



Executive Summary

Portrait of School Readiness 2009-10:

San Francisco Unified School District



SFUSD SAN FRANCISCO
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



P.O. Box 1927, Watsonville, CA 95077 • 831.728.1356 • 991 West Hedding St., Suite 102,
San José, CA 95126 • 408.247.8319 • www.appliedsurveyresearch.org

Summary of Key Findings

Research Question	Conclusion	Data Highlights
1. Are SFUSD children ready for school?	<p>YES</p> <p>Overall readiness score: 3.31</p>	<p>For each individual readiness skill, children were scored on a scale from <i>Not yet</i> (1) to <i>Proficient</i> (4). Average scores for each <i>Basic Building Block</i> can also range from 1 to 4. The scores for overall readiness – as well as three of the <i>Basic Building Blocks</i> – are between the <i>In progress</i> (3) and <i>Proficient</i> (4) levels. Similar to what ASR has seen with county-wide assessments in Northern California; scores are highest in the <i>Self-Care & Motor Skills</i> area (3.51) and lowest for <i>Self-Regulation</i> (3.19).</p> <p>70% meet/exceed SFUSD teacher expectations; 69% meet/exceed the longitudinal study standard that predicts 3rd grade achievement.</p>
2. How has school readiness changed over time?	<p>Improvement in critical areas of school readiness</p>	<p>Overall, children’s readiness scores have increased from 3.26 in 2007 to 3.31 in 2009, representing significant gains in <i>Kindergarten Academics</i> and modest gains in <i>Self-Regulation</i> and <i>Social Expression</i>.</p> <p>57% of SFUSD children demonstrate proficiency across all <i>Basic Building Blocks</i>. This represents a 2% gain since 2007.</p> <p>11% of children demonstrate significant readiness needs across all <i>Basic Building Blocks</i>. This proportion has remained stable since 2007.</p>
3. How are early education programs connected to children’s school readiness?	<p>Preschool boosts kindergarten readiness</p>	<p>Students with preschool experience scored higher across all <i>Basic Building Blocks</i> as compared to their non-preschooled peers.</p> <p>Preschool attendance increased from 72% in 2007 to 83% in 2009.</p>
4. What other factors are associated with children’s school readiness?	<p>Parental supports & Use of local family resources</p>	<p>Children who are read to and whose families made greater use of local family resources (such as parks, museums, family resource centers, and/or zoos) were more school-ready.</p> <p>Parental coping and social supports are also associated with children’s increased school readiness.</p>

Introduction

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS SCHOOL READINESS?

In recent years, the issue of children’s readiness for school has received increasing attention from policymakers, professionals, researchers, the media, and caregivers. In one sign of the increasing recognition of this issue, California Assemblyperson Julia Brownley recently proposed statewide legislation that would “require the [State Department of Education] to collect data that will assess the school readiness of children entering kindergarten and that reflect all of the major domains of child development, as specified” (AB 2553 – Brownley; introduced February, 2010).

Definitions of what constitutes school readiness have varied somewhat. In 1995, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) defined school readiness as involving three critical components: (1) readiness of children for the social and academic institution of school; (2) readiness of families and communities to prepare children for school; and (3) readiness of schools to meet the diverse needs of incoming students and their families. Across the country, these NEGP dimensions have become the foundation for the development of measures of children’s school readiness.

Why Does School Readiness Matter?

A growing body of research supports the notion that children learn more complex concepts by building upon early skills; in the domain of school readiness, this suggests that children’s social and cognitive readiness for school acts as a “springboard” for later success in school. The five NEGP dimensions of readiness have all been found to contribute to a child’s success in school (Kagan, et. al., 1995). In particular, children who have competence across these five dimensions are more likely to succeed academically in first grade than are those who are competent in only one or two dimensions (Hair, et. al., 2003). A number of other studies have found linkages between early school readiness and later success in school. For example:

- Mastery of basic numerical concepts prepares children to learn more complex math problems and problem-solving approaches (e.g., Baroody, 2003).
- Children who have difficulty paying attention, following directions, getting along with others, and controlling negative emotions of anger and distress tend to do less well in school (e.g., Raver & Knitzer, 2002; Raver, 2003).
- The ability to control and sustain attention and participate in classroom activities is associated with achievement test scores in the early elementary grades (e.g., Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993).
- Children who performed less well on standardized tests in second and third grades also trailed on cognitive and socioemotional readiness early in their kindergarten year (Cannon & Karoly, 2007).
- Both academic and nonacademic school readiness skills at entry to kindergarten were found to be significantly related to eventual reading and mathematics achievement in fifth grade (Le, Kirby, Barney, Setodji, & Gershwin, 2006).

NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL Definition of School Readiness:

- **Readiness of children** for the social and academic institution of school
 - Physical Well-Being & Motor Development
 - Social & Emotional Development
 - Approaches Toward Learning
 - Communication & Language Usage
 - Cognition & General Knowledge
- **Readiness of families and communities** to prepare children for school
- **Readiness of schools** to meet the diverse needs of incoming students and their families

- A meta-analysis of six longitudinal, non-experimental data sets found that the strongest predictors of later achievement were school-entry math, reading, and attention skills (in that order) (Duncan, Claessens, Huston, Pagani, Engel, Sexton, Dowsett, Magnuson, Klebanov, Feinstein, Brooks-Gunn, Duckworth & Japel, 2007).

Results such as these emphasize the importance of school readiness and the importance of early education in delivering every child to kindergarten ready to learn.

ASSESSING SCHOOL READINESS IN SAN FRANCISCO

In partnership with the district and First 5 San Francisco, Applied Survey Research conducted the first kindergarten readiness assessment in fall 2007 using ASR’s School Readiness Assessment Model which focuses on four readiness dimensions: *Self-Care & Motor Skills*, *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. Information from this assessment was used in a variety of ways to summarize, evaluate, and inform efforts around school readiness in the City and County of San Francisco. In fall 2009, the district once again contracted with ASR to conduct another readiness assessment on a representative sample of kindergarten students, providing the district a generalizable view of its new kindergarten students across the same four readiness dimensions. In addition to many analysis areas, ASR will (1) investigate whether readiness levels of entering kindergarten students have changed since 2007, and (2) explore how early education experiences relate to children’s readiness levels.

Based on these assessment data, this report provides a summary of the kindergarten readiness of children entering school in fall 2009. For a comprehensive report of findings, please consult the *Comprehensive Report*.

