



PRESS RELEASE
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Are San Francisco Kindergarteners Ready for School? **Report Shows Record Levels of Preschool Attendance but** **Troubling Gaps in Other Essential Supports**

August 31, 2016 (San Francisco) — Sixty-two percent of San Francisco children entering kindergarten last year demonstrated proficiency in the early academic and social skills necessary to succeed in school, according to new research released this week. The report, *School Readiness in San Francisco, 2015-16*, found that while more than one-third of children lacked adequate preparedness, parents and policymakers could take specific actions to help all children start school ready to succeed.

The report pointed to preschool attendance as an important determinant of readiness, and San Francisco—one of the first cities in the nation to launch its own universal preschool program in 2005—saw large gains in preschool participation. The study found that 92% of entering kindergartners had attended a curriculum-based preschool or transitional kindergarten program, up from 72% in 2007. Statewide, less than 48% of 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in preschool.

Despite the gains in preschool attendance, the report showed that 38% of entering kindergartners in San Francisco were not adequately prepared for school, and these children were more likely to come from low-income, non-English-speaking, Latino, or African American households.

“San Francisco has done an incredible job bringing preschool opportunity to nearly every child, but it’s clear from this report that preschool alone is not enough,” said Ingrid Mezquita, Executive Director of First 5 San Francisco, the City department that sponsored the research. “We need to start earlier with our babies, doing everything we can to support new parents and connect them to Family Resource Centers, developmental screenings, and high-quality early care.”

In addition to preschool, the report pointed to other critical and changeable factors that were associated with school readiness: how often children were sick, hungry, or tired in class; whether or not they had special needs; and engagement in activities at home. Previous research in 2007 and 2009 additionally identified reading at home, parenting strain and social support, and use of local resources such as parks, libraries, and museums as other significant factors in determining how ready a child is to start kindergarten.

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“Children achieve school readiness through a combination of resources and supports, but the systems in San Francisco that deliver these essentials are not well coordinated,” said Mezquita. “How effectively schools, health care practitioners, and social service providers communicate with and support one another is one key to making sure every child and family gets what is needed.”

The report found that 5-6% of children were often hungry or tired, and 82% of these children did not meet the readiness standard. Six percent of children had designated special needs, and 70% of them did not meet the readiness standard. The study also found that up to 8% of children may have had undiagnosed special needs, according to teachers and parents. Early screening and intervention for developmental concerns can help children thrive and reduce the need for expensive services later, but less than half of all children received developmental screening prior to kindergarten.

“We know what makes a difference in the development of babies and young children— health, education, and family support,” said Carla Bryant, Chief of Early Education for the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), a co-sponsor of the study. “San Francisco has demonstrated time and time again that it is committed to supporting all children, families, and schools to succeed. As a city, we must identify wherever inequities occur and correct them.”

The study established, for the first time, a standard for school readiness based on San Francisco kindergartners who were tested in 2007 and 2009 and whose progress researchers then tracked through the third grade. “We now know with good certainty how prepared San Francisco’s children need to be— before they enter school—to be successful in school,” said Mezquita.

The research on a representative group of 893 children entering kindergarten across 47 schools in 2015 was commissioned by SFUSD and First 5 San Francisco and conducted by San Jose-based Applied Survey Research (ASR).

“Our research shows that children who start school with the right mix of early academic and social skills are more likely to do well throughout their years of education,” said Lisa Colvig-Niclai, Vice President of Evaluation for ASR. “The research tells us which children in San Francisco are at risk and which children are not getting the supports they need to succeed. We hope this information provides a path forward for city departments and the school district to act quickly to better support young children and their families.”

The full research report, *School Readiness in San Francisco, 2015-16*, is available to download at www.first5sf.org.

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What Can Be Done to Improve Children's Readiness?

The report identifies several ways for parents, service providers, and policymakers to improve children's early academic and social skills before kindergarten:

- **Enroll children in high-quality preschool.** Early education is essential to developing school readiness skills, but some children still do not have access to it. San Francisco's Preschool for All program makes high-quality preschool more affordable to families and is offered at more than 150 sites throughout the city. For more information, visit www.first5sf.org or call 415-354-3873.
- **Screen children early on to detect developmental delays.** Early identification of concerns with children's cognitive, social, and physical development is the best way to make sure they stay on track and get the help they need. First 5 San Francisco aims to make developmental screening universal by working with pediatricians, teachers, and other service providers to adopt screening tools such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ).
- **Make sure children get adequate nutrition and sleep.** Children who teachers reported as frequently hungry, tired, and sick were prone to lower levels of school readiness. An earlier bedtime and healthy meals and snacks help children make the most of school time.
- **Read with children every day and engage them in a variety of home activities.** Parents should set aside at least five minutes a day to read with their children, starting from birth. The more often parents read, tell stories, sing, do household chores, and play together with their children, the better prepared their children are for school.
- **Take children to the library, zoo, museums, and parks.** Learning doesn't just happen in school or at home. Libraries and parks are always free, and families can get free admission to more than two dozen San Francisco attractions through the San Francisco Public Library's "Discover & Go" pass program at sfpl.org/discoverandgo.
- **Get help with parenting.** Raising a child is not easy, and every parent, regardless of background, will face parenting challenges. Parents needing help should not hesitate to ask for advice from family and friends or to contact one of San Francisco's many Family Resource Centers (FRCs), which offer classes, workshops, and fun events. FRCs are funded through the joint efforts of the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, the Human Services Agency, and First 5 San Francisco. A list of FRCs and services provided is available at www.first5sf.org.