

Mt. Diablo Literacy Preschool Programs 2012-2013

Charting Students' Progress toward School Readiness



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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| List of Figures | i |
| Mt. Diablo Literacy Preschool Programs | 1 |
| Summary of Findings | 1 |
| Characteristics of the Students Enrolled in 2012-2013 | 2 |
| Language and Language Development | 2 |
| Students' Health and Special Needs | 3 |
| Attendance..... | 3 |
| Changes in Home Literacy Practices | 4 |
| Parents' views about sharing books with children..... | 4 |
| Number of books in families' homes | 4 |
| Visits to the Library | 4 |
| Children's perceived enjoyment of sharing books..... | 4 |
| Interactions while sharing books | 4 |
| Changes in Literacy Preschool Students' Readiness for Kindergarten | 5 |
| How were students' levels of readiness assessed?..... | 5 |
| Literacy Preschool Students' Readiness Strengths and Challenges | 8 |
| Factors Related to Growth in Readiness Skills | 9 |
| Demographic Factors associated with Readiness | 9 |
| Program Participation and Readiness | 9 |
| Literacy Practices associated with Readiness | 9 |

List of Figures

| | | |
|-----------|---|---|
| Figure 1: | Literacy Preschool Student Race/Ethnicity | 2 |
| Figure 2: | Teacher Perceptions of Development in Primary Language..... | 2 |
| Figure 3: | Teacher Perceptions of Students’ Abilities to Understand and Speak English | 3 |
| Figure 4: | Interactions during Book Sharing in Fall and Spring | 4 |
| Figure 5: | Fall to Spring Changes in Literacy Preschool Students’ Readiness Skills..... | 5 |
| Figure 6: | Students’ Levels of Proficiency across the 24 Readiness Skills in Fall 2012..... | 6 |
| Figure 7: | Students’ Levels of Proficiency across the 24 Readiness Skills in Spring 2013 | 7 |
| Figure 8: | Students’ Top Five Readiness Strengths | 8 |
| Figure 9: | Students’ Top Five Readiness Challenges | 8 |

Mt. Diablo Literacy Preschool Programs

Mt. Diablo Adult Education, a division of Mt Diablo Unified School District, offers three innovative preschool programs that pair high quality early childhood education with adult education. Funded by the First 5 Contra School Readiness Initiative, half-day preschool sessions are offered concurrently with adult ESL/parenting classes for children's parents that include a focus on strategies that parents can use to help prepare their children for school. In 2012-2013, First 5 Contra Costa partnered with Applied Survey Research to explore how participation in this program may relate to children's readiness for elementary school. In Fall 2012 and Spring 2013, information was collected about children's school readiness and families' home literacy practices and demographic characteristics. This brief report summarizes how parent practices and children's readiness changed over the course of the year and describes the program and family factors that were found to be most strongly associated with children's readiness.

Summary of Findings

In 2012-2013, 83 students and families receiving services through the program participated in a study to learn how program participation might relate to changes in home literacy practices and children's preparedness for kindergarten. Most students were from Hispanic/Latino backgrounds and spoke Spanish as a primary language. Growth was seen between Fall and Spring in students' abilities to understand and speak English.

Changes in home literacy practices reported between Fall and Spring included parents taking their children to the library more often, finding it easier to share books with their children on a regular basis, and observing their children's increased enjoyment in reading. Many of the positive changes in home literacy practices identified this year were also found in previous reports (2010-2011 and 2011-2012). In all three years, there have been increases in the frequency of library visits, children's enjoyment of reading, children listening to the story, parents asking the child questions about the story, the child asking questions, and the child turning pages. There have also consistently been decreases in parents' difficulty sharing books with their child and the child not paying attention to the story.

Children's preparedness for kindergarten increased significantly between Fall and Spring. Factors associated with growth in kindergarten readiness skills included demographic factors (i.e., age), length of time enrolled in the Literacy Preschool program, and parents' home literacy practices. Although visiting the library more frequently was not associated with higher levels of readiness in this year's data, it was significantly associated with greater kindergarten academics scores in 2011-2012. Similarly, although more books in the home and child participation in the form of "reading"/telling stories about pictures was not associated with readiness this year or last year, these literacy practices were associated with greater readiness in 2010-2011.

