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Santa Clara County
Partnership
for school readiness

United Way Silicon Valley
1922 The Alameda
San Jose, CA 95126

September 22, 2006

Milpitas City Hall
455 East Calaveras Boulevard
Milpitas, California 95035

Attn: Finance Committee

Dear Vice Mayor Gomez and Council Member Giordano,

I am writing to formally thank you and the City of Milpitas for your on-going support and membership in the Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness, and to share with you our major deliverable for the year. Enclosed you will find a copy of our summary document. Toby Librande, City of Milpitas Childcare Coordinator, received a copy of the full report at our June meeting.

I would like to invite the City of Milpitas to renew its support of the Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness. We are requesting a contribution of **One Thousand Dollars ($1,000)** to support the continuation of our work for 2006-07.

As you may recall, our work began in 2004, and has focused on an assessment of kindergarten readiness in local children. The overarching goals have been to create a portrait of the skills of our local children when they enter school, and a shared understanding of the family and preschool factors that impact school readiness. Within this we have compared the skills of the children with the expectations of teachers in order to help us understand where we need to focus our on-going investments. The following are some of the recent accomplishments of the Partnership:

- Established the first county-wide school readiness assessment of children entering kindergarten in 2004-05.
- In 2005-06, aligned the assessment with San Mateo County, generating the first regional, bi-county picture of kindergarten readiness. The comparison between the counties is helping us to understand the differences in program effectiveness.
- Provided the first county-wide assessment of social and emotional development of children aged 0-5.
- Recognition in 2006 by the California Child Development Administrators Association with an award for *contribution to research* in the field of early childhood education.
- Held three discussion forums in 2006 with local early childhood funders. Topics included: the effectiveness of programs focused on social / emotional development in the first three years; family interventions; the *Promotores* model for delivering

educational services; most recently, the challenges of teaching *English Language Learners*.

- Developed a definition of school readiness that has been adopted by more than 20 funders and agencies providing resources for early school readiness (in Santa Clara County).
- Collaborated with the Santa Clara County Office of Education to perform a case study assessment of the articulation between Head Start programs and kindergarten.
- Engaged K-12 leaders to help build stronger communication between ECE and K-12 systems.
- Provided visibility of the tools and results at national and local forums. This has resulted in the adoption of the assessment methodology by United Way in Lake County, Illinois for their work. Additionally, we have opened a dialog with the California Department of Education to look for other areas of leverage.
- Collaborative efforts have spun off of the Partnership, focused primarily on early literacy.

In 2006-07, we look forward to going even further to understand the factors that can help us better prepare our community's youngest students for academic success. We look forward to building on the connections that have been established between the many funders and agencies that came together to provide an important resource to decision makers, in all areas, that impact young families, children and schools.

The goals of the Partnership for 2006 include:

- Validate the results of the assessment benchmark by completing a 3-year data collection cycle and soliciting additional expert review of the work.
- Facilitate community dialog and research "study circles" to build consensus for recommended changes in community investments or practices. These changes will prepare children for school in ways that are the most likely to help in closing the gaps in school achievement in the early grade years.
- Develop enhancements to the assessment to address and answer some of the questions raised by the first two rounds.
- Balance the quantitative research with qualitative investigations to develop additional insight.

The Partnership is a unique collaborative. Twenty organizations, that invest over $100 million a year in early childhood programs, are working together to develop a shared understanding of the results of their investments to improve the collective results. They represent the public, private and non-profit sectors (see attachment).

We value the strong commitment the City of Milpitas has demonstrated to the Partnership from its inception. In 2004-05 you made a $500 contribution and your childcare coordinator, Toby Librande, has been a consistent and valuable contributor to the content of our work. This combination of support is a very tangible demonstration of the leadership role that Milpitas plays among our local municipalities in early childhood education. In addition, we have had the cooperation of four schools from Milpitas. Pomeroy, Zanker, Weller, and Randall Elementary Schools, and their kindergarten teachers, have provided us with observations of

more that 120 Milpitas kindergarteners to help ensure that the full diversity of our county is represented in our analysis.

We know that we need to capitalize now on the data, and use it to build stronger, local commitment to programs that will help to create school readiness – and ultimately success in school. Continued involvement by the City of Milpitas will help ensure that we draw on important and diverse perspectives from community leaders of all backgrounds.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at (408) 345-4361 or loretta.burns@uwsv.org. I look forward to continuing to work with you and the City of Milpitas to strengthen the community leadership that helps us to grow successful children.

