



# SCHOOL READINESS

## IN SACRAMENTO COUNTY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2016

Funding provided by:



Produced by:



## WHY WAS THIS STUDY CONDUCTED?

This study is the fifth kindergarten readiness assessment across the network of Sacramento area elementary schools served by First 5. Beginning in 2012, their purpose is to help First 5 and its partners understand how ready students and their families are for kindergarten across the network and to identify the links between readiness and other aspects of child and family development that First 5 addresses. Results may be used to examine ways that First 5 may better target resources and services to address factors that hinder children’s readiness across the First 5 Sacramento network.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Research Questions	Findings	Data Details
<p><b>How ready are children across the First 5 Sacramento network of schools?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Thirty-five percent of children were <i>Ready</i> for kindergarten in all three domains (<i>Kindergarten Academics, Self-Regulation, and Social Expression</i>). An additional 37% were <i>Partially Ready</i> (ready in 1 or 2 domains).</li> <li>● Average scores in each of the three Building Blocks were:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Self-Regulation</i>: 3.25</li> <li>– <i>Social Expression</i>: 3.20</li> <li>– <i>Kindergarten Academics</i>: 3.06</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ For each of the 20 individual readiness skills, children were scored on a scale from <i>Not Yet</i> (1) to <i>Proficient</i> (4).</li> <li>■ Average scores for the three Building Blocks (<i>Self-Regulation, Social Expression, and Kindergarten Academics</i>) also ranged from 1 to 4. Children were considered <i>Ready</i> in each domain if they had a score of 3.25 or higher.</li> <li>■ Across years, scores were lowest in <i>Kindergarten Academics</i>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What are the major factors or “predictors” of readiness across the First 5 Sacramento network?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Child’s Age</li> <li>● Special Needs</li> <li>● Gender</li> <li>● Attended preschool or TK</li> <li>● Child Well-Being</li> <li>● Readiness Activities</li> <li>● Less Parenting Strain</li> <li>● Family Income</li> <li>● Not an English Learner</li> <li>● Read at home more</li> <li>● First 5 service: parent education &amp; support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Most of the strongest “predictors” of readiness in Sacramento County (well-being, age, gender, special needs, and pre-school/TK attendance) were largely the same as those found in national assessments of kindergarten readiness as well as the 2012-2105 Sacramento studies.</li> <li>■ Parent and home factors included readiness activities and reading at home, parenting strain and family income. Participation in F5-funded parent education and support services was also linked to higher readiness scores.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What is the relationship between First 5-funded school readiness services and school readiness scores and related factors?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● As in previous years, children who attended a <b><i>First 5-supported preschool</i></b> had significantly higher readiness scores than those who did not attend preschool, with the largest benefit in the domain of <i>Kindergarten Academics</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ As in past assessments, slightly over one-third (35%) of the sample had received at least one F5 school readiness service in the two years before kindergarten entry.</li> <li>■ Most children who attended a F5-</li> </ul>

Research Questions	Findings	Data Details
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children whose parents/families participated in <b><i>F5-funded parent education and family support services</i></b> had significantly higher readiness scores, with a particularly large boost for low-income children.</li> <li>• Children whose family participated in <b><i>at least one F5-funded school readiness service</i></b> read at home more frequently, engaged in more kindergarten transition activities, and received more information about the transition. These outcomes support long-term academic success through increased home learning and school engagement.</li> </ul>	<p>supported preschool also received a variety of <b><i>health screenings (e.g. dental, hearing, and vision)</i></b>, which may have contributed to the readiness boost.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ While it was not possible to examine the impact of <b><i>playgroups</i></b> because there were so few playgroup participants in the assessed sample, an in-depth, multi-year analysis will be conducted to more closely assess the relationship between playgroup participation and school readiness.</li> </ul>
<p><b>How ready are families to support their children's readiness?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High rates of health insurance (99%), and medical and dental homes (97% and 90% respectively).</li> <li>• High rates of vision and hearing screenings</li> <li>• Approximately half or less of families reported participating in a range of home learning activities at least five days per week, including reading (46%), telling stories/singing songs (54%), and playing games/doing puzzles (43%).</li> <li>• Rates were similar for many kindergarten transition activities, such as meeting with the child's kinder teacher (49% among F5 families) and attending a parent orientation (56%). A few had higher rates: among First 5 participants, 61% had visited the elementary school and 71% had worked on school skills at home.</li> <li>• The majority of families had received readiness information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Many children received screenings that were funded by First 5.</li> <li>▪ Early engagement in home learning and kindergarten transition activities can have long-term benefits, since they establish important practices related to informal learning and school engagement.</li> <li>▪ As noted above, F5 participants were significantly more likely to have engaged in kindergarten transition activities and to have received readiness information.</li> </ul>

## HOW WAS THE STUDY CONDUCTED?

### Sample

The sample of schools and classrooms was drawn by First 5 Sacramento staff to cover the entire First 5 service area, particularly those schools whose incoming kindergartners and their families were most likely to have received First 5 school readiness services in recent years. The sample was designed to reflect the First 5 Sacramento target population and service network, which covers parts of nine school districts: Sacramento City, Twin Rivers, Elk Grove, Natomas, River Delta, Folsom Cordova, Galt, Robla, and San Juan school districts. The sample was not designed to be representative or generalizable to the county at large or any individual district or school. The 2016 study comprised **89 kindergarten classrooms** from **40 elementary schools** across the county. In all, **1,874 individual student assessments** were completed. The figure below details the overall demographics of kindergarten students and their families across the First 5 network who were assessed in fall 2016. The make-up of the current sample was fairly similar to that of previous years (see full report for details), except that incomes were slightly higher than in previous years.