One home literacy practice that was significantly associated with readiness across all three years was parents asking questions about stories, highlighting the importance of this literacy practice. Another key factor consistently associated with readiness is length of time in the literacy preschool program. Each year, longer program participation has been associated with higher levels of readiness. Findings suggested that there was a significant and positive relationship between program participation and children's progression toward readiness for elementary school.

Characteristics of Students Enrolled, 2012-2013

In Fall 2012, 127 literacy preschool students were assessed by their teachers. Forty-four children did not receive post-tests. The data in this report focuses on the 83 children for whom both pre- and post-test data were available.

The sample included 37 (45%) boys and 45 (55%) girls. Students were 4.04 years of age on average at the time they were assessed in Fall 2012. Nearly all students assessed were from Hispanic/Latino ethnic/racial backgrounds.

Figure 1: **Literacy Preschool Student Race/Ethnicity**

| Race/Ethnicity | Percent | Frequency |
|-----------------|---------|-----------|
| Hispanic/Latino | 95% | 79 |
| Caucasian/White | 2% | 2 |
| Other | 2% | 2 |

Source: Pre-Kindergarten Observation Form, Fall 2012. Percentages sum to less than 100% because of rounding.

Language and Language Development

All students assessed were English Language Learners. Spanish was the preferred language of 97% of the children involved in the assessment. Two children spoke English as their preferred language.

To provide an overall view of children’s language development, preschool teachers were asked: “For a child of his/her age, how would you describe this child’s progress in his/her primary language?” The proportion of children who were advanced in their primary language development increased over the course of the year.

Figure 2: **Teacher Perceptions of Development in Primary Language**

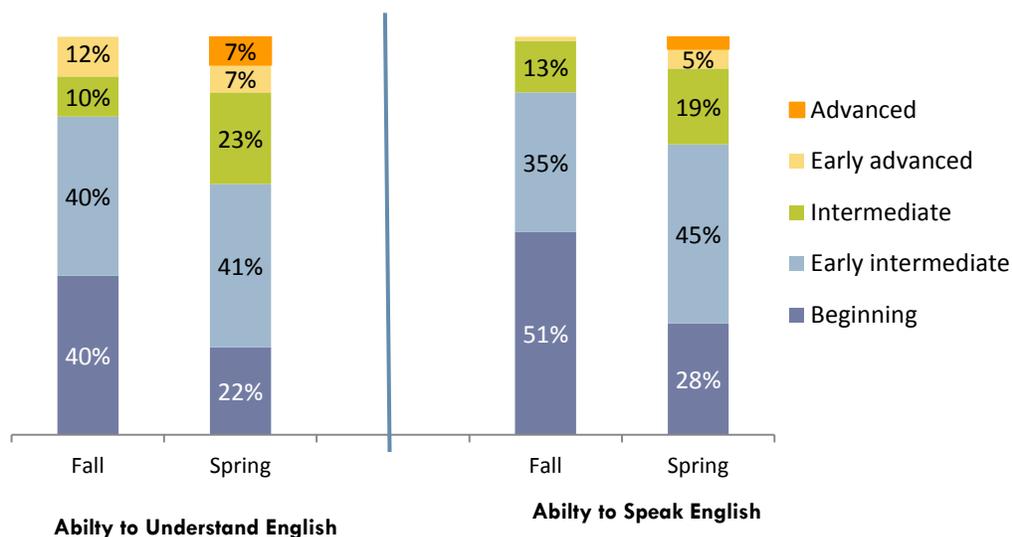
| Assessment of Language Development | Fall | Spring |
|------------------------------------|------|--------|
| Delayed | 4% | 1% |
| On track | 93% | 91% |
| Advanced | 4% | 9% |

Source: Pre-Kindergarten Observation Form, Fall 2012; Spring 2013.

Note: N=81 (Fall); N=82 (Spring).

