supports, and **15% of teachers said their school did not have any formal transition supports.**

Figure 41 — Kindergarten Transition Supports Offered by School

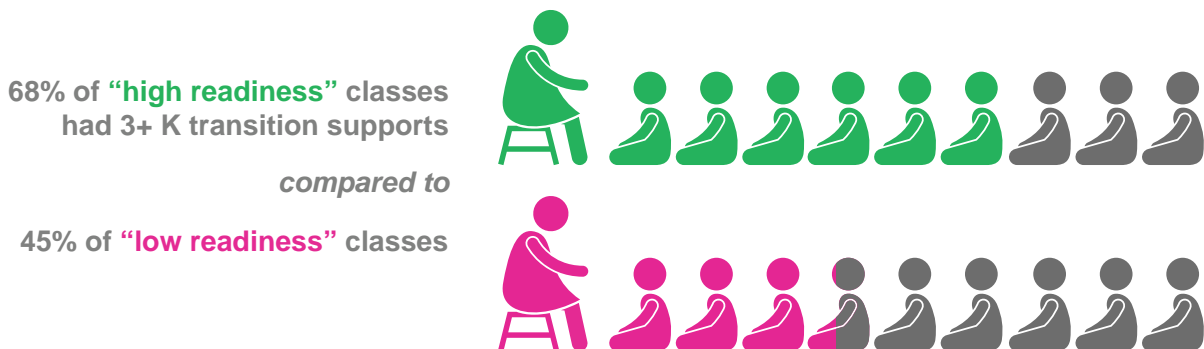


Source: Teacher Survey (2019)  
Note: N=71.

*“My child was in foster care. When she came to this school, she needed to adapt to a new environment and had a hard time. Now, after more time, she’s more comfortable.”* – Parent focus group participant

We found that **classrooms with a high proportion of Fully Ready children (“high readiness” classes) were more likely to be in schools that offer multiple kindergarten transition support activities**, compared to classrooms with a high proportion of less ready children (“low readiness” classes). Over two-thirds of “high readiness” classes were in schools with at least three kindergarten transition supports, compared to fewer than half of “low readiness” classes.

Figure 42 — Percent of Classes in Schools Offering Multiple Kindergarten Transition Supports, by Average Student Readiness in the Class

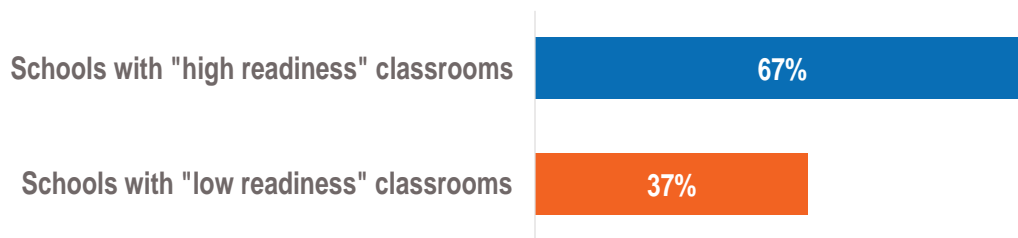


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), Teacher Survey (2019)  
Note: N=71. At least half of children in “high readiness” classes were Fully Ready. Difference between class types statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

## Third Grade Reading Proficiency

Third grade reading proficiency has been shown to be critical for children's later academic and socioeconomic outcomes.<sup>xxix</sup> Therefore, we also examined the proficiency levels of third graders in the schools involved in the study to assess the degree to which children were meeting state standards in English and Language Arts (ELA). More specifically, we observed the proficiency levels in schools with "high readiness" classes compared to those with "low readiness" classes. We found that **third grade proficiency rates were significantly higher where children were already entering kindergarten *Fully Ready***, relative to schools where most children were not yet ready. These findings add to other research suggesting that schools may reinforce structural inequities in that children at risk for lower kindergarten readiness often attend poorer resourced and therefore less "ready" schools.<sup>xxx</sup> In contrast, longitudinal research in Alameda County has found that **schools where children "beat the odds" – by demonstrating proficiency in third grade when they were not yet ready in kindergarten – are more socioeconomically advantaged**, as measured by the proportion of students enrolled in the Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program, and higher performing overall.<sup>xxxi</sup>