### Demographics of Sampled Kindergartners and their Families, 2016

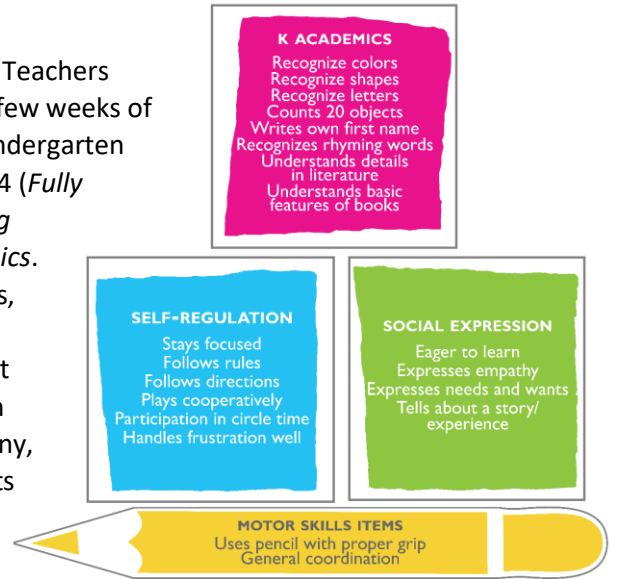
	2016
<b>Gender</b>	
Boys	53%
Girls	47%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
Latino/Hispanic	38%
African American	13%
White	13%
Asian	16%
Multiple race/ethnicity	17%
Filipino	1%
Other	3%
<b>English Learners</b>	38%
<b>Special Needs Students</b>	8%
<b>Family Income</b>	
\$0-\$14,999	31%
\$15,000-\$34,999	37%
\$35,000-\$49,999	17%
\$50,000+	15%
<b>Mother's Education</b>	
Less than HS	24%
High School	32%
Some College	27%
College Degree	17%

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form 2016; Parent Information Form 2016

Note: N=1,288-1,864

## Instruments and Data Sources

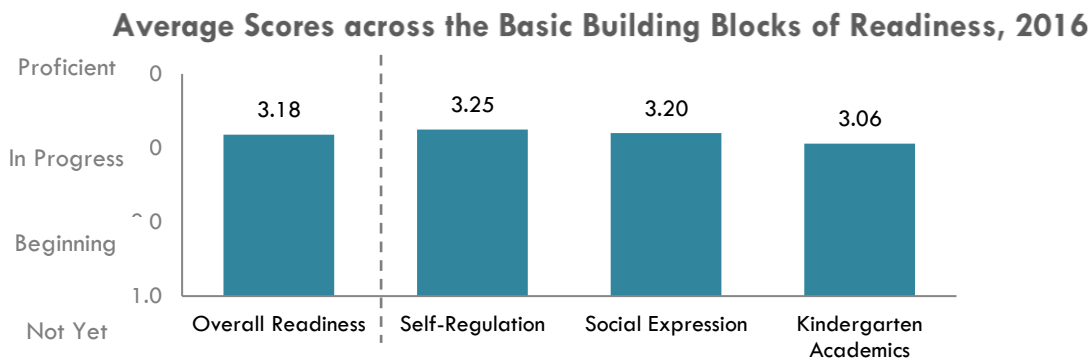
Three primary instruments and data sources were used in this study. Teachers completed the *Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF)* within the first few weeks of the 2016/17 school year by rating student proficiency levels on 20 kindergarten readiness skills on a scale from 1 (*Not Yet* demonstrating the skill) to 4 (*Fully Proficient* on the skill). These readiness skills comprised three *Building Blocks – Self-Regulation, Social Expression, and Kindergarten Academics*. A fourth area includes two items related to fine and gross motor skills, which serve as a foundation for these *Building Blocks*. Parents completed the *Parent Information Form* to provide information about their children and family background. First 5 service and participation records for children and their parents were obtained from Persimmony, the data system into which First 5 contractors enter data about clients and services received.



## KINDERGARTEN READINESS

### The Average Kindergarten Student is In Progress

For each individual readiness skill, children were scored on a scale from *Not Yet* (1) to *Proficient* (4). In 2016, the average overall readiness score across the First 5 network was **3.18**—just above the benchmark for *In Progress*. Students were similarly *In Progress* on overall readiness in the two prior study years<sup>1</sup>. Scores for each of three domains, or *Building Blocks*, of readiness were also calculated. As was found in Sacramento’s prior readiness studies, scores were lowest in *Kindergarten Academics* (e.g., counting, recognizing basic shapes and colors, rhyming). Scores for *Self-Regulation* (e.g., staying focused, following rules, handling frustration well) were highest, and *Social Expression* (e.g., expressing needs and wants, expressing empathy) fell in between.