Best Regards,

Co-Chair, Partnership for School Readiness
United Way Silicon Valley

cc: Toby Librande, City of Milpitas Childcare Coordinator
Charles Lawson, City Manager
Bonnie Greiner, Recreations Services Manager
Emma Karlen, Finance Director

Kindergarten Readiness Study Background and Outcomes

Readiness for school is an essential indicator of child well being and includes physical well-being and motor development, self-regulation, social expression, and kindergarten academics. Schools need to be ready to educate young children, families need to be able to help prepare children for school, and the community needs to have the capacity to help ensure that children arrive at school ready to learn. The Kindergarten School Readiness Assessment will give us data that will allow us to better target programs that create a community in which children experience school success. The specific outcomes of the assessment are as follows:

- Understanding of the current state of readiness of our community's children and which family and preschool practices are having the desired impact.
  - A report will be developed and made available to the community. We will also conduct at least one formal community information meeting.
  - All members of the Partnership and funders of the project will have access to the data reports.
- Creating a dialogue wherein best practices may be shared and resources may be more effectively allocated to improve readiness.
- The Partnership will be using the data to create a "call to action" to community leaders that outlines priorities for change.

Project Coordination

The Partnership has retained the services of United Way Silicon Valley (UWSV) as project manager and Applied Survey Research (ASR) as research partner for this assessment.

- UWSV has a long track record of providing funds to health and human services agencies and to facilitating collaboration between non-profits to help improve strategic impact in the community.
- ASR is a nonprofit social research firm dedicated to conducting and using community-based research to help people build better communities. ASR has been working with San Mateo County for the last 3 years to conduct similar assessment of school readiness and will bring their expertise to bear on this project.

Fiscal Sponsor

United Way Silicon Valley acts as fiscal sponsor for the Partnership. The United Way is a nonprofit corporation, exempt from federal tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. It is formed for purposes which include taking a leadership role in improving our community's health and human care environment and procuring funds and acting as a steward for such funds. The United Way agrees to receive grants, contributions and gifts to be used for the Partnership, and to make those funds available to the Partnership. All grants, charitable contributions and gifts which it receives for the Partnership will be reported as contributions to the United Way as required by law, and United Way further agrees to acknowledge receipt of any such grant, charitable contribution or gift in writing, and to furnish evidence of its status as a exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) to the donor upon request. Both the United Way and Partnership agree to notify the other immediately of any change in their respective tax-exempt status.

Attachment A1

Organizational Structure June 15, 2006

Members

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE effective 5/11/06 – 6/30/07