Consistent with ASR’s best-practice assessment methodology, children from randomly sampled classrooms were observed by their teachers in the early weeks of the 2009-2010 school year. Using the *Kindergarten Observation Form* – a tool with demonstrated validity and reliability – teachers rated the proficiency of their students across 24 readiness skills. These 24 skills provide a comprehensive picture of children’s readiness for school in four key *Basic Building Blocks* dimensions of readiness: *Self-Care & Motor Skills*, *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. Because ASR also gathered information about the families of children who participated in the assessment, this report also outlines factors that promote and inhibit school readiness. In sum, the readiness assessment in San Francisco aimed to answer these primary questions:

- How – and to what extent – are kindergarten students ready for school?
- How has school readiness changed over time in SFUSD?
- How are early education programs connected to children’s school readiness?
- What other factors are associated with children’s school readiness?

OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT METHODS

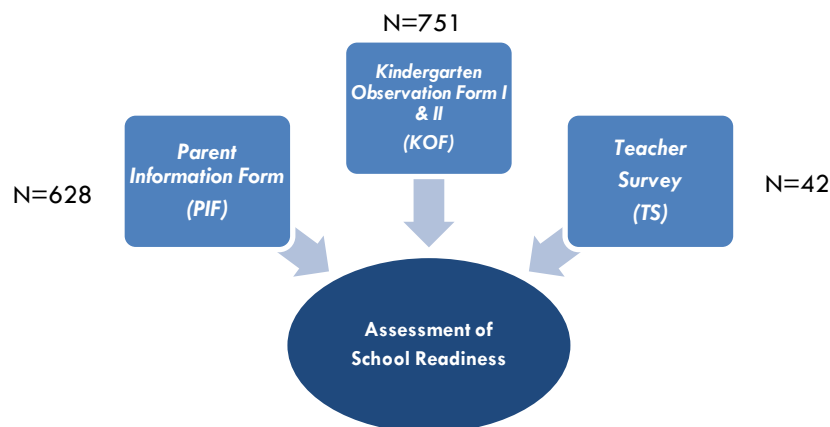
Assessment of school readiness in San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) was conducted among children entering kindergarten in fall 2009. A random sample of schools – and classrooms within schools – was drawn from all SFUSD elementary schools. Sampled teachers were trained on the four assessment forms described below and served as the expert observers of each of their students, recording their observations approximately four weeks after classes began so that children were fairly comfortable in their new surroundings, but their skills still reflected the proficiency with which they entered kindergarten.

Data Collection Instruments

The readiness assessment consisted of the four survey instruments listed below and depicted in Figure 1.

- The **Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF), 2009** is designed to measure school readiness skills across four domains: *Self-Care & Motor Skills*, *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. The form has strong content validity, strong construct validity, shows strong results on early tests for criterion validity (California Reading and Literature Project literacy assessment), has consistent known groups validity, has strong predictive validity (highly correlated with the 3rd grade California Standards Tests in reading and math) and a high degree of internal consistency. (See *Comprehensive Report*, Appendix A).
- The **Kindergarten Observation Form II (KOFII), 2009** is completed by kindergarten teachers to assess each student’s transition into kindergarten. (See *Comprehensive Report* Appendix B).
- The **Parent Information Form (PIF), 2009** collects background information on childcare, activities in the home, demographic information, and parental supports and well-being. (See *Comprehensive Report* Appendix C).
- The **Teacher Survey on the Importance of Readiness Skills 2009** is a self-administered teacher survey. It collects opinions about children’s transition into kindergarten as measured by the skills in the *KOF*. It gathers teacher opinion on the importance of the skills assessed in the *SOF*, the ease of impact on the skills in the classroom, and which skills they spend most of their time on. This instrument also collects information about classroom activities and curricula. (See *Comprehensive Report* Appendix D).

Figure 1: **Sources of Information to Assess the Readiness of Incoming Kindergarten Students**



Are children ready for kindergarten?

To be ready to learn, children must first be physically healthy with age-appropriate development in their primary languages. On these two dimensions, children entering SFUSD kindergarten classrooms appear well-prepared.

The basic physical needs of almost all children seem to be met – children appeared healthy to teachers, the majority had access to pediatricians, and most have had basic health screenings.

Teachers were asked to ascertain language development in children’s primary languages when possible. According to teachers, approximately **78** percent of children were rated as “on track” or “advanced” in their primary language development, up from 70% in 2007.

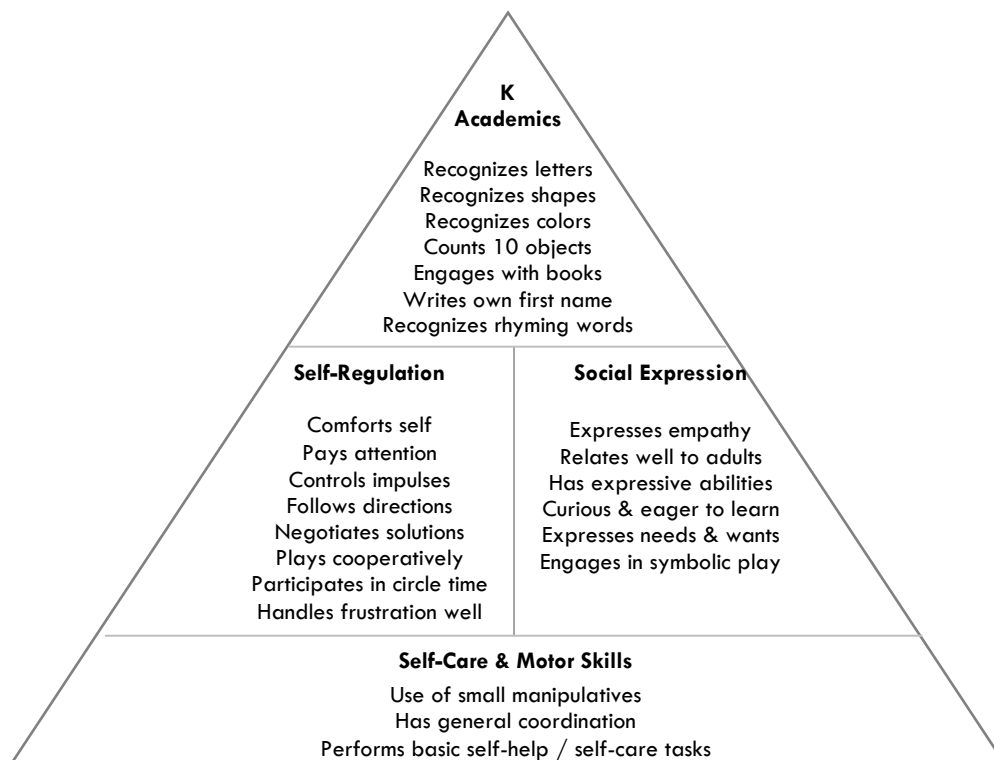
INTRODUCING THE **BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS OF SCHOOL READINESS**