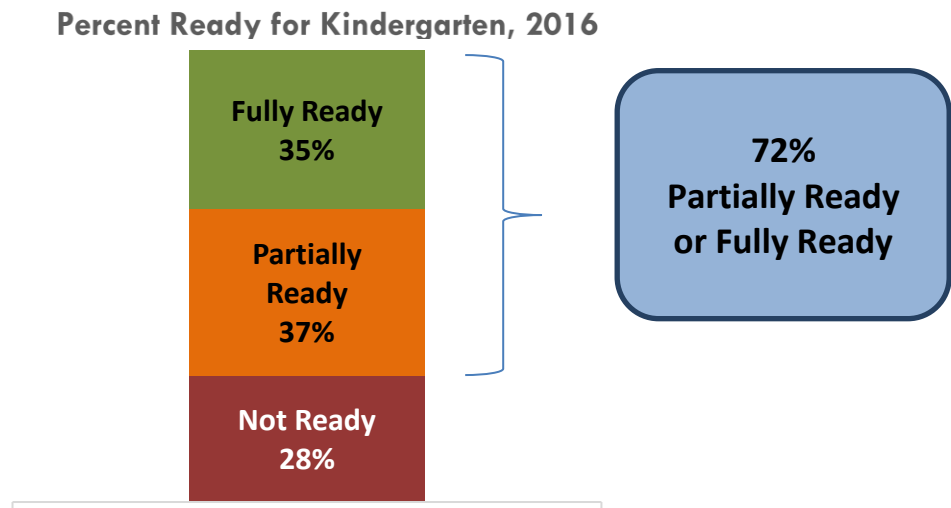


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form 2016. N=1,801-1,912.

<sup>1</sup> The KOF was revised in 2014, which makes it inappropriate to compare raw readiness scores from year to year. For a year-to-year comparison of the items that did not change in 2014, see full report. Also, because several of the items on the KOF were aligned with the kindergarten Common Core State Standards (skills children are expected to acquire by the end of the school year), we did not expect students to be fully proficient on all skills at the time of the assessment.

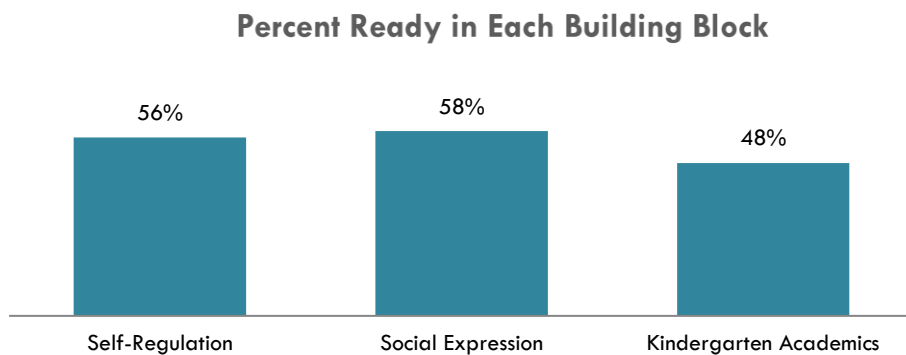
### Just Over One-Third of Students Are Ready in All Areas

Students were considered “Ready” for Kindergarten if they scored at or above 3.25 on all three Building Blocks, meaning they were *Proficient* or nearing proficiency on *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. Using these criteria, **35 percent** of the sample were *Ready* for kindergarten, while another 37 percent were *Partially Ready*, having scored at or above 3.25 on some but not all of the *Building Blocks*. The remaining 28 percent were *Not Ready*, having scored below 3.25 on all three *Building Blocks*. These readiness rates are nearly the same as 2015.



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form 2016. N=1,756

When each Building Block is considered separately, just over half of children are “ready” (i.e., score at or above 3.25) in the domains of *Self-Regulation* and *Social Expression*. Just under half were “ready” in *Kindergarten Academics*.