Linda Aceves – Santa Clara County Office of Education

Lori Burns – UWSV, Assessment Project Manager – co-chair

Lynda Greene – Applied Materials

Molly Fezell – Junior League of San Jose

Mike Hochleutner – American Leadership Forum – co-chair

Bob Kirkwood – Bella Vista Foundation

Amari Romero-Thomas – UWSV/Fiscal Sponsor

John Williams – Knight Foundation

OTHER VOTING MEMBERS

Applied Materials

Bring Me A Book Foundation

BEA Foundation

City of Milpitas

Community Foundation Silicon Valley

David and Lucile Packard Foundation

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County

Hispanic Foundation

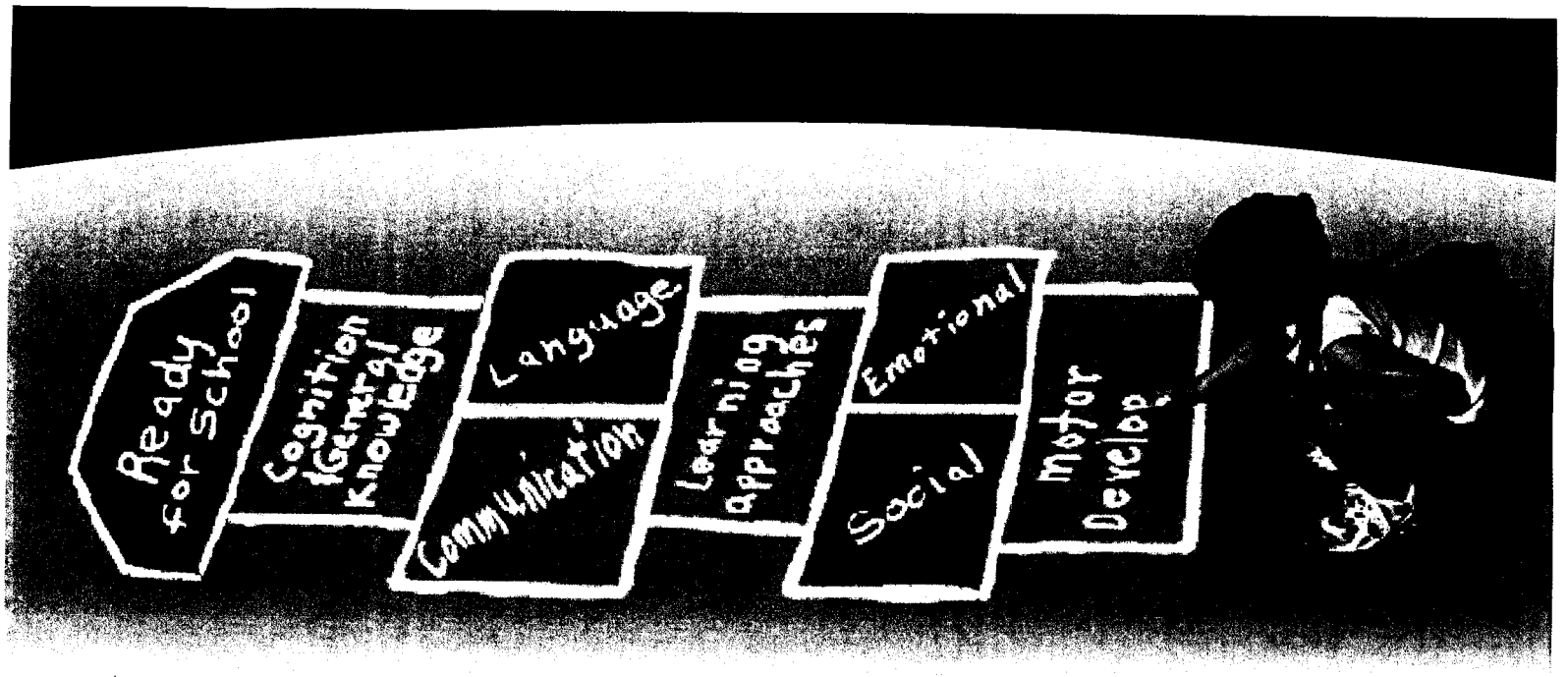
IBM

Kids In Common

Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health

Morgan Family Foundation

Santa Clara County Office of Education



Are Children Ready For School?

Assessment of Kindergarten Readiness in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties

Summary Report
2005

Introduction

Research has shown that children's readiness for school acts as a springboard for future success in school and in life. Because of the importance of school readiness, many communities across the country have set for themselves the ambitious goal of ensuring that all children are ready for school, particularly those who are most vulnerable. But what does school readiness mean, and how do communities know whether they have achieved it?

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) defines three readiness domains:

- The **readiness of children** for the social and academic institution of school
- The **readiness of schools** to meet the diverse needs of incoming students and their families
- The **readiness of families and communities** to prepare children for school

The effort to document children's school readiness in Silicon Valley began in 2001, when the Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families[1] pioneered a study in San Mateo County based on the NEGP framework. In 2004, an expanded version of the study was implemented in Santa Clara County by the Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness.[2] Both groups, working with researchers at Applied Survey Research, have combined expertise and resources to take the most detailed look yet at kindergarten readiness in the Silicon Valley.