Arriving at school healthy and well-rested is an important foundation, but school readiness is more complex. This assessment, as well as previous assessments in the region, has demonstrated that there are multiple dimensions to kindergarten readiness. Statistical exploration of children’s performance across 24 readiness skills revealed that skills reliably sort into four *Basic Building Blocks* of readiness:

- *Self-Care & Motor Skills*
- *Social Expression*
- *Self-Regulation*, and
- *Kindergarten Academics*

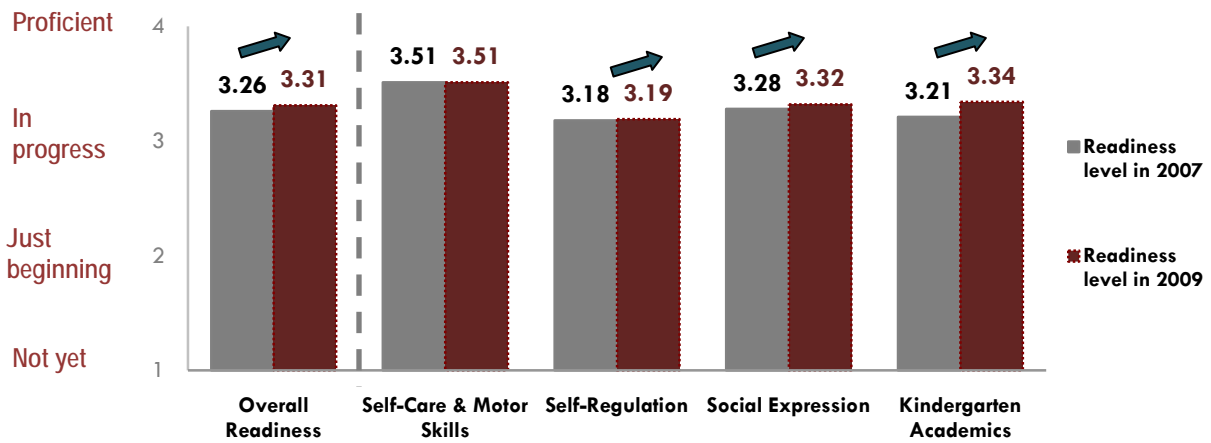
Figure 2 shows the 24 individual skills on which children were assessed, as well as how the skills sort into the four *Basic Building Blocks*.

Figure 2: **Basic Building Blocks of Readiness**



The figure below shows how children scored across the *Basic Building Blocks*. Overall, children scored between the “in progress” and “proficient” levels. Children tended to score highest on *Self-Care & Motor Skills* (3.51) and to have the greatest room to grow in *Self-Regulation* (3.19).

Figure 3: **Mean Readiness Skill Levels in SFUSD, 2007 and 2009**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form I (2009) and (2007)
 Note: Children’s skill level scores are based on 751 students in 2009 and 447 students in 2007.

The readiness levels observed this year indicate an increase in readiness in three out of four domains. The area of *Social Expression* increased from an average of 3.28 in 2007.¹ Readiness levels in *Kindergarten Academics* showed significant improvement, up from a 3.21 observed mean in 2007.² *Self-Regulation* also increased from 3.18 to 3.19. These improvements drove the increase in Overall Readiness from 3.26 in 2007 to 3.31 in 2009.³

Overall, children scored between the “in progress” and “proficient” levels of readiness.

PROFICIENCY PATTERNS

There were readiness strengths and challenges among entering kindergartners in the city. For a more detailed look at different patterns of readiness, children were sorted into one of four *Readiness Portraits* – *Proficient Across Blocks*, *Socially Proficient*, *Academically Proficient*, and *Readiness Needs* students – based on their pattern of proficiency across the readiness skills.⁴

The *Readiness Portraits* in 2009 are as follows:

- *Proficient Across Blocks*
- *Socially Proficient*
- *Readiness Needs*
- *Academically Proficient*

Each portrait reflects a different pattern of developmental strengths and challenges and prevalence rates. Based on a longitudinal study conducted in San Mateo County in 2008, ASR found the *Readiness Portraits* to be predictive of later academic achievement in the third grade.⁵ The study found that children who are well-

¹ This difference was not statistically significant

² This difference was statistically significant; $t=3.19$; $p<0.05$.

³ This difference was not statistically significant

⁴ Children were sorted into one of the four *Readiness Portraits* via a data-driven technique called cluster analysis.