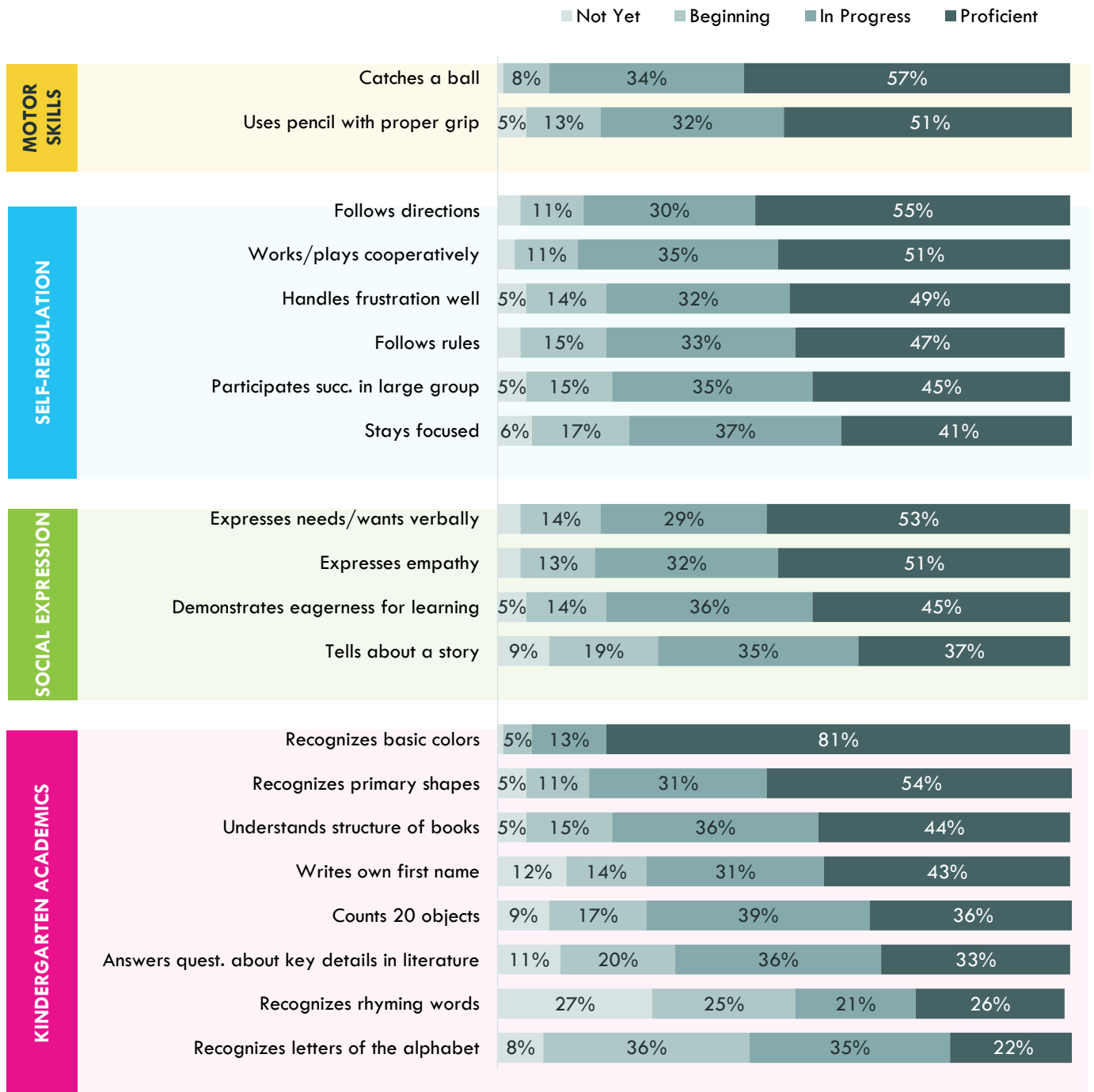


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form 2016. N=1,756.

### Kindergarten Students Skills Vary Across the Building Blocks of Readiness

The figure on the next page shows the percentage of children scoring at the *Not Yet*, *Beginning*, *In Progress*, and *Proficient* levels across all 20 readiness skills. Most students were proficient in recognizing basic colors, while relatively few were proficient in recognizing all letters of the alphabet. Some of the skills below are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, which children are expected to meet by the end of the school year; therefore, students were not expected to be proficient on all of these skills at the time of the assessment.

### Percentage of Children at Each Proficiency Level Across Readiness Skills



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form 2016. N=1,742-1,912. Note: Proportions of less than 5% are not labeled. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Scores were omitted for language-dependent items when language barriers were a concern.

## Greatest Strengths and Challenges across Years

While there was some variation over time in the percent of children scoring *Proficient* on each of the readiness items, children consistently showed strengths in certain areas over others. Specifically, children across all five years were strong in counting and recognizing basic colors, but had room for growth in knowing their letters and recognizing rhymes<sup>2</sup>.

## STRONGEST PREDICTORS OF READINESS

The following figure displays the predictors significantly associated with overall kindergarten readiness scores across the First 5 network. Some of the factors most strongly associated with readiness were child demographics. **Child's age** had the strongest link with readiness, such that children who were older when they entered kindergarten had higher readiness scores. **Gender** and **special needs** were two other child characteristics strongly associated with readiness, consistent with the previous four years. Specifically, boys and children with special needs had lower scores. **English Learners** had lower readiness scores, although this played less of a role than other child characteristics. Additionally, children in **higher income** households had higher readiness skills.

As in previous years, **preschool or transitional kindergarten attendance** was a predictor, such that children who attended a licensed preschool—both First 5-supported and other facilities—or transitional kindergarten had higher readiness scores.

Although not at the top of the list like last year, **child well-being** was a strong predictor of readiness. Children who came to school well-rested and well-fed had significantly higher readiness scores than children who did not.

Finally, several parent and family factors were significantly associated with readiness. Controlling for other factors, including maternal education, children whose parents had less **parenting stress** had higher scores, and children whose families had participated in **F5-funded parent education or support services** had higher scores. Two activities were linked to greater readiness scores: **reading together** more frequently and participating in more **kindergarten transition activities** (e.g., working on school skills with the child, meeting the child's teacher, attending a parent orientation or meeting, reading books about kindergarten).

Many of these predictors have been associated with readiness scores across all five years of assessments. These include:

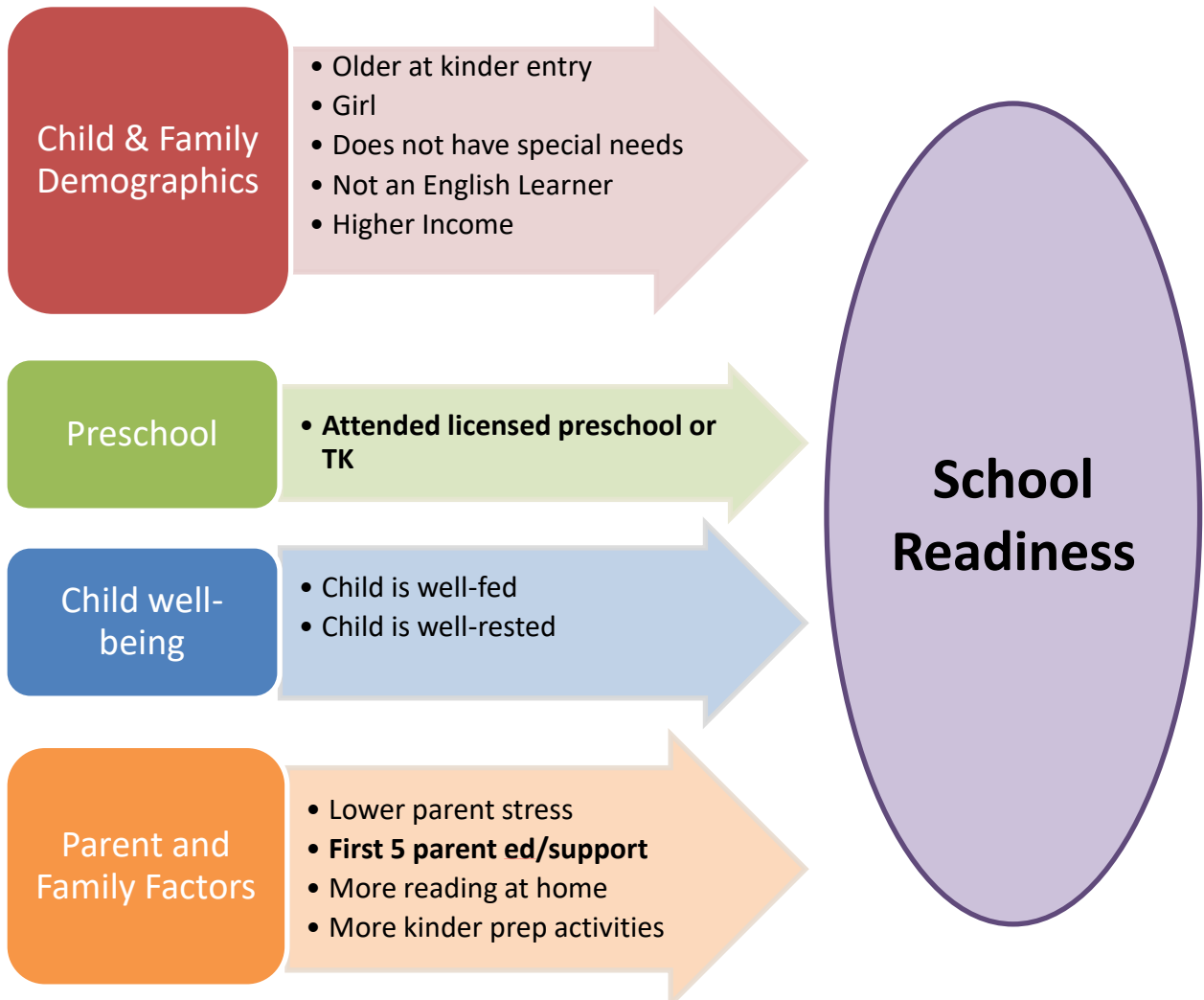
- Child factors: age, gender, special needs status
- Parent factors: maternal education and/or family income
- Child well-being (hunger and fatigue)
- Preschool/TK attendance

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<sup>2</sup> As rhyming is a Common Core-aligned skill to be learned by the end of kindergarten, we did not expect all entering kindergartners to be proficient on this item.



### Strongest Predictors of Overall School Readiness

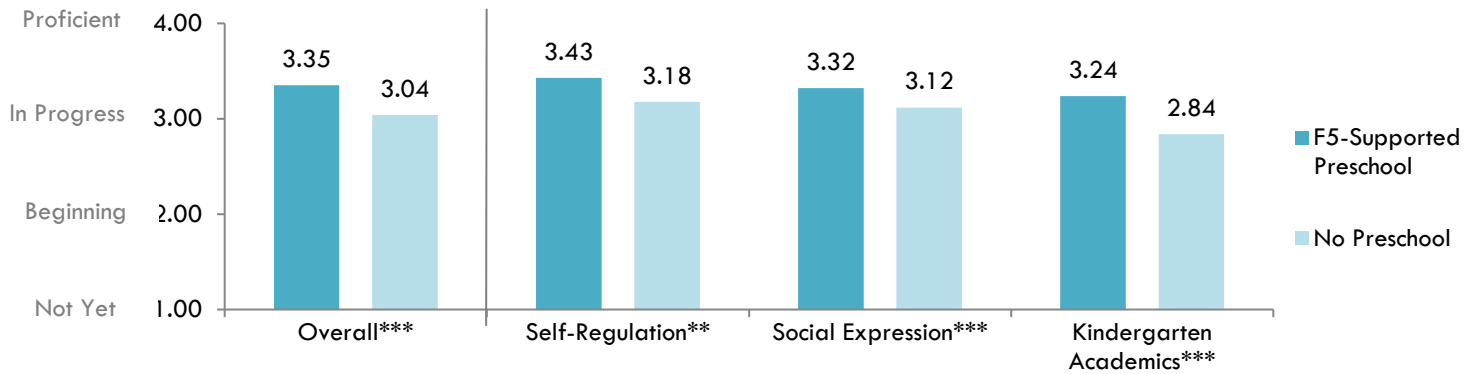


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form 2016, Parent Information Form 2016, First 5 service records. N=1,014.