Children’s abilities to speak and understand English were also assessed by their teachers. Gains in children’s English language abilities were observed over the course of the year with over 70% of students progressing to “early intermediate” or higher levels of proficiency by Spring.

Figure 3: **Teacher Perceptions of Students' Abilities to Understand and Speak English**



Source: Pre-Kindergarten Observation Form, Fall 2012; Spring 2013.

Note: N=83. Percentages less than 5% are not labeled.

Students' Health and Special Needs

According to teacher observations, the majority of students were “rarely or almost never” tired (96%), or hungry (100%) when they came to school. Just under half of children (42%) were sick “on some days” that they came to school. Teachers reported that two children in the sample had an IEP/IFSP or designated special needs status. Teachers suspected an additional two children may have special needs that had not yet been diagnosed.

Attendance

During 2012-2013, 64% of the students were absent from preschool “on some days,” 15% were “rarely or almost never” absent, and 10% were absent “on most days” or “just about every day.” A little under half (41%) of students arrived at school on time the days they attended. However, 48% of students were tardy “on some days,” and 11% were tardy “on most days.”

Changes in Home Literacy Practices

While the Literacy Preschool students were attending preschool, their parents/primary caregivers were attending adult education/ESL classes that included an emphasis on home literacy practices to use with children. In order to better understand how family practices changed over the year, parents completed the **Raising a Reader Survey**, a brief questionnaire about home literacy practices, and the **Family Survey** which inquires about family demographic/background characteristics. Parents' literacy practices and beliefs and children's perceived enjoyment of reading Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 are described below. The analyses below include the 70 parents who responded in both the fall and the spring.

Parents' views about sharing books with children

Parents were asked to rate the importance of sharing books with their child on a 10-point scale from "Not at all important" (1) to "absolutely essential" (10). Parents felt sharing books with children was "absolutely essential" at both points in time (i.e., mean rating of 9.5 in Fall and 9.4 in Spring). Perceived difficulties in sharing books with children on a regular basis due to lack of time, the child not being interested, or discomfort with reading aloud decreased slightly between Fall and Spring. In Fall, 29% of parents reported sharing books with their children was at least "somewhat difficult"; by Spring, this proportion had decreased to 25%.

Number of books in families' homes

In the fall, 30% of families reported having 10 or fewer children's books in their homes. This percentage dropped to 16% in the spring. The percentage of families who had more than 30 books increased, from 27% in the fall to 31% in the spring.

Visits to the Library

The average number of visits families made to the library per month increased slightly from an average of .65 visits/month in the Fall to 1.16 visit/month in the Spring. In Fall, 28% of families reported visiting the library at least once in the past month. In Spring, this percentage grew to 41%.

Children's perceived enjoyment of sharing books

Children were reported to enjoy sharing books with parents and others in both the Fall and the Spring. On a scale from "does not enjoy"(1) to "enjoys very much" (5), the percentage of children who were observed to enjoy reading or enjoy reading very much increased 80% to 86% of the sample.

Interactions while sharing books

Parents were asked to indicate the kinds of interactions they had with their child the last time they shared books together. The figure below contrasts parent-child interactions in Fall and Spring.

Figure 4: **Interactions during Book Sharing in Fall and Spring**

| | Fall | Spring |
|--|------|--------|
| Child did not pay attention to the story | 9% | 11% |
| Child quietly listened | 60% | 73% |
| Parent asked child questions about the story | 63% | 69% |
| Child turned pages of the book | 63% | 66% |
| Child asked questions about the story | 73% | 81% |
| Child "read" the book or told a story about the pictures | 57% | 49% |
| None of the above | 0% | 1% |

Source: Raising and Reader Survey. Fall 2012; Spring 2013.

Notes: N=70.