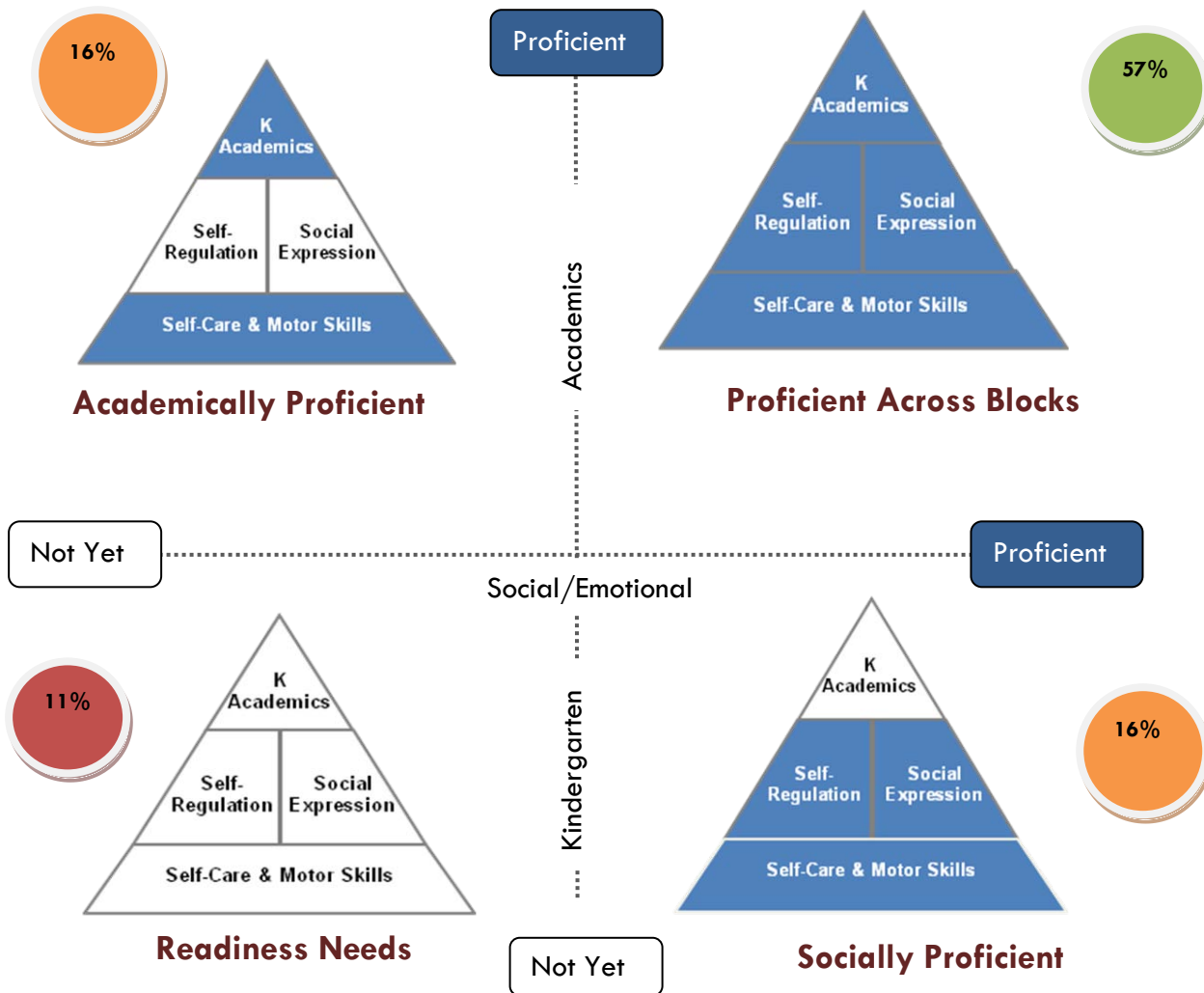
⁵ Applied Survey Research, 2008. *Does Readiness Matter? How Kindergarten Readiness Translates Into Academic Success.*

rounded and ready for school at kindergarten entry are ten times more likely to be proficient or advanced on their Longitudinal Study Standardized tests than those who enter kindergarten with significant readiness needs: 62% of children who were *Proficient Across Blocks* at kindergarten entry were performing at proficiency and advanced levels three years later in math and English, as measured by their 3rd grade CST scores. In contrast, only 6% of the children who were assessed at kindergarten as having *Readiness Needs* across domains were performing at proficiency level at the 3rd grade.

Thus, the readiness portraits are predictive of longer-term achievement.

The dark shading in Figure 4 shows where children in each portrait are near-proficient on the associated skills. The circles indicate the prevalence of each *Portrait* in SFUSD. Children *Proficient Across Blocks* were ready for kindergarten across most dimensions, whereas *Readiness Needs* children needed to catch up on readiness skills across almost all dimensions. *Socially Proficient* were skilled when it came to the foundational *Self-Care & Motor Skills* and critical social-emotional skills, whereas *Academically Proficient* children were skilled at the nuts and bolts of learning – the *Kindergarten Academics* – but had more challenges in the social-emotional arenas.

Figure 4: **Readiness Portraits**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form I (2009)

HOW PREVALENT IS EACH PORTRAIT?

As illustrated in Figure 4 above, **over half (57%) of children entered SFUSD kindergarten classrooms well-rounded across readiness skills.** These children are *Proficient Across Blocks*, across all four *Basic Building Blocks* of readiness.

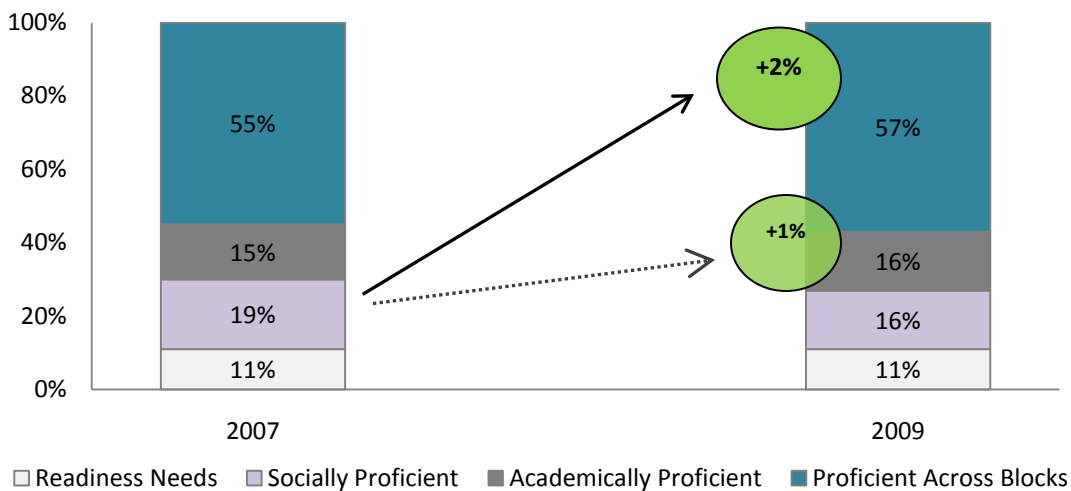
Who demonstrated the **greatest readiness needs**? Children in the *Readiness Needs* group have not yet learned – or are just beginning to learn – the 24 readiness skills. Approximately one in ten children sorted into the *Readiness Needs* group, which is comparable to neighboring counties.

The remaining children exhibited mixed patterns of readiness. *Socially Proficient* students were well-equipped on the social-emotional dimensions of readiness, but they had needs in *Kindergarten Academics* – learning their letters, numbers, shapes, and colors. In contrast, the *Academically Proficient* children have mastered their early academics; however, they demonstrate greater challenges in the social-emotional areas of readiness (skills within the *Self-Regulation* and *Social Expression* dimensions).

