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Ready For School?



A Report on Skill Levels of
Santa Clara County kindergarteners

Brought to you by the Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness

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In 2004, the **Partnership for School Readiness** – a collaborative of public, private and nonprofit organizations – sponsored a comprehensive assessment of school readiness in Santa Clara County. Although millions of public and private funds are spent to prepare children for school, it was not known how many kindergarteners actually arrive ready to learn.



How do we know if children are ready?

The National Education Goals Panel defines school readiness as:

1. The Readiness of Children for the social and academic institution of school
2. The Readiness of Schools to meet the diverse needs of incoming students and their families
3. The Readiness of Families and communities to prepare children for school

To work on all three of these dimensions of readiness, we need to first understand the skills our children currently bring to school. This report focuses on the skills of children as they enter kindergarten.

Teachers in a representative sample of classrooms observed 700 children during the first four weeks of school. Skills proficiency in 20 areas was evaluated. The skills included a broad spectrum of developmental attributes that encompassed:

- Physical and Motor Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches Toward Learning
- Communication and Language Usage
- Cognition and General Knowledge

In addition, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire that would allow us to analyze the impact of family and demographic factors on school readiness.

Who are Santa Clara County Kindergarteners?

Santa Clara County has roughly 19,500 public school kindergarteners. Our sample evaluated 700 of these children in 36 classrooms in 16 school districts.

To ensure that our results reflected children in all our schools, we designed the sample to be representative of schools with different performance levels. All public K-12 schools in California receive an annual performance ranking which is called the Academic Performance Index (API). The API ratings of the schools in our sample are consistent with the performance distribution of schools in the county. Of the 700 children observed, classrooms in the sample, 48% are in high achieving schools (API score of 8-10), 28% are in medium performing schools (API 4-7) and 24% are in low performing schools (API 1-3).

The Portrait of Readiness for Santa Clara Kindergarteners:

Ideally, all children should arrive at school ready to learn – from the first day of kindergarten. But the data shows that children actually have a wide diversity of skills when they arrive.

- 33% of the students are *In Progress* or *Proficient* in ALL 20 readiness skills when they enter kindergarten.
- Approximately 75% were at least *In Progress* or *Proficient* on all Physical Well-Being and Motor Development, Social and Emotional Development, and Approaches to Learning Skills.
- 75% of the children have mastered self-help and self-care skills, counting to 10, and recognizing primary colors and shapes by the time they enter kindergarten.
- 67% of new students were at least *In Progress* or *Proficient* on all the individual skills within the Cognition and General Knowledge dimension.
- According to their teachers only 41% are at the *In Progress* or *Proficient* level on all skills within the Communication and Language Usage dimension. More specifically, fewer than 30% have mastered rhyming, or being able to engage with books.