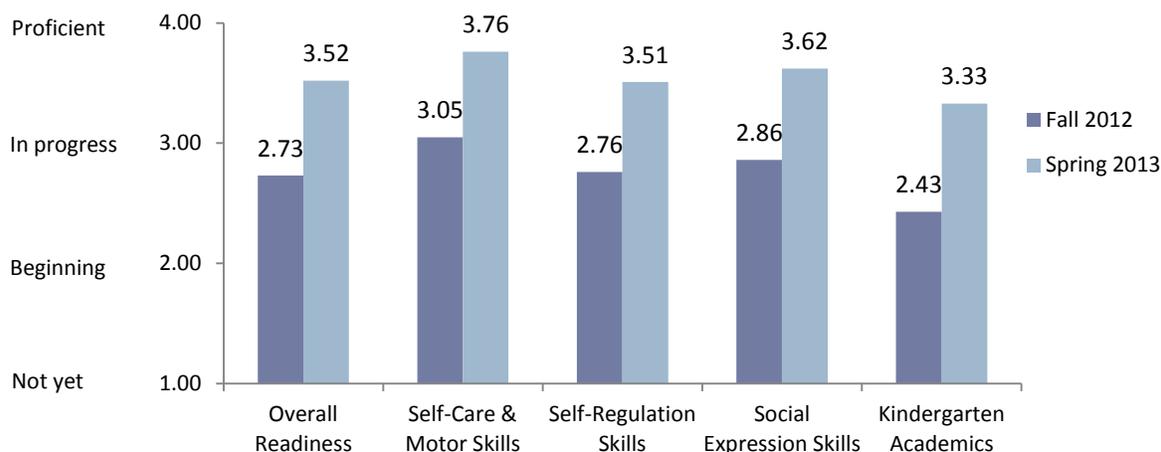
Changes in Literacy Preschool Students' Readiness for Kindergarten

How were students' levels of readiness assessed?

Children's levels of school readiness were assessed by their teachers in Fall 2012 and in Spring 2013 using the **Pre-Kindergarten Observation Form (P-KOF)**. This tool assesses children's development across 24 readiness skills on a four-point scale that ranges from Not Yet (1), Beginning (2), In Progress (3) to Proficient (4). Nineteen of the skills are assessed through teacher observation and five of the items involve direct assessment of the child to assess knowledge of colors, shapes, numbers, rhyming, and counting. These skills indicate children's levels of proficiency in four domains, or *Basic Building Blocks*, of readiness: 1) *Self-Care & Motor Skills*, 2) *Self-Regulation Skills*, 3) *Social Expression Skills*, and 4) *Kindergarten Academics*.

The gains observed in Literacy Preschool students' average levels of readiness between Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 were statistically significant.

Figure 5: **Fall to Spring Changes in Literacy Preschool Students' Readiness Skills**