Change in Portrait Prevalence since 2007

As illustrated in Figure 5, the distribution of *Portrait* prevalence shows a 2% gain between 2007 and 2009 in students who are *Proficient Across Blocks* and a slight decrease in the proportion of students who are *Socially Proficient*. While the proportion of students demonstrating *Readiness Needs* remained level at 11%, this change suggests positive movement in the distribution of students between 2007 and 2009 into proficiency across *Blocks*.

Figure 5: **Comparing Portrait Prevalence in SFUSD, 2007-2009**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form I (2009); Note: This chart is based on 751 students across the county in 2009.

HOW READY IS “READY”? BENCHMARKING CHILDREN’S READINESS

So far these data speak to children’s general readiness levels, but just how ready is “ready”? To answer this question, ASR created two different standards of readiness described below to compare children’s observed readiness for kindergarten against:

- **The SFUSD Teacher Expectation**– is based on teachers’ expected levels of proficiency. After their student observations were complete, teachers were asked to report how proficient children should be on each skill in order to experience a successful transition into kindergarten.
- **The Longitudinal Study Standard** – ASR also created a standard based on the kindergarten readiness scores of a group of children in San Mateo County who, as of third grade, were academically successful.⁶

Although the Longitudinal Study Standard benchmark is based on empirically observed kindergarten readiness scores of those children who proved to be academically successful in the third grade, we recognize that many children who may not score quite at the Longitudinal Study level will indeed go on to become academically successful. As such, the benchmark was broadened and defined by one standard deviation below the Longitudinal Study Standard mean. Broadening the benchmark in this manner acknowledges variation among students’ kindergarten readiness and recognizes the possibility that the approximately 34% of the population who fall within one standard deviation below the mean⁷ may indeed reach proficiency by the third grade.

The SFUSD Teacher Standard reflects how proficient teachers expect children should be for successful entry into kindergarten

The Longitudinal Study Standard reflects the actual kindergarten readiness levels of children who were academically successful in third grade

Are the Benchmarks Met?

The first set of columns in the following figure shows the percentage of children who met or exceeded the SFUSD Teacher Standard. Overall, 70% of children met or exceeded teacher expectations. More children met expectations in *Self-Care & Motor Skills* (72%), whereas just over half of children met expectations in *Self-Regulation* (58%).

The second set of columns reflects the percent of SFUSD kindergarten students who met or exceeded the Longitudinal Study Standard benchmark⁸. Similar to the SFUSD teacher standard, approximately 69 percent of incoming SFUSD kindergarten students were as ready or more ready as the group of academically successful San Mateo County third graders had been at kindergarten.

⁶ This was done by linking the kindergarten readiness assessments of children in San Mateo County (2001-2003) to their third-grade STAR test scores.⁶ Kindergarten readiness proved to be a strong predictor of children’s later academic success. To create the Longitudinal Study Standard, children in San Mateo County who scored at the Proficient or Advanced levels on their English Language Arts and Mathematics STAR tests in the 3rd grade were first identified. ASR then calculated the kindergarten readiness scores for this group of academically successful children. These readiness scores represent the Longitudinal Study Standard, reflecting the kindergarten readiness levels of children who went on to academic success in third grade.

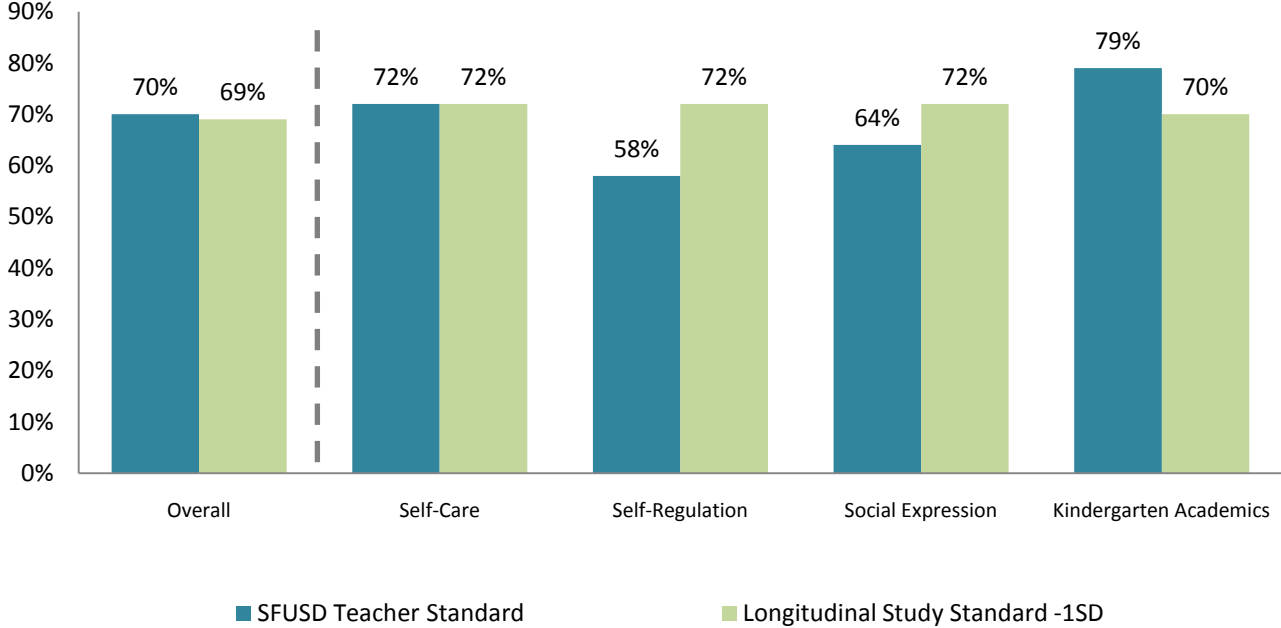
⁷ Estimate based on assumption of a normal distribution.

⁸ Defined here by one standard deviation below the mean readiness score of academically proficient third graders in San Mateo.

As illustrated in Figure 6, SFUSD teachers appear to have similar expectations for success to within one standard deviation of readiness scores observed in academically successful children. Expectations are particularly on par in *Self-Care*. In the areas of *Self-Regulation* and *Social Expression*, SFUSD teachers appear to have higher expectations, as a lower proportion of SFUSD kindergartners meet/exceed the teacher expectation relative to the standard defined the Longitudinal Study.