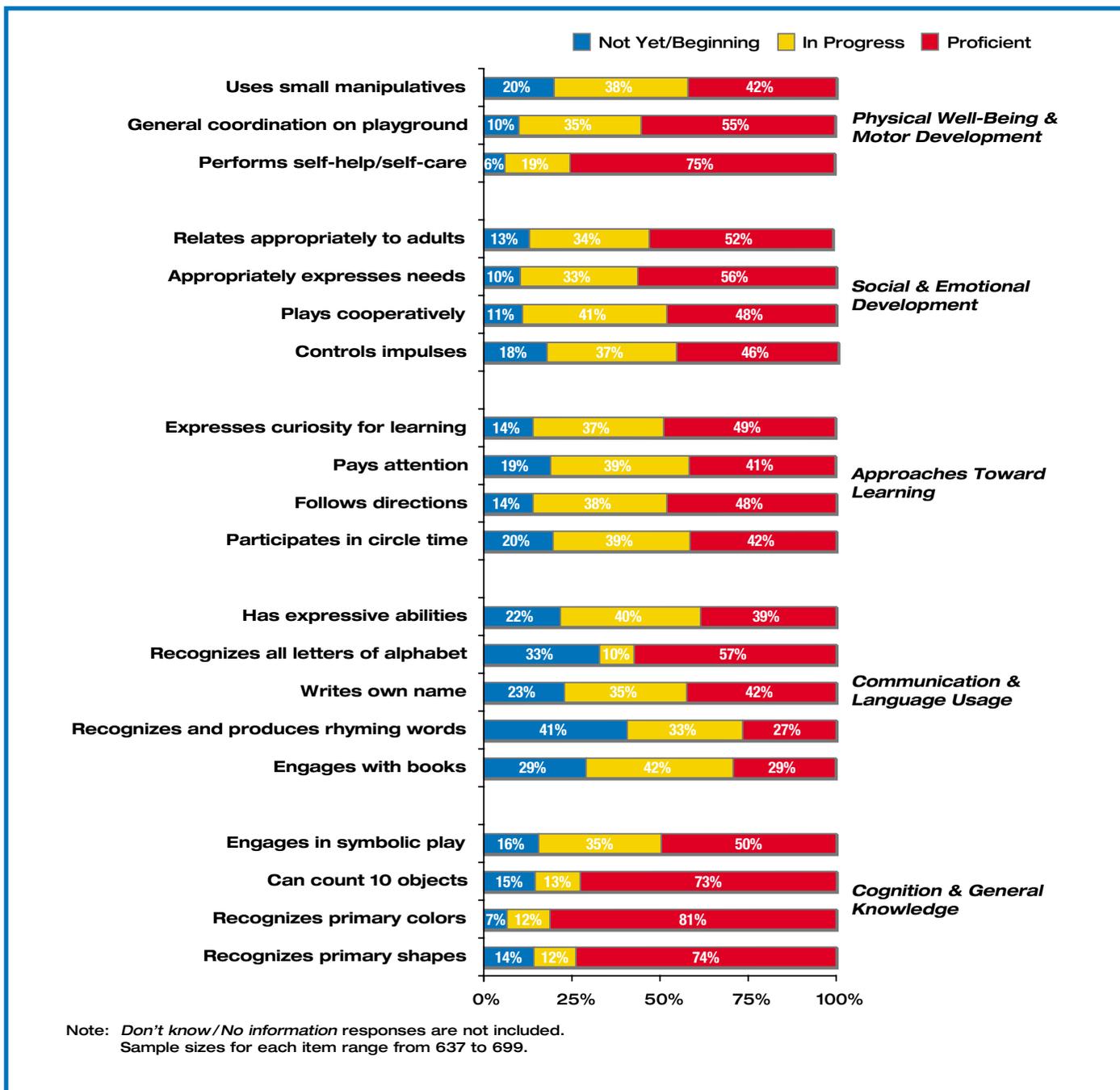
What are teachers' expectations for skill proficiency?

Preschool and kindergarten teachers were asked to identify the skills that they consider most important for school readiness. They placed high importance on performing self-help/self-care, controlling impulses, playing cooperatively and expressing needs appropriately. We found that preschool teacher expectations of their students are significantly higher

than those of kindergarten teachers. There is no statistically significant difference in the expectations of teachers from schools with different API rankings. Teachers also report that they expect children to be at least *In Progress* in all the skills when they enter kindergarten.

Skill Levels of Kindergarten Students

Percentage of Observed Students *Not Yet/Beginning*, *In Progress* or *Proficient* in Key Readiness Skills





What patterns of readiness do we see?

Analysis of the data shows us that there are groupings of children with different skill levels and different areas of strength. Many children arrive with a strong set of skills in all the major areas of development. Other children have strengths that are concentrated in specific areas of development – either the Social and Emotional Development dimension, or the Cognition and General Knowledge dimension. Unfortunately, there are some children that are behind when they start school. In order to target our interventions more effectively, we are studying the characteristics of the children in these different readiness groups.

All-Stars

- The All-Stars are definitely ready for kindergarten. These children are near proficiency (4.0) in every development area that was tested. They represent 48% of the children in Santa Clara County.

Needs Prep

- In stark contrast to the All-Stars, about 11% of the children need significant help to get them to the level that teachers expect. They appear most skilled at performing self-help and self-care tasks and recognizing their primary colors, but they are at the Not Yet (1.0) or Beginning (2.0) level for most other skills.

Social Stars

- Fifteen percent are very strong in the areas of physical well-being and social/emotional skills. These children are able to take care of their own basic needs; they can control their impulses; they play cooperatively; and they appropriately express their needs. Teachers prioritize all of these skills as being extremely important prerequisites for learning. These children need work on recognizing their letters, rhyming, writing their own names, and engaging with books.