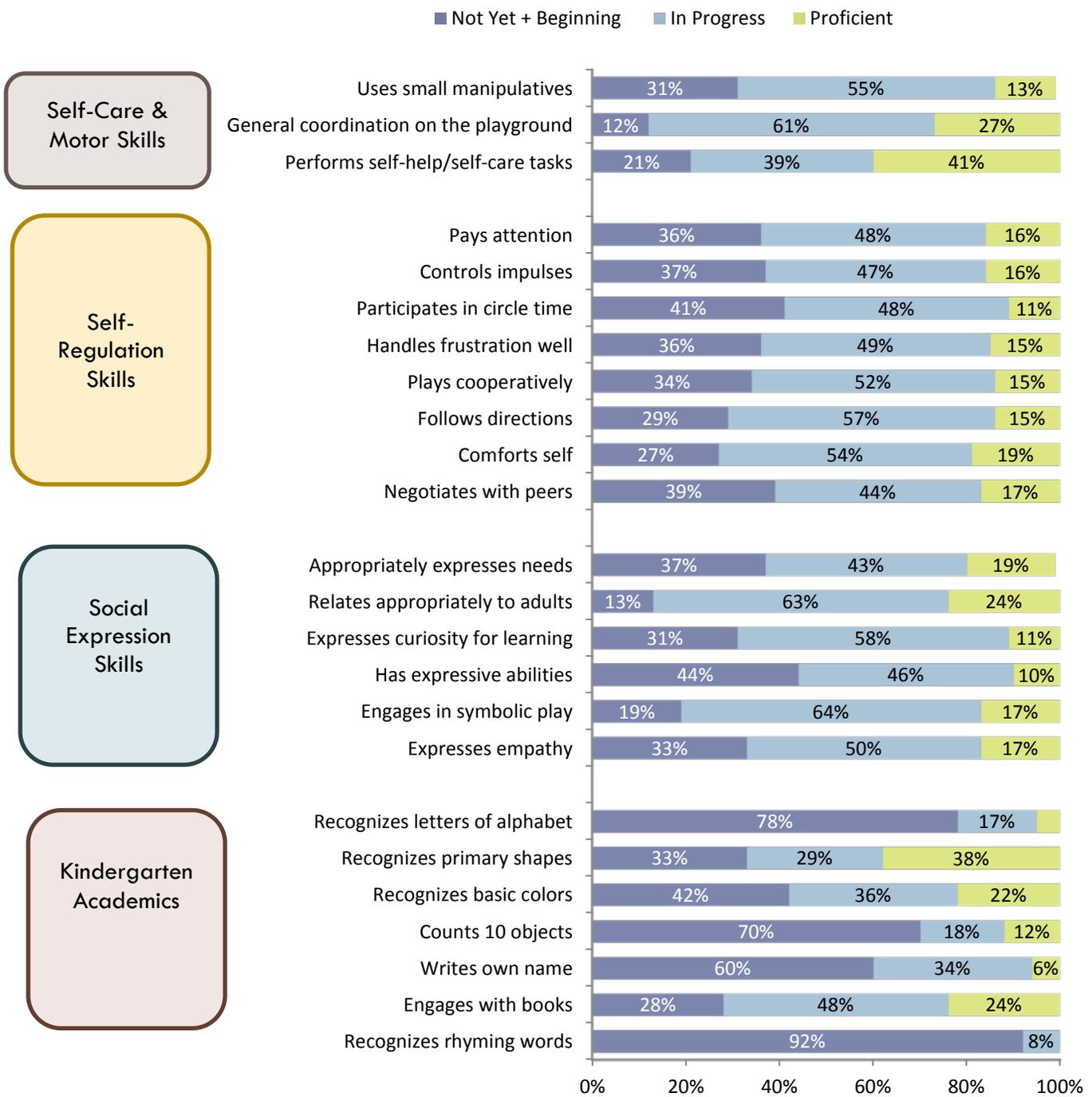
Source: Pre-Kindergarten Observation Form, Fall, 2012; Spring 2013.

Note: Means are based on the results for 83 students who were assessed by their teachers in both Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. Paired sample t-tests showed statistically significant mean differences between students' Fall and Spring scores: Overall Readiness, $t(82)=19.45$, $p<.001$; Self-Care & Motor Skills, $t(82)=12.32$, $p<.001$; Self-Regulation Skills $t(82)=14.33$, $p<.001$; Social Expression Skills, $t(82)=14.09$, $p<.001$; Kindergarten Academics, $t(82)=24.32$, $p<.001$;

Students' Levels of Proficiency across the 24 Readiness Skills

To provide a more detailed look at students' skills and the areas in which they showed the most growth, Figure 6 on the following page displays the percentage of students who were rated at the *Not yet/Beginning*, *In progress*, or *Proficient* levels for each of the 24 readiness skills assessed by the P-KOF in Fall 2012. Figure 7 displays the ratings that these same children received on the 24 readiness skills in Spring 2013 after one year of Literacy Preschool.