However, the converse is observed in the area of *Kindergarten Academics*, where a greater proportion of SFUSD kindergartners meets/exceeds the teacher standard as compared to the benchmark defined by the Longitudinal Study Standard.

Figure 6: **Percent of Children Meeting or Exceeding Readiness Standards**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form I 2009, Teacher Survey on Importance of Readiness Skills 2009, and the 2008 ASR report Does Readiness Matter? How Kindergarten Readiness Translates Into Academic Success.

What factors are associated with children’s readiness for kindergarten?

HOW DID FAMILIES HELP CHILDREN’S SCHOOL READINESS?

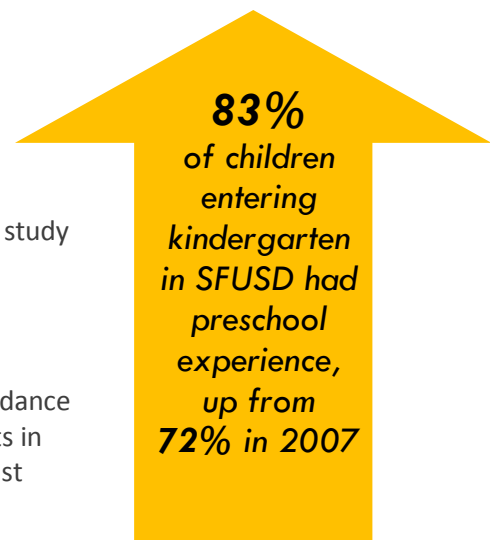
Family support of children’s entry into kindergarten is an important component to school readiness. In many respects, San Francisco families appeared ready to support their children’s success in school:

- Most families had visited city resources like local parks, the San Francisco zoo, and San Francisco Public libraries.
- Most families appeared to place limits on their children’s screen time – 86 percent of children had daily screen time that was within American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines. And most of the screen time that children did spend was “educational,” according to parents.
- Most parents had healthy attitudes about parenting, social support, and coping. Eighty percent reported feeling confident in their ability to help their child grow and develop, and most felt they could easily find someone to talk to when they need advice about parenting.
- Most San Francisco families were well-engaged with their children – over half of families reported that they read with their children for more than 5 minutes a day, five (or more) times a week.
- Families also engaged in many activities to assist their children with the transition into kindergarten. Seventy-three percent of families had visited the elementary school with their child, more than half had worked with their children on school skills (56%), and about half attended a parent meeting or orientation before the first day of school (50%).

HOW ARE EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILDREN’S READINESS FOR SCHOOL?

Preschool attendance rates in SFUSD were high – 83 percent⁹ of children in this study had attended some type of preschool during the year prior to kindergarten, representing a substantial increase from 2007, when 72% of the district’s kindergartners were preschool graduates.

Despite increased economic hardship during this time period¹⁰, preschool attendance has increased, due at least in part to significant First 5 San Francisco investments in preschool facilities that has helped expand licensed preschool capacity by at least 547 spaces in the last two years.

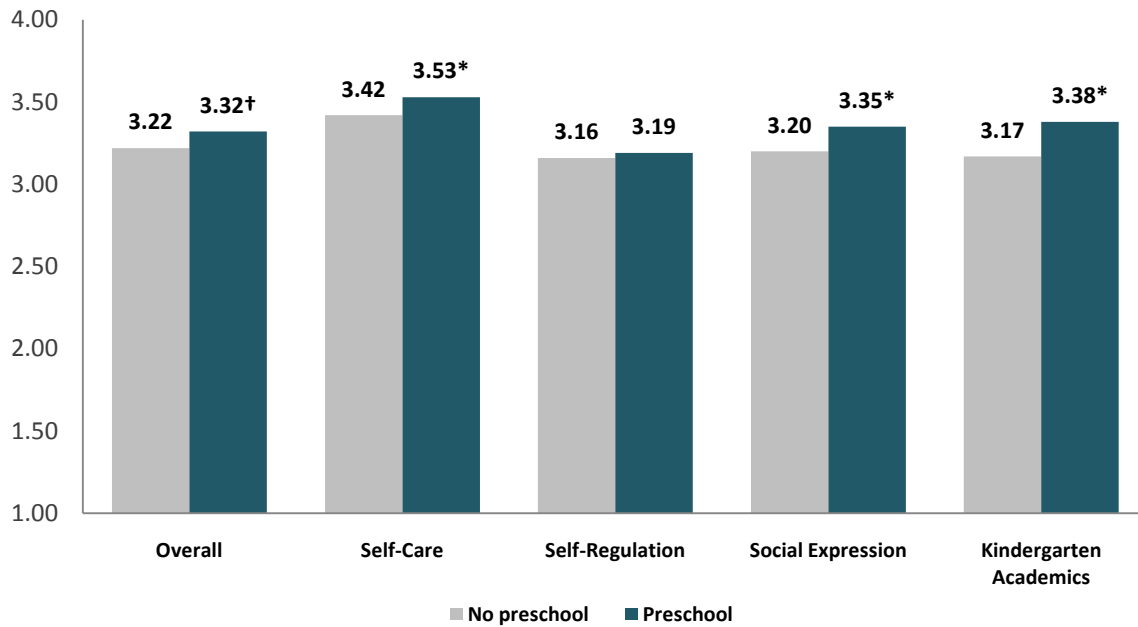


⁹ In 2009, ASR received data from First 5 San Francisco on Preschool For All participants. Inclusion of these data produces the 83% estimate of preschool attendance in the district. It should be noted that the 72% estimate derived in 2007 was based on parent and teacher report alone. Using the 2007 method, an 80% preschool attendance is observed. Thus, we attribute approximately 3% of the 9% gain in preschool attendance to differences in calculation methods. However, the 83% estimate is the more accurate identification of preschool attendance and is employed in report analyses.

¹⁰ Economic hardship appears to be a barrier to preschool attendance. Children from households earning less than \$32,000/year were less likely to attend preschool than children from families with higher incomes and this difference is statistically significant (chi-square = 10.77; p=0.001).

Consistent with findings from several other regional readiness assessments, preschool experience was significantly associated with enhanced readiness for all *Basic Building Blocks*, with the exception of *Self-Regulation*, as shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: **Average Scores on the *Basic Building Blocks* of Readiness by Preschool**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form I and Parent Information Form (2009) N = 124 no preschool; 627 preschool. †p<0.10; *p<0.05.