### First 5-Supported Preschool and Parent Education Linked to Higher Readiness Scores

The following chart displays the differences in readiness scores for children who attended a First 5-supported preschool compared to children who did not attend any preschool, after adjusting for other factors linked to readiness, including child and family demographics. Children who attended preschools supported by First 5 readiness services had significantly higher *Overall Readiness* scores than children who did not attend preschool. These children also had significantly higher *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics* scores, with the largest benefit in *Kindergarten Academics*. Although the differences here appear small, they are significant because they apply to large numbers of children. It is important to note that most children who attended a F5-supported preschool also received F5-funded screenings (91% received a hearing screening, 90% received a dental screening, 78% a vision screening, and 53% a developmental screening). This makes it difficult to parse out distinct benefits of screenings, and indicates some of the benefit of attending a F5-supported preschool may be due to non-educational services.

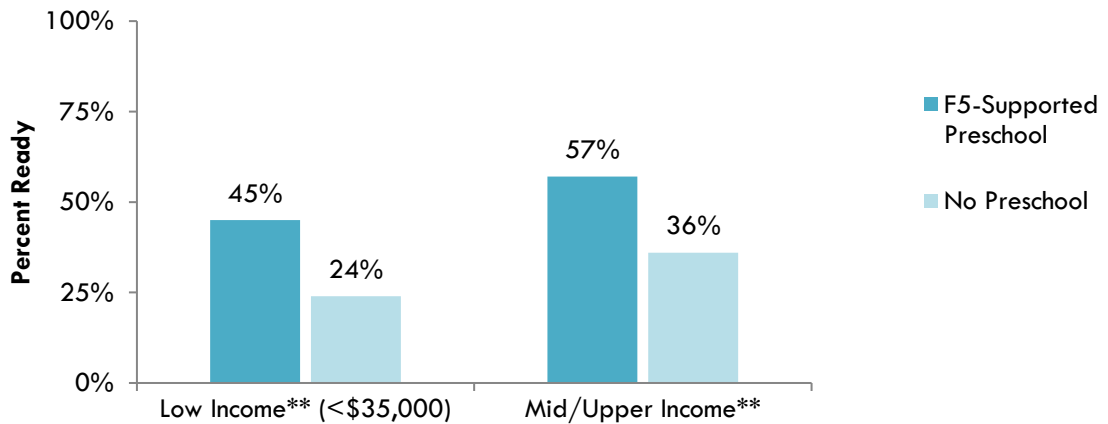
### Readiness Scores, by F5 Preschool Experience (Adjusted for Other Child/Family Factors)



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form 2016, First 5 service records. Note: N=610. \*Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\*statistically significant at  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*statistically significant at  $p < .001$ .

The figure below shows the percentage of children ready by preschool attendance and income, adjusting for other factors. Unlike last year, low-income children did not receive a significantly bigger boost from preschool attendance than middle/upper income children. Because relatively few middle/upper income children receive F5-supported preschool, it is more difficult to detect differences in impact across the income groups.

### Percent Ready for School, By F5-Supported Preschool Experience and Income (Adjusted for Other Child/Family Factors)



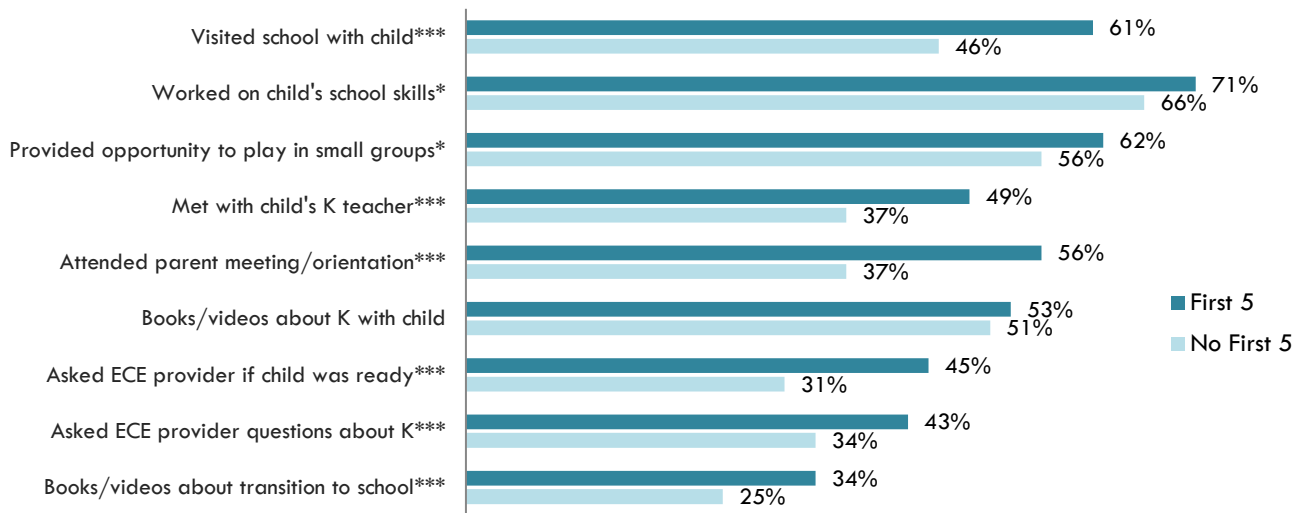
Source: KOF, PIF, First 5 Records 2016. N=618. \*\*Significant at  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*Significant at  $p < .001$ .  
 Note: Low income: <\$35K. Mid/Upper income: \$35K+

Participation in First 5-funded parent education and support services was also associated with higher readiness scores, including *Overall Readiness*, *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression* and *Kindergarten Academics*. The boost was significantly larger for children from low-income families, compared to middle/upper income families.