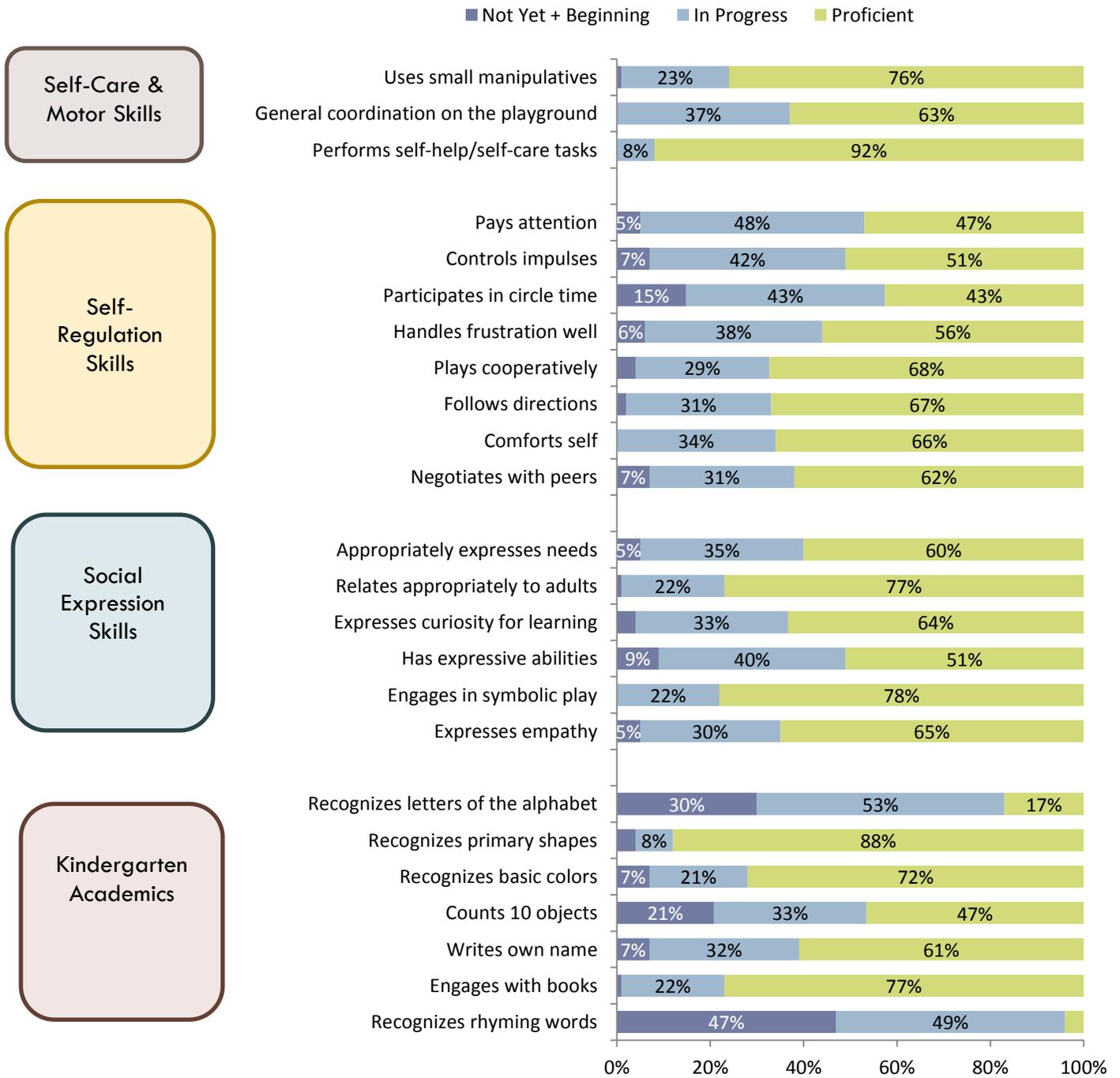
Figure 6: **Students' Levels of Proficiency across the 24 Readiness Skills in Fall 2012**



Source: Pre-Kindergarten Observation Form, Fall 2012.

Note: N=70-83 students. Percentages less than 5% are not labeled. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Figure 7: **Students' Levels of Proficiency across the 24 Readiness Skills in Spring 2013**



Source: Pre-Kindergarten Observation Form, Spring 2013.

Note: N= 71-83 students. Don't Know/Not Observed responses are not included. Percentages less than 5% are not labeled. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Literacy Preschool Students' Readiness Strengths and Challenges

Figures 8 and 9 highlight the readiness skills for which Literacy Preschool students were rated as demonstrating the most and least proficiency, respectively. In Fall 2012, students demonstrated the greatest readiness skill strengths within the domains of *Social Expression* (i.e., symbolic play; relating to adults); *Self Care & Motor Skills* (i.e., basic self-help/self-care tasks; general coordination on playground), and *Kindergarten Academics* (i.e., shape recognition). In Spring 2013, "General coordination" within the *Self-Care and Motor Skills* domain was no longer in the top five, but "Engage with books" (3.76) was a strength.