**Figure 43 — ELA Third Grade Proficiency Rate, by Average Student Readiness in the School**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form (2019), California Department of Education (2019)  
Note: N=5,405. At least half of children in "high readiness" classes were *Fully Ready*.

### What Parents Say

Parents in the focus groups mentioned several ways in which schools can better meet the needs of children and the community, including:

- Offer the following resources and programs at school:
  - » Physical recreation activities for children and fun events for families
  - » Libraries and reading clubs
  - » Healthy meals and snacks
  - » Health and family support services like food pantries and health and dental clinics
- Have plans and practices in place to ease the transition for children, particularly if they did not have prior preschool experience or experienced adversity in their early years
- Offer more parent-teacher meetings
- Educate teachers on interventions to promote child resilience
- Increase the diversity of the teacher workforce (e.g., by actively recruiting more male teachers and starting recruitment at a young age, improving teacher pay, and providing more counseling and support programs to students studying to become teachers)
- Identify and intervene early when children have learning difficulties

## SUMMARY

- Just over half of teachers in the study were white, and 96% were female; white students were more likely than students of color to be taught by a same-race teacher and fewer than half of English Learners had a bilingual teacher
- Over six in 10 teachers had a child development or education degree, at least 10 years of teaching experience, and received early childhood education training, but fewer than half had received trainings on teaching children with special needs, trauma-informed care, cultural humility, and family engagement
- Most teachers reported that their school offers a kindergarten orientation prior to or at the beginning of the school year, but fewer than half reported other types of kindergarten transition supports, and 15% said their school does not offer any type of formal support
- Classrooms with a high proportion of *Fully Ready* children were more likely to be in schools that offer multiple kindergarten transition supports and where third graders are proficient in reading
- Parents wanted to see additional kindergarten transition supports; parent-teacher meetings; recruitment and training of a diverse teacher workforce; early intervention for learning difficulties; and resources and services on school sites

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in the recruitment of a diverse teacher workforce, including policies that incentivize teacher education and teaching in high-need schools, and invest in the professional development of that workforce
- Develop policies at schools that reach out to and engage families with cultural sensitivity, including parents of color and non-English speaking parents
- Implement school-based policies that address basic needs, such as those that expand access to and facilitate utilization of free and reduced-price meals
- Expand kindergarten transition supports offered at schools, such as parent-teacher meetings and school events





# Conclusions and Discussion

The results of the 2019 Alameda County Kindergarten Readiness Assessment highlight the importance of providing nurturing, supportive environments in the first five years of life, so that children enter school ready to learn. It also points to the need for investment in building the readiness of schools to meet the learning needs of entering kindergartners. Below, we review the key study findings and discuss strategies for addressing inequities and raising the overall readiness of children in the county.

## Key Findings

### Readiness of Children and Families

The current study found that 44% of children in Alameda County were *Fully Ready* for kindergarten, demonstrating skills across an array of domains. Kindergarten readiness was most strongly associated with child and family demographics and socioeconomics, as well as several other factors that can be modified with interventions, including child health and well-being, early childhood education (ECE) attendance, screen time, child resilience, reading at home, and father's use of community resources. The positive effects of malleable assets were cumulative, and their presence significantly boosted readiness for boys of color.

### Readiness of Communities

Most families felt their communities were safe and supportive, and the majority reported their neighborhood had basic resources, like sidewalks, parks, and libraries. These neighborhood assets were significantly associated with children's kindergarten readiness – children living in neighborhoods with a greater number of assets had higher readiness than children living in neighborhoods with fewer assets, even after controlling for family income.