### Other Benefits of First 5 Services

In addition to higher readiness scores, First 5 services were associated with other positive outcomes important for kindergarten readiness and later academic success. Specifically, families who participated in any First 5 service read more frequently at home, engaged in more kindergarten preparation activities (such as visiting the elementary school and working on school skills), and received more information about school readiness. The figure below shows the percentage of families who participated in each type of kindergarten transition activity.

**Participation in Kindergarten Transition Activities, by First 5 Participation**



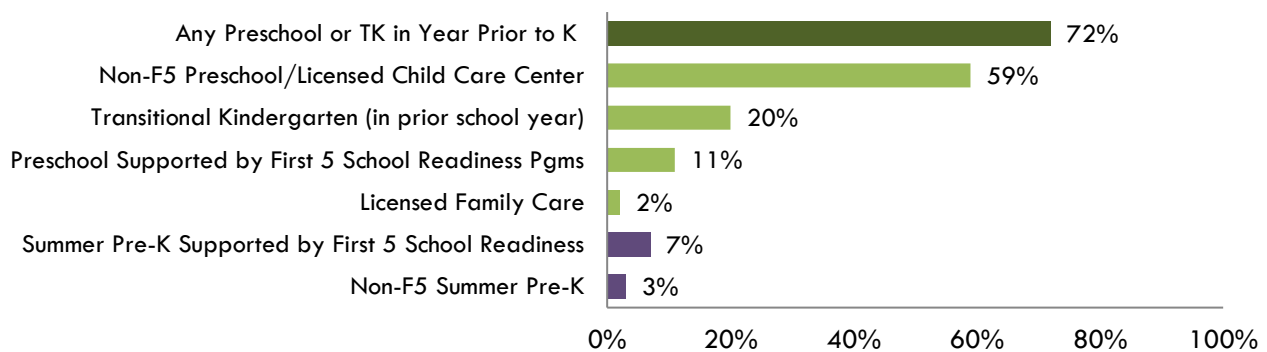
Source: Parent Information Form 2016, First 5 service records. Note: N=1,318.  
 \*Statistically significant at p<.05; \*\*statistically significant at p<.01; \*\*\*statistically significant at p<.001.

## A PROFILE OF KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN ASSESSED

### 72 Percent of Children Attended Preschool or Transitional Kindergarten

Seventy-two percent of students attended a preschool, licensed childcare center, or transitional kindergarten (TK) in the year before they started kindergarten. The majority of these children attended preschool, 20% attended TK, and some attended both.

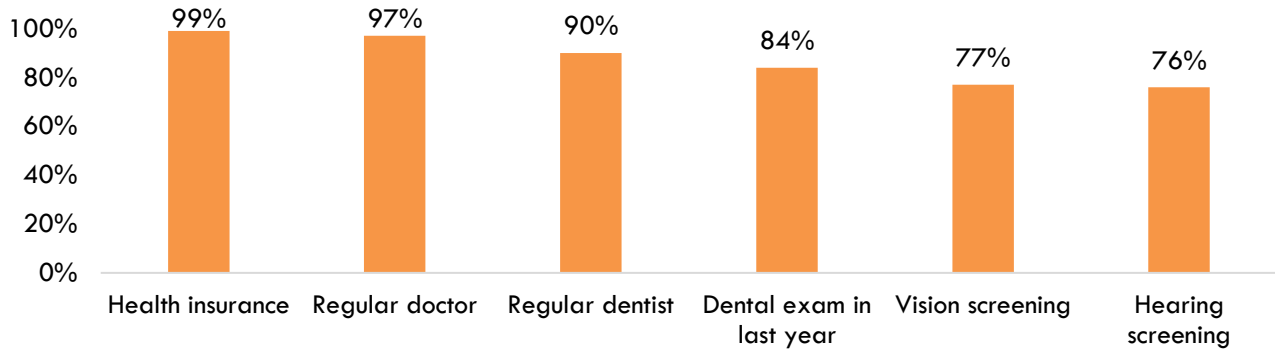
**Types of Pre-K Experience in Year Prior to Kindergarten, 2016**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form 2016, Parent Information Form 2016, First 5 service records. Note: N=1,429-1,864. Some reported more than one type of preschool or childcare. Summer pre-k programs are not included within "Any Preschool in Year Prior to K."

### Most Children Have Access to Health Care, Dental Care, and Health Screenings

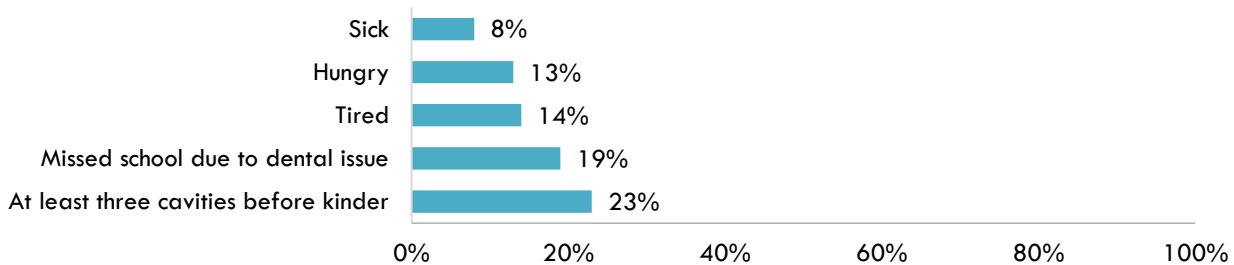
Overall there was no discernable shift in children’s access to health and dental care from 2015 to 2016, according to parents. The majority of children had health care access and had received vision and hearing screenings, many through First 5-funded services.