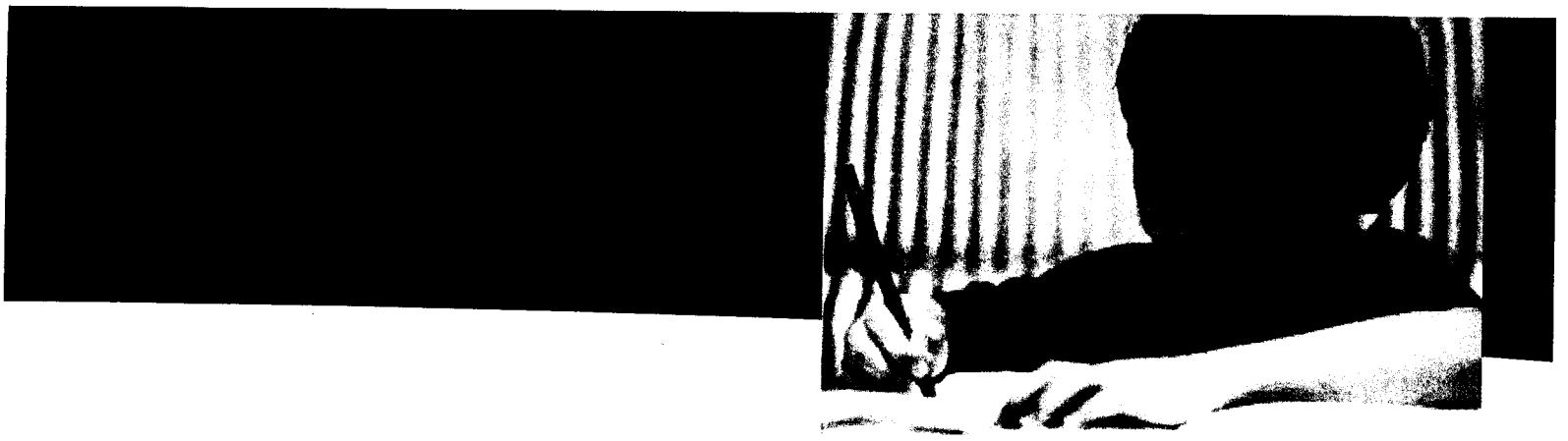
A total of 76 kindergarten classrooms were randomly selected and 1,434 children observed so that assessment findings could be generalized to all kindergarten students in both counties. Because of the breadth and depth of information collected, now, for the first time, both counties have a detailed portrait of the region's diverse kindergarten population, the wide range of cognitive and social skills these young children bring to school, and the factors that influence these skills upon kindergarten entry.

Who Are The Region's Kindergartners?

The San Mateo and Santa Clara County kindergartners involved in this study represent the rapidly changing profile of Silicon Valley families. Only 50% of these children have U.S.-born parents, and 42% are English Language Learners (ELLs). Spanish is the primary language spoken among 20% of the children. The findings also reveal that children come to school with a variety of experiences and backgrounds. While there are many similarities between the counties, there are important differences that can have an impact on children's development. For example,

- A significantly higher percentage of kindergartners in San Mateo County live in single parent homes (31% as compared to 24% in Santa Clara County).
- A higher percentage of Santa Clara County primary guardians lost their jobs in the previous year (20% as compared to 14% in San Mateo County).
- Families in both counties move somewhat frequently, with Santa Clara County families significantly more "mobile" than San Mateo County families.
- About one in four parents report reading to their children daily; but families in San Mateo County report engaging in more enrichment activities that have been associated with improving school readiness than do Santa Clara County families.
- Children in San Mateo County are more apt to use problem-solving strategies (71%) when faced with conflict than are children in Santa Clara County (61%).
- Children in San Mateo County are more likely to have had preschool experience (66%) than children in Santa Clara County (58%).

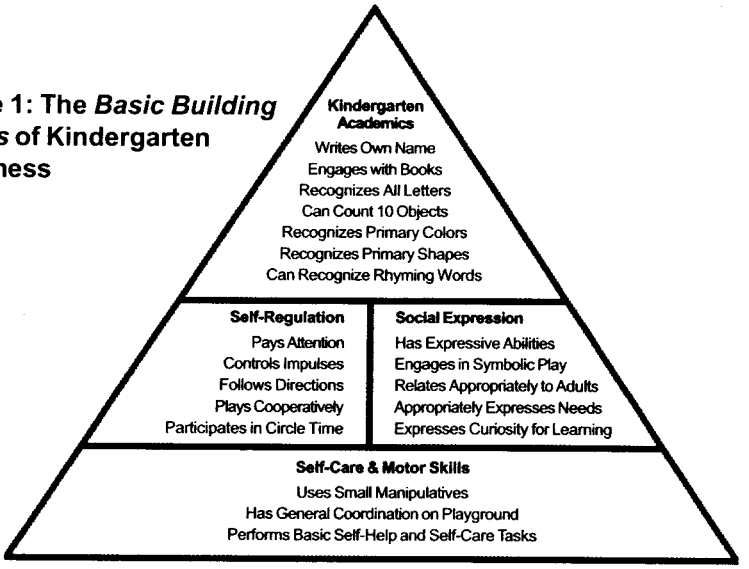
[1] The Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families is a division of Peninsula Community Foundation.
[2] The Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness is a collaborative of local public and private organizations that is co-chaired by United Way Silicon Valley and American Leadership Forum Silicon Valley.