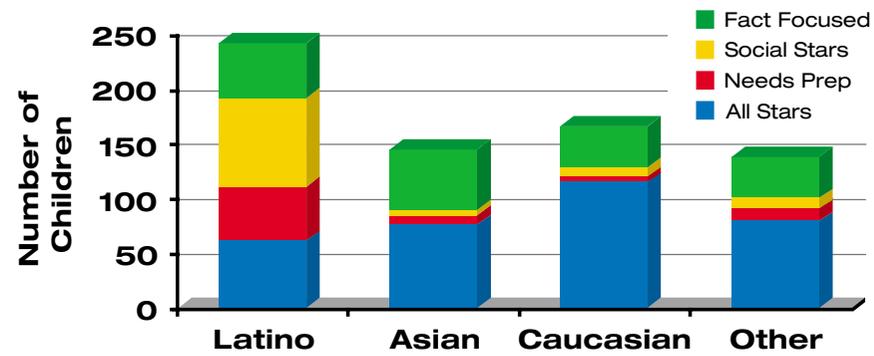
Fact-Focused

- Twenty-six percent of our children are “focused on the facts.” These children enter kindergarten well-prepared in terms of kindergarten “academics.” There are near-proficient (4.0) at counting and recognizing their primary colors and shapes. They have work to do, however, when it comes to social/emotional development, communication, paying attention and following directions.





Ethnic Breakdown of Skill Readiness Groups



Characteristics by Readiness Group

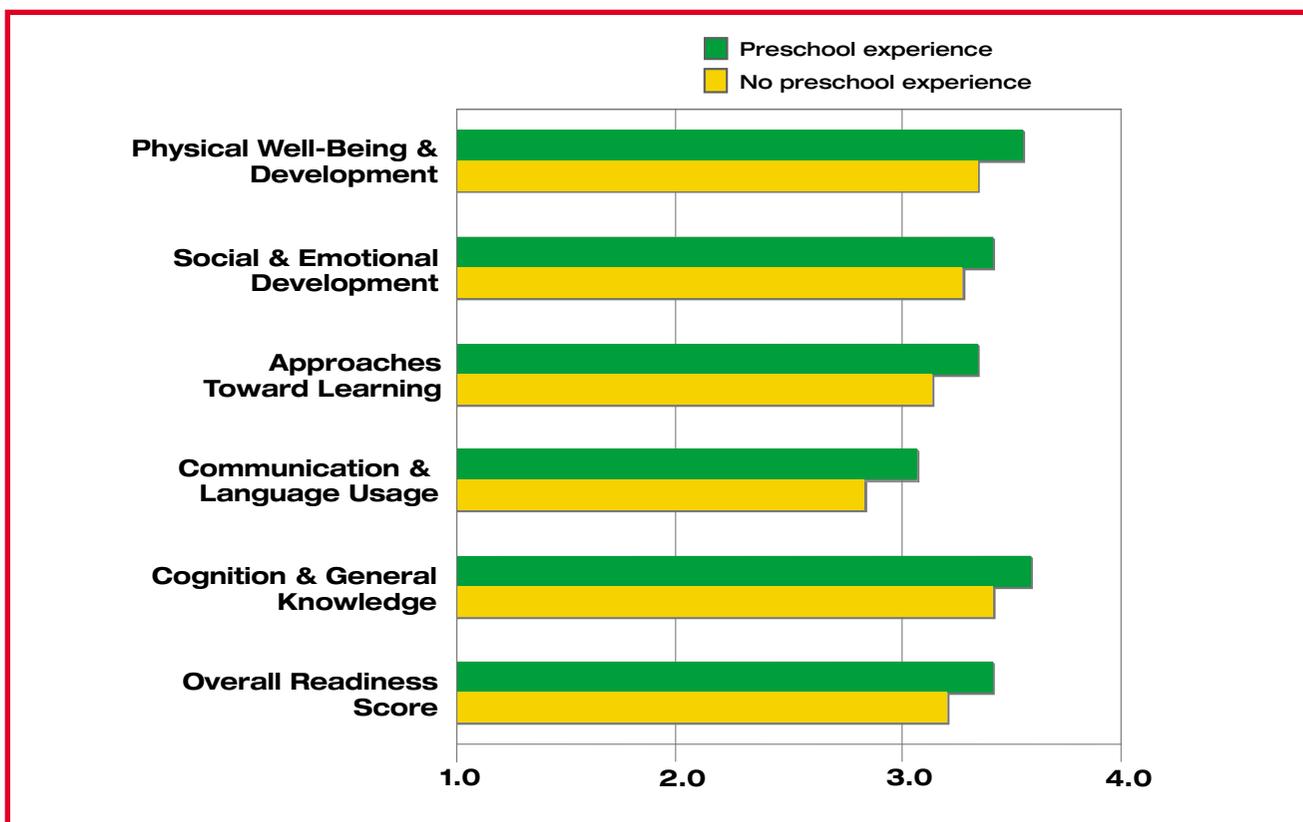
Characteristic	All-Stars	Needs-Prep	Social Stars	Fact Focused	Overall
Family Income above \$82,000	62%	8%	8%	36%	43%
Parents have post high school education	71%	43%	34%	65%	62%
English Language Learner Status	24%	71%	64%	45%	41%
Family Size – more than 5	13%	14%	33%	18%	17%
Attended Preschool	70%	41%	45%	66%	62%
Frequency of reading to child more than 3 times/week	91%	64%	69%	82%	83%
Special Needs	3%	8%	2%	12%	6%
Less than 5 years old at enrollment	16%	47%	26%	24%	23%
Boys	43%	59%	51%	63%	51%
Girls	57%	41%	49%	37%	49%
Low API (1-3)	23%	21%	47%	14%	24%
Med API (4-7)	22%	60%	34%	24%	28%
High API (8-10)	56%	19%	20%	63%	48%