Most parents/caregivers also reported utilizing at least some community resources and services. However, despite the fact that fathers' community resource use was more strongly associated with kindergarten readiness than mothers', fathers were significantly less likely to use each type of resource, particularly libraries.

### Readiness of Schools

Teachers in the study tended to be highly experienced, but they were overwhelmingly female and white, meaning boys and children of color were less likely to be taught by a teacher of the same race or gender. Similarly, only 45% of English Learners were taught by a bilingual teacher.



Although most teachers had received training in early childhood education, just over half had received trainings on teaching dual language learners, and fewer than half had received trainings on teaching children with special needs, trauma-informed care, cultural humility, and family engagement.

Most teachers reported that their school offers a kindergarten orientation to help with the transition, but fewer than four in 10 reported other types of transition supports, and 15% said their school doesn't offer any type of formal transition support. Classrooms with a high proportion of *Fully Ready* children tended to be taught by less experienced teachers on average, but were in schools that offer more kindergarten transition supports and where third graders are proficient in reading compared to classrooms where children had lower readiness levels.

## How Do We “Turn the Curve”?

The findings from the current study point to several strategies that First 5 Alameda County and its partners throughout the community can undertake to help improve the readiness of the county's children. These strategies are aligned with Alameda County's 2026 Vision, including the goal to eliminate poverty and hunger, and First 5 Alameda's policy priorities, which fall into three general categories: address inequity and child poverty; support family engagement, leadership, and community well-being; and sustainability for proven results.

## Readiness of Children and Families

Poverty is related to higher rates of stress and poor health among parents, as well as less time and disposable income to invest in children's development, which has implications for children's kindergarten readiness and later achievement.<sup>xxxii</sup> Similarly, parents/caregivers of English Learners and children of color in the study tended to report more stress and fewer neighborhood resources and supports. Both children of color and those in low-income families were also less likely to have access to formal ECE. With more limited access to resources, supports, and enrichment opportunities, these children entered kindergarten with lower readiness levels compared to white children and children in more affluent families. This finding is consistent with recent research on the kindergarten transition for African-American children, which has found that those with an optimal transition came from families with higher incomes and had parents who had better physical and mental health.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### Address the basic needs of children and families.

Unfortunately, longitudinal research conducted in Alameda County suggests that kindergarten readiness gaps are persistent and, in some cases, widen over time.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Thus, it is vital that public systems leaders acknowledge and address these inequities by investing in children 0-5 and their families. These might include policies that address families' basic needs (e.g., by increasing the availability of affordable housing and access to affordable healthy food), policies that increase income and assets for families (e.g., by increasing the earned income tax credit); and universal access to developmental screenings, mental health services, and physical health services. Policies and investments that address young children's developmental needs and support families' economic security should take an equity approach, prioritizing populations and communities that experience the impacts of



### First 5 Alameda Policy Priorities ADDRESS INEQUITY AND CHILD POVERTY

- Increase access to quality early care and education
- Serve, advocate for, and defend the rights and safety of all families regardless of their race and socio-economic, immigration, or housing status
- Advocate for the prioritization of pregnant people and families with young children in housing and homelessness prevention and equitable community development
- Advocate for programs that acknowledge the strain low-income/working families experience and guarantee families have a right to basic needs (e.g., diaper banks), regardless of their ability to pay
- Advocate for policy and practice change that ensures a sufficient social safety net with better access, improved customer service, and greater utilization
- Increase income and assets for families (e.g., earned income tax credit and college savings accounts)
- Advocate for increased access to health, behavioral health, and dental care services

*“If you don’t have proper housing, shelter, it’s hard. [It] makes things unstable for the kids.”* – Parent focus group participant

historic disinvestment, inequity, and structural racism. Focus should also be placed on supports for pregnant people and families with young children. The brain grows faster in the first five years of life than at any other time, and thus the circumstances in which children live prior to kindergarten entry have a significant effect on their long-term health, education, and employment outcomes.<sup>xxxv</sup>

**Strengthen early identification and intervention systems.** Effective early identification and intervention systems, like the First 5 Alameda-supported Help Me Grow program and the developmental screenings and supports provided in Quality Counts early learning settings, should also be strengthened to optimize the development of children at risk for special needs, and trauma-informed services should be expanded to promote the resilience of young children exposed to trauma.