How Do We Describe Readiness?

Ongoing research continues to confirm the need to think about children's readiness for school as multi-faceted. Analysis of the local data shows four *Basic Building Blocks* of school readiness, including *Self-Care and Motor Skills*, *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression* and *Kindergarten Academics*. Each of the *Building Blocks* and their corresponding readiness skills[3] are shown in Figure 1.

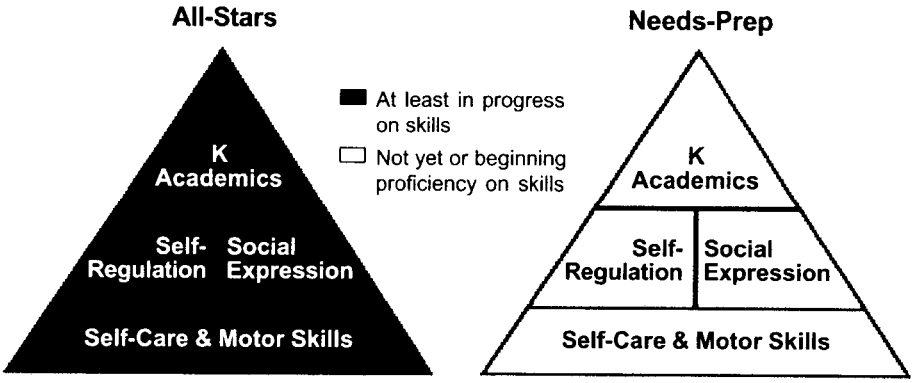
Figure 1: The *Basic Building Blocks* of Kindergarten Readiness



How Ready Are Children For School?

Most children in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties enter kindergarten ready to learn. However, different patterns of readiness emerge among different types of children. The researchers found four distinct patterns or "portraits" of readiness: All-Stars (children who are nearly proficient in all of the 20 readiness skills), Needs-Prep (children who have not mastered any of the readiness skills), Focused-on-the-Facts (children who have mastered academic-related skills, but need practice on *Self-Regulation* and *Social Expression* skills), and Social-Stars (children who have mastered *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression* and *Self-Care and Motor Skills*). As shown in Figure 2A, the pyramid representing children in the All-Stars group is dark blue, reflecting their near proficiency across each of the *Basic Building Blocks*. Conversely, the pyramid representing children in the Needs-Prep group is all white, reflecting little or no proficiency on these dimensions.

Figure 2A: General Patterns of Readiness on *Basic Building Blocks* for Each Readiness Portrait (San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties)



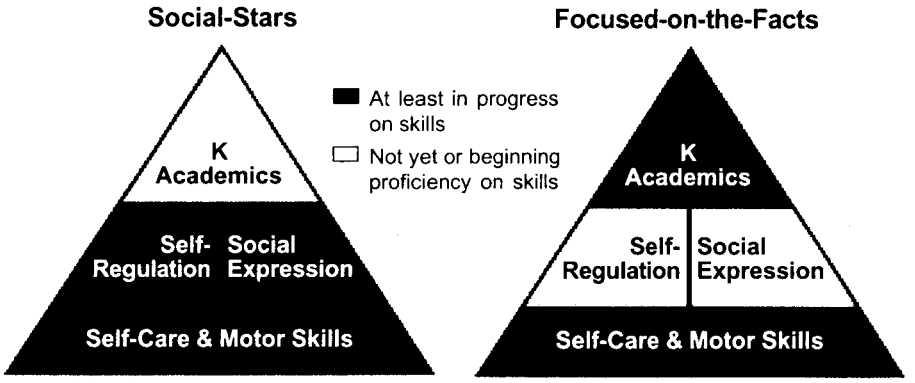
Source: Kindergarten Observation Form

[3] The *Kindergarten Observation Form* is an assessment tool that teachers use to observe children's proficiency levels across 20 readiness skills, ranging from minimum competencies, such as *performing basic self-help/self-care tasks*, to higher-level competencies, such as *recognizing rhyming words*.

As shown in Figure 2B, the pyramid for Social-Stars represents children's aptitude in *Self-Regulation, Social Expression* and *Self-Care and Motor Skills*, whereas the pyramid for Focused-on-the-Facts represents children's aptitude in *Kindergarten Academics* and *Self-Care and Motor Skills*.