Bold face denotes significant trends.
 API Scores are from the California Academic Performance Index ratings found on the California Department of Education Website.

Preschool does make a difference

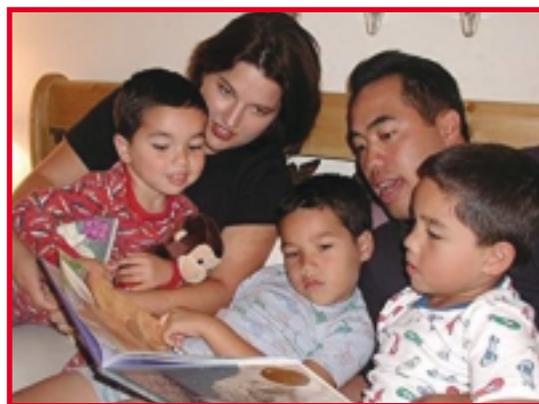
In all developmental categories, children who attend preschool score significantly higher than those that do not. Preschool is especially important to building readiness within the Communication and Language Usage and Cognition and General Knowledge skill dimensions. This message seems to be getting through – 62% of the children in the sample have attended preschool.

Impact of Preschool on Skills Development



Reading with Children is Important

Reading to children is one of the most fun and practical ways that parents can help prepare children for school. It builds vocabulary, helps children listen for sounds and connect them with letters. It provides a great opportunity for building an understanding of rhyming and for parents to encourage children to learn new ways to express their own ideas. There is a strong correlation between reading and overall readiness. Almost all (91%) of the All Stars children share books with their families at least 3 times a week, while children whose parents read to them infrequently are twice as likely to be in the Needs Prep category.



—Bring Me a Book Foundation



CONCLUSIONS

Children are ready for school when:

- Their basic needs for health and physical development are satisfied.
- Their environments nurture emotional development and support learning.
- They experience positive approaches to learning new skills.
- They have the skills to communicate their thoughts, feelings and experiences.
- They have the ability to explore and learn from their surroundings.
- They have effective interactions with peers and adults.

Although very few children arrive at school with ALL the skills that define readiness, about half our children come to school well-prepared. Another 40% have definite strengths in either the social and emotional skills or the academic facts we like our kindergarteners to have. With these skills, most of our children should be well-positioned to be successful in school. But we cannot afford to be complacent. We need to help children balance their skills across the developmental areas. Children in all socio-economic groups need additional development in language and communication skills. And additional interventions are needed for children that fall significantly below teacher expectations.

Things that families can do to help:

- Provide a safe, affectionate, and stable home environment.
- Provide opportunities to experience and resolve challenges cooperatively.
- Foster the development of strong language skills by reading to their children, sharing stories and listening to their children talk.
- Provide opportunities for positive interaction with adults and other children.
- Help children learn and make sense of their world based on cultural practices and beliefs.

Ways the schools and community can help:

- Provide continuity between early education experiences and elementary school.
- Support the professional development of teachers.
- Understand the strengths our children come to school with and learn more effective ways of working with children that have diverse learning styles.
- Ensure that high quality and affordable preschools are available to promote children's positive development.
- Ensure that programs and schools are visibly inclusive for children from different cultures and those with special needs.
- Expect achievement from all children.
- Promote children as community assets.
- Provide social supports for families.

The Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness is committed to strengthening our communities to grow successful children.



gratefully acknowledges

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American Leadership Forum Silicon Valley

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“Strengthening Communities to Grow Successful Children”

For a copy of the full report or questions regarding the assessment, please contact Lori Burns, Success By 6 Program Manager at United Way Silicon Valley at 408-345-4361, or visit our web site at www.uwsv.org/successby6/kindergartenassessment

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