**Increase access to high-quality, affordable ECE.** One of the best approaches for improving kindergarten readiness in the community is to advocate for policies and investments that improve access to high-quality, affordable ECE. Several landmark studies have found that children who attend ECE have improved outcomes in adulthood (e.g., improved graduation rates and employment outcomes).<sup>xxxvi</sup> However, parents in the focus groups noted that ECE is unaffordable for many families; policies at the local, state, and federal level should increase access to affordable child care (fortunately, the county and state have recently taken steps to address this recommendation).<sup>xxxvii</sup> We also know from other research, to be most effective, ECE programs must be of high quality,<sup>xxxviii</sup> and thus investment should be made to develop the capacity of early care and education providers, addressing pay equity and providing a living wage for these providers. Half of California’s ECE providers earn so little they rely on public benefits to make ends meet,<sup>xxxix</sup> and yet research shows that higher pay is linked to higher quality care, by promoting the stability of the ECE workforce and reducing ECE provider stress levels.<sup>xl</sup> These educators must also have access to ongoing professional learning opportunities, especially coaching, which has shown to be effective in improving the quality of teachers’ care.<sup>xli</sup> It may also be particularly important to offer ECE providers trainings on social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care, given the relationship between child resilience and readiness, and the importance of social-emotional readiness for long-term outcomes. Communities can also promote the development of bilingualism – which benefits both children and their communities – through dual language programs, which have shown promise in boosting the language and literacy skills of dual language learners.<sup>xlii</sup> Policies should also promote the professional and workforce development of a diverse ECE field. Children of color are more likely to have a better transition to kindergarten if ECE providers are culturally sensitive and there is a close connection between the provider and the child and family.<sup>xliii</sup> Taken together with other research, the findings from this study support continued investment in ECE quality improvement efforts like First 5 Alameda’s Quality Counts initiative.

**Support and empower families to be their child’s first teacher.** The findings from the study also suggest that parent engagement and leadership programs can help families promote their children’s readiness by connecting them to community resources, developing their leadership skills, and empowering them to be their child’s first teacher. Parents/caregivers should be encouraged to replace screen time with reading with the child; yet programs should also identify and address barriers to reading at home (e.g., time, stress, adult education and



### **First 5 Alameda Policy Priorities SUPPORT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP, AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING**

- Train and support parent leaders
- Advocate for the expansion and sustainability of parent support programs (e.g., paid family leave)
- Build capacity of providers to promote the adoption of the Father-Friendly Principles, advocate for father-specific services, and support parent leadership and advocacy
- Create livable communities by supporting community driven improvements to the built environment and public infrastructure (e.g., parks, playgrounds, community housing developments, and transportation)

literacy, and access to books, including multilingual books). Research shows that reading to non-English speaking children in their native language improves their English reading proficiency later in elementary school.<sup>xliv</sup> The expansion of parent support policies, including paid family leave, can also provide families with more time and resources to invest in their child's development.

**Welcome, encourage, and support father involvement.** Considering the finding that fathers' use of community resources was more strongly related to children's kindergarten readiness than mothers' use, family support programs and policies should welcome and encourage father involvement. Other research has shown that fathers have a distinct way of communicating, interacting, and playing with their children that can build cognitive, self-regulation, and social skills.<sup>xlv</sup> Thus, policies like paid paternity leave and parent education and leadership programs that target fathers have the potential for significantly promoting children's readiness.