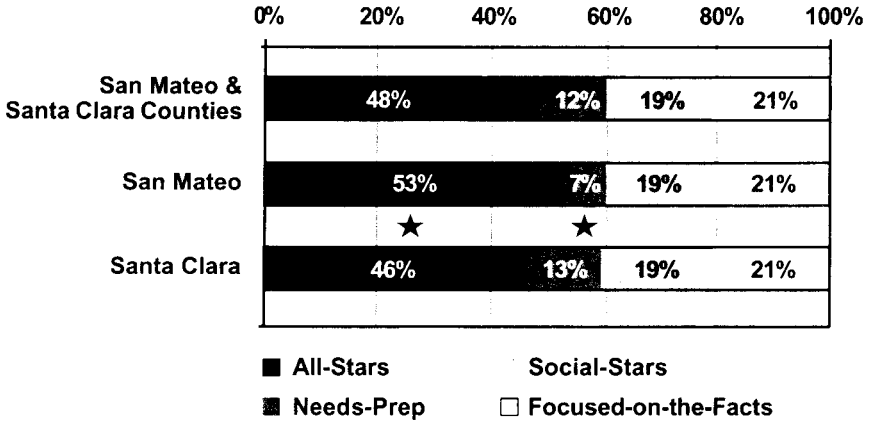
As shown in Figure 3 below, 53% of San Mateo County and 46% of Santa Clara County kindergartners are All-Stars. These children likely come to school fully prepared to launch into kindergarten content. However, 475 San Mateo County kindergartners (7%) and 2,503 Santa Clara County kindergartners (13%) are Needs-Prep children and have a significant amount of catching up to do.

Figure 2B: General Patterns of Readiness on *Basic Building Blocks* for Each Readiness Portrait (San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties)



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form

Figure 3: Percentage of Children Belonging to Each Readiness Portrait (San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties)

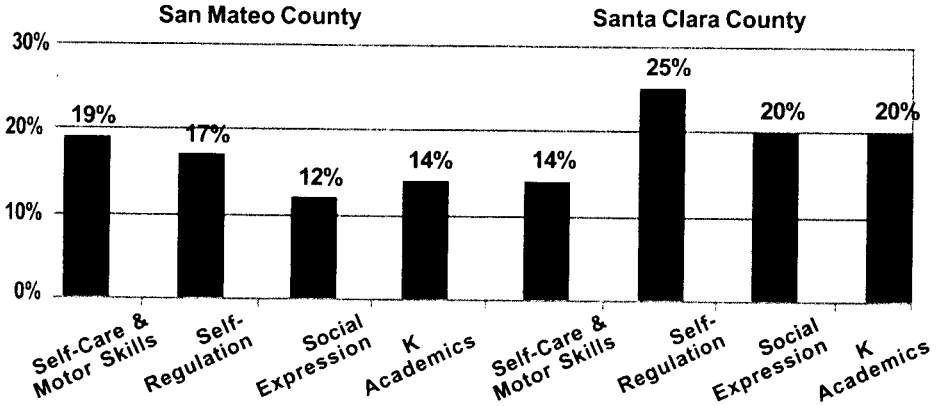


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form
Note: Stars represent statistically significant differences between All-Stars and Needs-Prep children in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

What Are Teacher Expectations of Children's Readiness?

Most children in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties enter kindergarten meeting or exceeding teacher expectations when it comes to their readiness for school (74% and 62%, respectively). However, some children fall significantly below teacher expectations. For example, one in four children in Santa Clara County (25%) and nearly one in five children in San Mateo County (17%) fall below teacher expectations when it comes to

Figure 4: Percentage of Children Significantly Below Teacher Expectations by County



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form and Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Importance of Readiness Skills

the *Self-Regulation Building Block* (see Figure 4). Because *Self-Regulation* involves controlling impulses, working cooperatively with others, paying attention, following directions, and participating in circle time, a lack of proficiency on these skills can pose a problem for classroom management.

Indeed, teachers reported that they spend more time on helping children self-regulate than on any of the other *Building Blocks*, as depicted by the dark-shading in Figure 5B below.

Although it is developmentally appropriate that children enter kindergarten still working on their ability to self-regulate, these findings highlight the balance teachers are struggling to find between encouraging the natural development of young children and the need to manage behavior to focus classroom instruction on academics. Interestingly, teachers regard *Kindergarten Academics* as less important to kindergarten entry—and the skills in this area as among the easiest to improve (Figures 5A and 5C).