Source: Parent Information Form 2016. Note: N=1,432-1,857.

### Most Children Were Well-Rested, Well-Fed, and Healthy

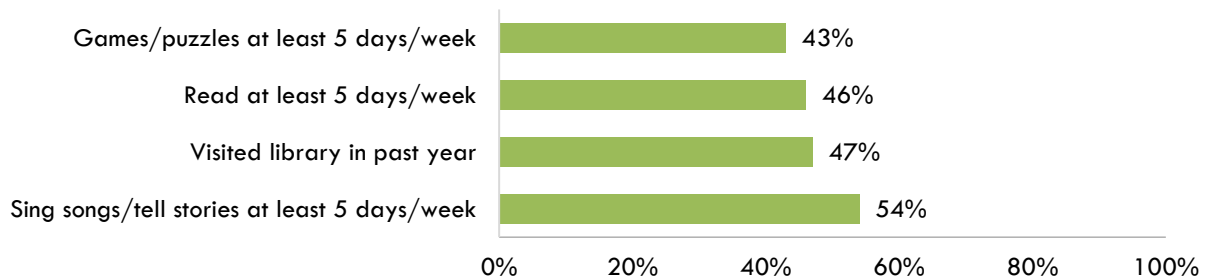
During the first month of school, most students appeared to their teachers be well-rested, well-fed, and healthy. Nearly a quarter of students had dental health issues according to parents.



For sick, hungry and tired: Source: Kindergarten Observation Form 2016. Note: N=1,859-1,861.  
 For dental outcomes: Source: Parent Information Form 2016. Note: N=1,285-1,312.

### Home Learning Activities

Parents in 2016 generally reported the same degree of engagement and support with their children as parents did in 2012-2015.



Source: Parent Information Form 2016. Note: N=1,147-1,219.

## SUMMARY OF THE KEY TAKE-AWAYS

### Nearly three-quarters of students were *Partially Ready* or *Fully Ready*.

Thirty-five percent of incoming kindergarten students were *Ready in All Areas* for school, meaning they had scores of 3.25 or higher in all three readiness domains. An additional 37 percent were *Partially Ready* (ready in one or two domains), for a total of 72% who were partially or fully ready for school. These percentages are similar to previous years. Twenty-eight percent of students were *Not Ready* (score of below 3.25 in all three domains).

Using a four-point scale of readiness (1=*Not Yet*, 4=*Proficient*), the overall average readiness score across all 20 items was **3.18**— just above the benchmark for *In Progress*. Students were similarly *In Progress* in 2012-2015. While the average scores for *Self-Regulation* (3.25) and *Social Expression* (3.20) were on or near the readiness benchmark of 3.25, the average *Kindergarten Academics* scores was quite a bit lower at 3.06.

### 72 percent of children across the First 5 network attended preschool or transitional kindergarten

Data collected from the *PIF*, *KOF*, and First 5 show that in the year preceding kindergarten, **72 percent** of students had attended preschool or transitional kindergarten (TK). Of those who attended preschool in 2016, about 11 percent attended a First 5-supported preschool, while 59 percent attended another preschool or licensed child care program. The rate of preschool/TK attendance has remained fairly stable across the last five years.

### Preschool/TK attendance was associated with higher levels of readiness across all five readiness studies (2012-2016) in Sacramento.

In addition to common predictors of kindergarten readiness (e.g., well-being, age, mother's education, gender, special needs status), regression analyses indicated that that preschool attendance increased a child's likelihood of being ready for school in all five readiness studies. In 2016, children who attended a family child care had similar readiness scores as those who attended a licensed center-based preschool. Preschool/TK attendance has the largest benefit in the domain of *Kindergarten Academics*.

### First 5 Service participants had higher readiness scores and other positive outcomes

Attending a First 5-supported preschool was associated with higher readiness scores, as was participating in parent education and support services. While the impact of preschool was similar for lower income and mid/upper income families (unlike last year), the impact of parent education was larger for children from lower income families.

In addition to higher readiness scores, children whose families participated in any F5 school readiness service read at home more frequently, engaged in more kindergarten preparation activities, and were more likely to have received information about school readiness.

## ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Applied Survey Research is a nonprofit 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. Incorporated in 1981, the firm has over 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:

McHale Newport-Berra, PhD, Project Manager, [mchale@appliedsurveyresearch.org](mailto:mchale@appliedsurveyresearch.org)

Lisa Colvig, MA, Vice President of Evaluation, [lisa@appliedsurveyresearch.org](mailto:lisa@appliedsurveyresearch.org)

Bay Area Office

408.247.8319

### **BAY AREA**

1871 The Alameda, Suite 180,  
San Jose, CA 95126  
Phone: 408-247-8319  
Fax: 408-260-7749

### **CENTRAL COAST**

P.O. Box 1927,  
Watsonville, CA 95077  
Phone: 831-728-1356  
Fax: 831-728-3374

[www.appliedsurveyresearch.org](http://www.appliedsurveyresearch.org)