Figure 8: **Students' Top Five Readiness Strengths**

| Top five strengths | Basic Building Block | Fall | Spring |
|---|--------------------------|------|--------|
| 1. Performs basic self-help/self-care tasks | Self-Care & Motor Skills | 3.19 | 3.92 |
| 2. Has general coordination on playground | Self-Care & Motor Skills | 3.14 | 3.63 |
| 3. Relates appropriately to adults other than primary caregiver | Social Expression | 3.11 | 3.76 |
| 4. Recognizes primary shapes | Kindergarten Academics | 3.00 | 3.84 |
| 5. Engages in symbolic/imaginative play | Social Expression | 2.98 | 3.78 |

Source: Pre-Kindergarten Observation Form, Fall 2012, Spring 2013.

Note: Means are based on 70-83 students. Don't know/ Not observed responses are not included. Scale points are as follows: 1=not yet, 2= beginning, 3=in progress, 4=proficient.

In Fall 2012, students demonstrated the greatest readiness challenges with the *Kindergarten Academic* skills involved in rhyming, letter recognition, counting, and writing as well as the *Self-Regulation* skills involved in circle time participation. Students showed increased levels of proficiency in each of these skill areas over the school year. Proficiency levels for the items "Writes own name" increased to such a degree that these skills were no longer counted among the five lowest rated skill items in Spring. The item "Stays focused/pays attention during activities" replaced this item among the five lowest rated items in the Spring with a mean ratings of 3.42 on a four-point scale.

Figure 9: **Students' Top Five Readiness Challenges**

| Top five challenges | Basic Building Block | Fall | Spring |
|---|------------------------|------|--------|
| 1. Recognizes rhyming words | Kindergarten Academics | 1.58 | 2.47 |
| 2. Recognizes letters of the alphabet | Kindergarten Academics | 2.14 | 2.84 |
| 3. Writes own first name | Kindergarten Academics | 2.23 | 3.51 |
| 4. Counts 10 objects | Kindergarten Academics | 2.36 | 3.27 |
| 5. Participates successfully in circle time | Self-Regulation | 2.61 | 3.28 |

Source: Pre-Kindergarten Observation Form, Fall 2012; Spring 2013.

Note: Means are based on 70-83 students. Don't know/ Not observed responses are not included. Scale points are as follows: 1=not yet, 2= beginning, 3=in progress, 4=proficient.

Factors Related to Growth in Readiness Skills

Through the course of typical child development, it is expected that some growth in readiness skills would be observed over the course of the year. However, children may grow at different rates and to different degrees depending on their experiences and services received. This section explores the child, family, and program factors that were found to be related to differences in readiness growth.

Demographic Factors associated with Readiness

Although older children had higher levels of *Overall Readiness* than did younger children in both the fall and the spring ($p<.001$), they had less growth from fall to spring ($p<0.1$). Girls had higher levels of proficiency than did boys in all areas in both the spring and the fall; however, the gender difference only approached significance for *Self-Regulation* skills in Spring 2013 ($p<.10$).

Program Participation and Readiness

The length of time students spent in a literacy preschool program was positively associated with students' overall readiness scores. After controlling for child age and baseline overall readiness, this correlation was found to be of moderate statistical significance ($r=.26$, $p=.020$).

Literacy Practices associated with Readiness

Correlations between family literacy practices in Fall 2012 and children's readiness levels in Spring 2013 that controlled for age revealed the following statistically significant relationships:

- When parents asked children questions about the stories they were sharing together, children tended to have higher levels of proficiency in *Social Expression* ($r=.22$, $p<.05$) and *Overall Readiness* in the spring ($r=.23$, $p<.05$), as well as greater growth in *Self-Regulation* ($r=0.33$, $p<0.01$), Kindergarten Academics ($r=0.25$, $p<0.05$), and *Overall Readiness* ($r=0.30$, $p<0.01$).