Regression analysis showed that children who attended preschool were more ready for kindergarten than their non-preschooled peers. For example:

- Preschool graduates entered kindergarten with significantly higher scores on *Kindergarten Academics* than their non-preschooled peers, even after controlling for a number of demographic differences. This finding is important, because it is the *Kindergarten Academics* skills that are most closely linked to academic achievement in later elementary grades (ASR, 2008).
- Preschool experience was associated with greater proficiency in important pre-literacy skills like recognizes letters, writes first name, and engages with books.
- Preschool graduates also scored higher in *Social Expression* and were rated as particularly able in expressing empathy or caring for others.
- Compared to children with no prior preschool experience, children who had gone to preschool also appeared to have an easier time transitioning into school. Children with preschool experience were less nervous in the classroom and participated more frequently in class discussions.

Children who had preschool experience were more ready for school

Preschool is important for “leveling the playing field” for children at-risk of lower readiness scores

Families who sent their children to preschool also tended to engage in more of the behaviors that are associated with heightened readiness. For example, preschool graduates spend less time each week in front of a television or computer screen than children with no preschool experience and time spent in front of a television or computer screen is associated with lower readiness scores in kindergarten academics.

In addition, families who sent their children to preschool also tended to avail themselves of local resources more than non-preschool families. These families used the public library, went to the zoo, parks, etc., and these activities are associated with heightened school readiness.

Importantly, preschool may have contributed to leveling the playing field for children at-risk of lower readiness scores. ASR identified several risk factors that were associated with lower readiness scores (e.g., age, income, maternal education). Although preschool did not completely erase effects of risk factors, it did provide a boost to overall school readiness.

WHAT ELSE IS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGHER READINESS?

Regression analyses showed the importance of preschool in kindergarten readiness, but analyses also showed that a number of other child and family factors were also associated with heightened readiness. Several factors appear to have a powerful and independent association with school readiness. As Figure 8 shows, girls, children who were older when they entered school, and children who did not have special needs began kindergarten at higher readiness levels.

Families were important, too. Children whose families scored higher on an index of risk factors demonstrated lower levels of school readiness than their peers from families with fewer risk factors. Risk factors included teen motherhood, single parenthood, having received no parenting supports/services (such as home visits, parent education classes, regular medical checkups through pregnancy, WIC, help from friends or family), a family member having lost their job in the past year, and having moved 2 or more times since the child was born.

Children whose families made greater use of local family resources (using the public library, zoo, museums, parks, family resource centers, or raising a reader) scored higher in overall readiness than other children. In addition, children who were read to were also more school-ready than other children. These findings suggest that the more learning opportunities families can provide for their children both inside and outside the home, the more ready children will be for school.

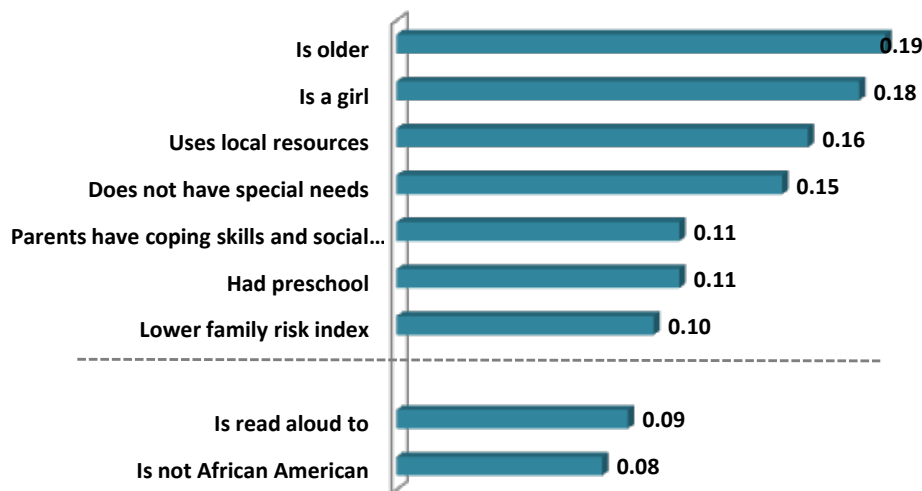
Parents who reported higher levels of social support and coping also sent children to school who tended to be more ready than their peers. These families felt more confident in their ability to help their child grow and develop, they reported a strong support system of family, friends, and community, could more easily find someone to talk to when they needed advice or help, and they reported coping well with the day-to-day demands of parenting.

Thus, for families experiencing the same risk factors, making use of local resources, reading aloud, and reaching out to a support system all seem to provide a protective boost to children's readiness for kindergarten.

Family risk factors pose a challenge to children's school readiness

Families who made use of local resources and parents who reported higher levels of social support and coping saw higher readiness levels in their children

Figure 8: **Relative Strength of Factors Significantly Associated with Overall School Readiness**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form I and Parent Information Form (2009)

Note: Values for each factor listed above represent standardized beta coefficients that were significant at $p < .10$. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F = 6.72$, $p < .001$, explaining 24% of the variance in kindergarten readiness ($R^2 = .24$; Adj. $R^2 = .20$). In addition to the variables listed above, the following variables were included in the regression equation but were not statistically significant: English Learner status, ethnicity, income, mother's education, and parent scores on the mental illness screener.

*The family risk index includes measures for teen motherhood, single parenthood, having received no supports/services, a family member having lost their job in the past year, and having moved 2 or more times since the child was born.

HOW DOES ACCESS TO RESOURCES VARY AMONG SAN FRANCISCO FAMILIES?

Given the opportunity to improve school readiness that these findings point to, identifying populations in greater need of access to the resources that have been found to be associated with increased readiness allows for more effective targeting of efforts to increase school readiness.

This section briefly outlines the relationship between some key socioeconomic indicators (race/ethnicity, the risk index, and income) and access to the three resources that have been demonstrated to have a positive impact on readiness (use of local resources, parental support and coping, and preschool).