## Readiness of Communities

Parents/caregivers indicated that their communities had a variety of strengths, though there was a difference in the number of neighborhood assets reported based on family income, pointing to the need to increase investment in low-income communities. This is particularly important in light of the fact that kindergarten readiness tends to be higher among children living in neighborhoods with more assets like parks, libraries, sidewalks, and mutual support among neighbors, even after controlling for family socioeconomic status. Parents in the focus groups also wanted to see more of these assets, as well as playgroups to promote child development and parent groups to build social support.

**Invest in neighborhood assets.** Community leaders should invest in the development of livable communities, ensuring neighborhoods have resources and supports families can utilize to help promote their children's development, including parks, libraries, affordable housing, and safe, accessible transportation. Research suggests policies and interventions are more effective when made universally available to families in disadvantaged neighborhoods.<sup>xlvi</sup>

**Invest in Invest in and align and coordinate kindergarten readiness supports.** Improving readiness in the county will require a cohesive system of kindergarten readiness supports that maintain an equity focus, are data-driven and evidence-based, and are directly linked to child and family needs. State and federal funding opportunities for such supports should be maximized, and partnerships should be forged with families, businesses, faith-based organizations, early childhood providers, community groups, libraries, schools, nonprofit organizations, government, and others, to collectively develop and align policies and structures that improve the early childhood experiences of children in Alameda County. In particular, there should be coordination of navigation programs and family support programs like family resource centers that provide access to child development programming and support for concrete needs. Investing in proven and successful programs for young children (prenatal to age 5) comes with a high rate of return, significantly improving an array of health, education, and economic outcomes throughout childhood and well into adulthood.<sup>xlvii</sup>

*"[We need] more funding for resource programs that are trying to help their communities. Every year it seems like they're taking away more funding."*

– Parent focus group participant



### First 5 Alameda Policy Priorities SUSTAINABILITY FOR PROVEN RESULTS

- Preserve, sustain, and scale proven and successful programs that promote child development and family well-being, such as Help Me Grow
- Coordinate and align neighborhood and county-wide family-centered programs and investments
- Measure school readiness in Alameda County to better understand and advocate for the family, community, and policy factors that lead to children being ready for school and schools being ready for all children
- Partner with other systems leaders to maximize state and federal funding (such as Medi-Cal) to scale, sustain, and improve access to services for children birth to age 5

## Readiness of Schools

Elementary schools in Alameda County also need to be adequately resourced to meet the needs of the students entering their classrooms. Children who attend low-quality elementary schools are most at risk for “preschool fadeout” (i.e., the loss of skill gains achieved with ECE).<sup>xlviii</sup> In contrast, Harvard University researchers have found that attending a high-quality kindergarten class with an experienced teacher is associated with positive long-term outcomes, including higher earnings and college attendance rates.<sup>xlix</sup> Unfortunately, schools may reinforce structural inequities in that children at risk for lower kindergarten readiness often attend less “ready” schools.<sup>l</sup> Indeed, in the current study we found that, although classrooms where children had lower average readiness were actually taught by more experienced teachers, they also were in schools with fewer kindergarten transition supports and lower third grade proficiency rates.

**Recruit and retain a diverse teacher workforce.** Policymakers should encourage the recruitment and retention of teachers from diverse backgrounds (e.g., male teachers and teachers of color) and bilingual education teachers (e.g., by providing counseling and financial support to students studying to become teachers and incentivizing teaching in high-need schools). Boys were significantly less likely to be taught by a same-gender teacher than girls. Similarly, children of color in the study, particularly African-American children, were less likely than white children to be taught by a teacher who shared their racial/ethnic background, and yet some research points to the benefits of being taught by a same-race teacher for children’s academic performance.<sup>li</sup> There is also a shortage statewide of bilingual education teachers,<sup>lii</sup> and in this study, just 45% of English Learner students were taught by a bilingual teacher. Consequently, students’ home language skills are often neglected at school, yet bilingualism has been found to improve students’ academic performance and social outcomes, as well as benefit the communities in which they eventually live and work.<sup>liii</sup>