Figure 5A: Relative Importance of Each *Basic Building Block*

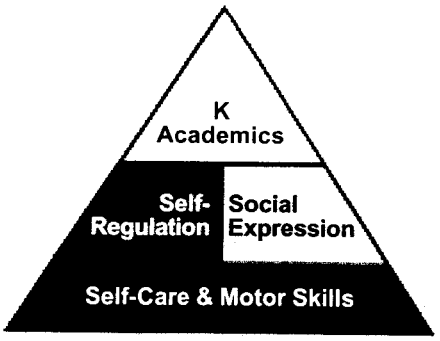


Figure 5B: Relative Amount of Time Spent on Each *Basic Building Block*

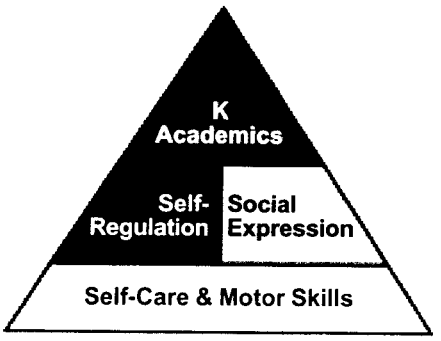
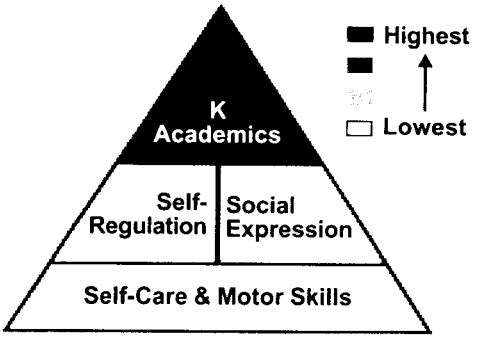


Figure 5C: Relative Ease-of-Changing Each *Basic Building Block*



Source: Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Importance of Readiness Skills

Teacher expectations are also important within the context of certain kinds of kindergarten classrooms. Ten classrooms from each county were analyzed in which children had the highest and lowest readiness scores. As can be seen in Figure 6, the average readiness scores of children in low-scoring classrooms fell well below teacher expectations for each of the *Basic Building Blocks*, while the average readiness scores of children in high-scoring classrooms were well above teacher expectations.

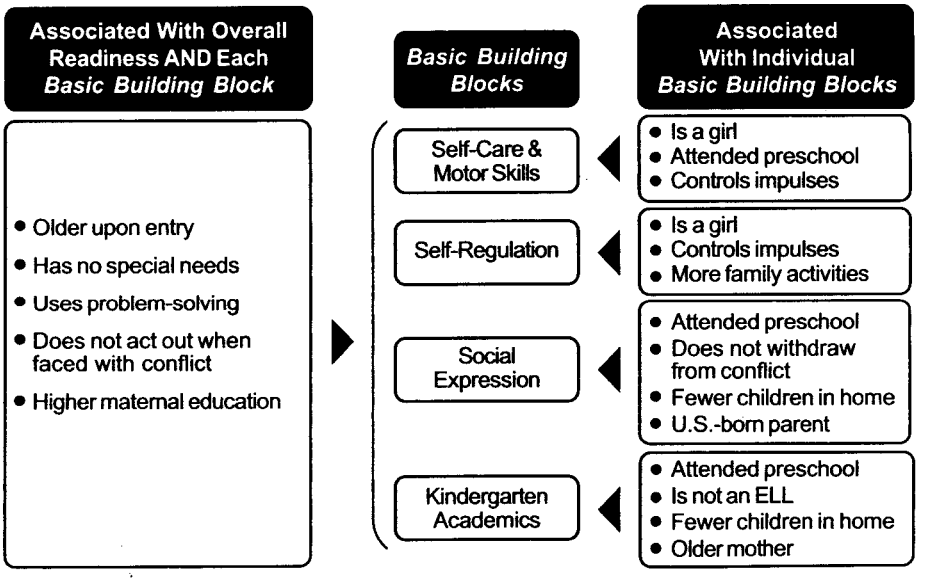
Figure 6: Comparison of Children's Readiness in the Highest- and Lowest-Scoring Classrooms

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form and Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Importance of Readiness Skills

What Student and Family Factors Contribute to Readiness?