Race/Ethnicity

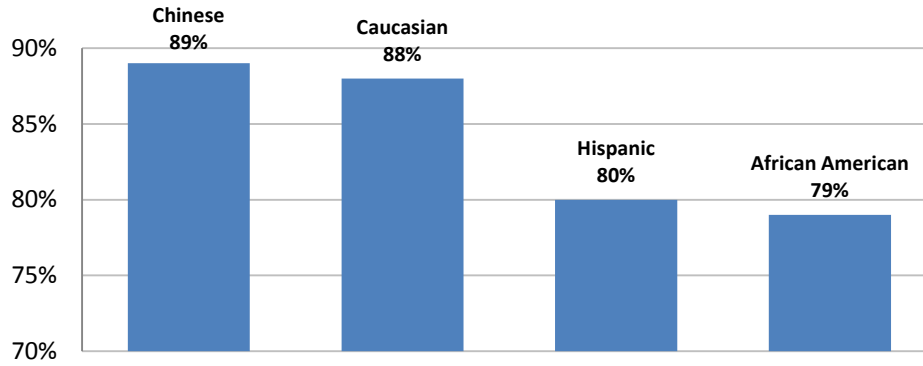
Caucasian families were more likely than families of any other race/ethnicity to make use of local family resources ($p < 0.01$).

Asian and Hispanic parents reported lower levels of coping and support as compared to African American and Caucasian parents ($p < 0.05$).

Although levels of preschool attendance are notably high across the district, Hispanic and African American children are less likely than Chinese or Caucasian children to attend preschool ($p < 0.05$). As Figure 9 shows, 89% of Chinese students attended preschool in the year prior to kindergarten, while 79% of African American students did so.

Based on these data, SFUSD, First 5, and community partners should continue making investments in early childhood education and family resources and support

Figure 9: **Preschool Attendance Within Race/Ethnicity**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form I and Parent Information Form (2009). N=572.

Risk Index

The more risk factors¹¹ a family has:

- the lower levels of reported parental coping and social support (p<0.01)
- the less likely they are to make use of local resources (p<0.01)
- are less likely to have children who went to preschool (p<0.05)
... and the lower their school readiness levels.

Income

Families earning less than \$32,000 a year:

- report lower levels of parental coping and social support (p<0.01)
- use of local resources less frequently (p<0.01)
- are less likely to have children who went to preschool (p<0.01)
... and the lower their school readiness levels.

¹¹ The family risk index includes measures for teen motherhood, single parenthood, having received no supports/services, a family member having lost their job in the past year, and having moved 2 or more times since the child was born.

Conclusions

This report describes the school readiness of 751 children who entered kindergarten in the San Francisco Unified School District in the fall of 2009. This section provides the basic contours of some key findings and outlines recommended actions that the district, First 5, and community stakeholders committed to improving school readiness in San Francisco might consider.

WHAT CAN SAN FRANCISCO DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN READINESS IN FUTURE YEARS?

Data showed that students entered SFUSD kindergarten classrooms with many strengths, but that extra supports are needed to give all children an equal chance to succeed in school. These data should be used not just to inform, but also to catalyze and direct action. Although some links to readiness may not be mutable (e.g., gender, certainly, and to some extent maternal education), readiness advocates could focus in some important areas to close the readiness gap. For example, SFUSD, First 5, and community partners could:

- Continue to invest in early childhood education programs. The increase in children’s school readiness from 2007 to 2009 may be attributable to the increase in the proportion of children attending preschool over the same period (83% in 2009 vs. 72% in 2007).
- Identify *Readiness Needs* students before they enter kindergarten in order to provide summer enrichment prior to school entry. Eleven percent of entering kindergarten students fall into this portrait – these students are just beginning to learn the gamut of readiness skills. Without intervention, these children are at risk of remaining behind and achieving at lower levels in English and math at later grades.¹² Results of the longitudinal study conducted in San Mateo County suggest that directing these children to an intensive kindergarten transition program may be helpful at closing the readiness gap.
- Target interventions in geographical areas with greater readiness needs. Analysis of children’s home zip codes point to a few neighborhood areas in which readiness interventions might be targeted. Neighborhood concentrations of children with readiness needs across all skill areas greater than the overall population (i.e., greater than 11%) include: South of Market/Mission Dolores/Treasure Island, Potrero Hill/ Mission/Bernal Heights, Visitacion Valley, Civic Center/Tenderloin, and the Bayview-Hunters Point areas.
- Support schools in understanding the readiness profiles of their incoming kindergarteners and ensure that teachers are prepared to address children’s varying readiness needs. Results underscore that some classrooms are filled with students *Proficient Across Blocks*, whereas other classrooms have a greater

Readiness advocates might focus in the following areas:

- *Continue to provide professional development around fostering Self-Regulation skills*
- *Strengthen systems of parenting support and extend to as many families as possible*
- *Encourage opportunities for learning experiences outside the home environment*

¹² ASR. 2008. *Does Readiness Matter? How Kindergarten Readiness Translates Into Academic Success.*

diversity of readiness levels and higher proportions of children with readiness needs. Teachers of classrooms with greater readiness needs may require extra supports to build basic skills in their students before children are ready for the kindergarten curriculum.

- Continue to provide early educators and elementary teachers with professional development around fostering *Self-Regulation* skills (e.g., controlling impulses, participating in circle time, working and playing with peers). Twenty percent of children entered kindergarten significantly below where their teachers would like them to be on *Self-Regulation* skills. Teachers also rated this area as one of the most important for kindergarten entry, one of the most difficult to impact, and the area in which most class time is spent. Children who struggle in this area may cause disruptions in the classroom environment, making it more difficult for all children in the classroom to learn. The district may want to gauge how teachers currently address these issues, and whether there are any best-practice curricula or teaching tips that may make a difference.
- Strengthen systems of parenting support and extend support to all families in need. Some parents reported significantly less access to support and coping resources than others ... parents who were not born in the U.S., families of Chinese and Hispanic/Latino descent, and economically disadvantaged families reported less access. Yet access to social support was one of the stronger family factors associated with higher readiness.
- Encourage families to get out and make use of local family resources such as libraries, family resource centers, parks, zoos, and museums. Controlling for risk factors, children whose families made greater use of local family resources had better school readiness outcomes.
- Build continuity between early education programs and elementary schools. By encouraging dialogue between preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers, readiness advocates can work on aligning expectations to ensure that teachers are focused on the most important competencies prior to kindergarten entry and beyond.

In sum, these data show that over half of children entering SFUSD kindergarten classrooms are well-rounded and well-prepared for kindergarten. Moreover, SFUSD has seen an increase in readiness in *Kindergarten Academics* and a slight increase in *Social Expression*. However, about 45 percent of children need extra supports in the *Self-Regulation* area. Longitudinal research shows that such gaps in readiness become achievement gaps as children progress through school. These findings can help SFUSD and First 5, who share a strong commitment to closing the achievement gap, continue building community partnerships and making investments in fostering school readiness.