**Invest in teacher professional development.** To improve classroom quality, investment should also be made in ongoing teacher professional development for both novice and experienced teachers that addresses implicit bias and promotes equity, high expectations, culturally sensitive teaching practices, and shared accountability to improve child outcomes and reduce disparities. Although teachers in the study were highly experienced, relatively few teachers had received trainings that would help them develop culturally responsive practices that address implicit biases and recognize and address childhood trauma. With improved training, educators can better support younger children, boys, dual language learners, children with special needs, children of color, and children from low-income families with individualized approaches that recognize and address their unique needs.

**Implement culturally sensitive family engagement policies and practices.** Although we did not fully explore the family engagement policies of each school in the study, relatively few teachers had received training on cultural humility and family engagement. To build “ready” schools, family and community engagement practices should be embedded in school policies and initiatives (e.g., requiring family engagement training for teacher and administrator certification and implementing formal family outreach policies and practices). These policies and initiatives should promote the establishment of meaningful partnerships with families. Teachers and administrators should listen to, recognize the expertise of, and involve caregivers in their child’s education. Staff should be aware of and respect cultural diversity, and schools should have specific approaches for engaging non-English speaking and recent immigrant families, recognizing these families’ strengths.

### What Parents Say

Parent focus group participants suggested kindergarten readiness could be boosted by increasing access to:

- Supports for basic needs, like food and shelter, and help with accessing these supports
- Affordable child care and preschool
- Early intervention for children with learning difficulties
- Community resources like libraries, parks, community activities and events, playgroups, and parent groups
- Kindergarten transition supports and more parent-teacher meetings at schools
- A diverse and trained teacher workforce
- Services and supports at schools, including healthy meals, libraries, and health and family support services

**Address basic needs at school sites.** Schools can also be a hub of support for children and families' basic needs. Given the finding that readiness was strongly linked to socioeconomic factors and child health and well-being, including coming to school well-rested and well-fed, it is important for policymakers and education leaders to consider expanding the role of schools in providing subsidized healthy meals before, during, and after school, as well as over the summer, and facilitate children's utilization of free and reduced-price meal programs. Food insecurity has adverse effects on children's development and ability to learn, and thus ensuring access to healthy food benefits children and schools alike.<sup>iv</sup> Schools can also play a role in connecting families to needed resources in the community or – as in the full-service community school model – offer such resources, like food, employment, and housing support, recreational activities, and medical and dental services, on site.<sup>lv</sup> Children can only begin to learn once their basic needs are met, so it is in the interest of the education system to invest in these wraparound supports.

**Expand kindergarten transition supports.** Finally, schools should smooth the transition between home and school and between ECE and kindergarten by offering multiple kindergarten transition supports like orientation sessions and activities, parent-teacher meetings, and communication and collaboration between ECE providers and kindergarten teachers. The current study found that such supports were more likely to be found where children had strong readiness skills; thus they were likely unavailable to children and families who need them most. This inequity could be remedied with policies and investments that make kindergarten transition supports universal across the county.

Together with its partners, First 5 Alameda addresses many of these recommendations through policy advocacy and investments. By working collaboratively to address the diverse needs of children and families and continuing to track kindergarten readiness in the county, community partners can reduce inequities and build *ready* families and communities that support *ready* children to enter *ready* schools.





# About the Researcher

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.

For questions about this report, please contact:

## **Applied Survey Research**

**Lisa Colvig-Niclai, MA**  
Vice President of Evaluation

**Christina Branom, MSW, Ph.D.**  
Director of Research and School Readiness Specialist

San Jose Office  
408.247.8319  
[www.appliedsurveyresearch.org](http://www.appliedsurveyresearch.org)



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