Consistent with national studies related to performance in school, the extent to which local children problem-solve, act out, control their impulses, and withdraw is critical to understanding readiness patterns. Various analyses of the local data revealed that children's approach to resolving conflict with their peers was the most important factor to understanding readiness. Conflict resolution style was not just important to overall readiness — or to the *Self-Regulation Building Block* to which it is related — but it was critical to understanding readiness differences in *Self-Care and Motor Skills*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. Other significant factors related to higher kindergarten readiness include: high maternal education, children who are older at kindergarten entry, preschool experience, fewer children in the home, girls, and an absence of special needs (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: A Summary of Factors Associated with Each of the *Basic Building Blocks* of Readiness



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form and Parent Information Form

What Are Some of the Special Issues Related to Readiness?

While there are many factors associated with children's readiness for school, project partners from both counties were interested in exploring some of these factors, such as self-regulation, preschool experience, and language, in greater depth. This in-depth analysis is captured in a series of "Special Issue" reports, key findings from which are highlighted below.

- **Self-Regulation Skills:** Consistent with national research, local data reveal that children's ability to control impulses, pay attention, and play cooperatively is critical to readiness for school. Regulation in early development is a different challenge for children with different temperaments, and is highly influenced by cultural values around what constitutes appropriate behavior. It is also deeply embedded in the child's relations with others. Activities that build strong adult-child relationships, like reading together, appear to be correlated with improved self-regulation.
- **Preschool:** Preschool experience is significantly associated with overall readiness. However, it does not always follow a "more is better" model. Children who spent more than 30 hours a week in a licensed, child care center scored significantly lower on the important *Self-Regulation Building Block* than did children who spent less time in these settings. The association between preschool experience and higher readiness was also different across the counties, with stronger readiness gains and for more types of children attending preschool in San Mateo than in Santa Clara County. The examination of these county-level differences may provide useful insights for those who are interested in increasing the availability and quality of preschool.
- **English Language Learners:** Although English Language Learners (ELLs) may indeed have a lot of catching up to do when they enter kindergarten, it is not accurate to conclude that their readiness needs are due to their lack of English proficiency. Rather, lower readiness has more to do with other child and family factors (i.e., maternal education and family income) that sometimes walk hand-in-hand with ELL status.

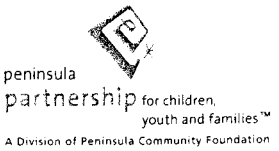
Conclusion

This study spotlights important findings around why some children arrive at kindergarten well prepared, while others are already behind. It also calls upon policymakers, funders and other leaders throughout the region to combine knowledge and resources in developing ready children, families and schools.

Acknowledgements

This School Readiness Assessment would not have been possible without the generous support of kindergarten teachers across San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. These teachers dedicated ample time to trainings, observations, project management, and questionnaire completion. Others who deserve acknowledgement for their support and resources include:

- The **Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families**, and the **Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness**, for commissioning this assessment. This project reflected a collaboration in which efforts from both counties were critical to its success.
- Applied Survey Research.
- The Morgan Family Foundation, for encouraging the collaboration between San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, and for providing the seed funding and impetus to initiate the project.
- Additional funders in San Mateo County, including FIRST 5 San Mateo County, and San Mateo County Office of Education through its Preschool For All Initiative.
- The School Readiness Assessment Task Force, convened by the Peninsula Partnership in San Mateo County: Cabrillo Unified School District, Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County, FIRST 5 San Mateo County, Institute for Human and Social Development, Inc., Morgan Family Foundation, Peninsula Community Foundation, San Mateo Community College District, San Mateo County Human Services Agency, San Mateo County Office of Education, and SPHERE Institute.
- The Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County and Preschool For All staff, for providing lists of early care and education professionals.
- The Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness, co-chaired by United Way Silicon Valley and American Leadership Forum Silicon Valley. Additional members and funders of the Partnership include: Applied Materials, BEA Foundation, Bella Vista Foundation, Bring Me A Book Foundation, the City of Milpitas, Community Foundation Silicon Valley, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, Hispanic Foundation, IBM, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Junior League of San Jose, Kids in Common, Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, Morgan Family Foundation, San Jose Unified School District, and Santa Clara County Office of Education.
- E3 Institute Advancing Excellence in Early Education, a program of WestEd, for providing planning and data collection for the *ECE Teacher Survey on Importance of Readiness Skills*.

For More Information

For more information on the issues presented in this summary report,
please refer to the full report which can be accessed at www.appliedsurveyresearch.org.