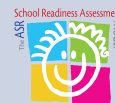


Executive Summary: *Ready or Not, Here We Come!*

APRIL 2018

AN ASSESSMENT OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS IN CONTRA COSTA, 2017



To understand the needs of children in Contra Costa, First 5 Contra Costa contracted with Applied Survey Research to conduct a county-wide assessment of kindergarten readiness. A total of 1,154 students from ten elementary school districts participated in this study.

OVERALL KINDERGARTEN READINESS

According to this research, **less than half of Contra Costa children are fully ready for kindergarten.** Across the county, **44% of children meet the definition of “fully ready.”** Over a third of children are “partially ready,” and **22% of children did not demonstrate proficiency in any of the measurements for kindergarten readiness.**

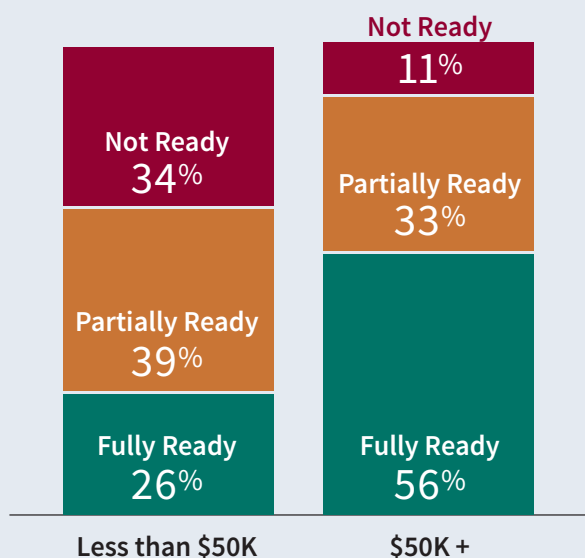
By Income: To meet the basic costs of living in Contra Costa, a family of one adult and one child must earn annual wages of \$55,000; a family with two adults and two young children must earn an annual wage of \$85,000 to meet the self-sufficiency standard. **Over a third of children living in households with incomes less than \$50,000 are not ready for school,** compared to just 11% of children with higher income.

HOW DO WE IMPROVE SCHOOL READINESS?

The results of this study suggest that there are barriers to school readiness that can be mitigated with the help of programs and services. The data indicates that children who are well-fed, well-rested, visit a library with a caregiver, attend preschool or Transitional Kindergarten (TK), or have parents who are confident and knowledgeable about parenting are more prepared to enter kindergarten ready to learn. **TK emerges as particularly beneficial** to children with low family income, less maternal education, or status as an English-learner. Preschool attendance was found to have **two kinds of effects on a child’s readiness:** children learn skills and socialization from the school setting, and in addition, parents of children in preschool were more likely to get involved with school preparation activities.

The overall lack of readiness among children in Contra Costa indicated by this research, though not dissimilar to neighboring counties, is still unacceptable. It will require the focus, creativity, and investment of all levels of governance to enrich the services available to families in our community so that all children have the best chances of success in school. The recommendations on the next page offer tested ideas about how school districts, cities, and the county could play a larger and more impactful role in improving children’s kindergarten readiness.

SCHOOL READINESS BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME



RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE KINDERGARTEN READINESS

School Districts

- **Expand access to and quality of early childhood education.** School districts can directly impact access to high-quality early learning programs by establishing or expanding Head Start, state-funded preschool and Transitional Kindergarten programs. All early childhood education programs that operate as part of the school district should be enrolled in Contra Costa's Quality Rating and Improvement System, Quality Matters.
- **Foster partnerships between early childhood and kindergarten educators.** Districts could improve collaboration and communication between kindergarten and early childhood teachers by coordinating classroom visits and other opportunities to learn from one another. In addition, by working with state preschool and Head Start programs, districts can assign unique identifiers to students before they enter kindergarten, so that information about child attendance and other indicators of performance can be tracked over time.
- **Employ a dedicated Early Learning Coordinator.** Early Learning Coordinators could ensure that children from birth through third grade are supported, and improve the connection of classroom experiences and curricula from year to year. This position could help districts and schools stay connected with community resources, such as the Help Me Grow system, libraries, the food bank, health clinics, and other local efforts and tools.
- **Include early childhood programs in LCAPs.** Districts should build family and community support programs into their Local Control Action Plans (LCAPs) to reflect the importance of those activities to a child's readiness to learn.

Cities

- **Expand access to early childhood education with new facilities.** Cities can assess the accessibility of quality early education programs in their communities, and the facilities available to house programs. In addition, they could encourage the creation of new early education programs by working with developers and community partners to ensure that there are sufficient facilities to meet the need.

- **Outreach to families about early childhood programs.** Cities should partner with CocoKids and First 5 Contra Costa to implement effective and innovative ways of messaging to families about how to sign up for early learning programs, especially subsidized programs. Outreach should be targeted and culturally appropriate.
- **Build and improve the spaces that strengthen families.** Cities should ensure that families have safe, welcoming and enriching parks, family resource centers, and recreation programs in their neighborhoods that encourage curiosity and experiential learning.

Contra Costa County

- **Prioritize children.** The County is the largest single provider of early learning programs in Contra Costa, and maintains additional investments supporting safety net, mental health and child welfare programs that all benefit children, yet there is more to be done. The County should prioritize increasing the funding and improving the effectiveness of these and other services to ensure that all eligible children are served at the highest level of quality.
- **Expand early childhood education programs.** The County should expand its system of Head Start and State Preschool programs to meet demand and reduce waiting lists. Providing high quality early education to the children who can benefit the most is the single most important step towards closing gaps in equity, opportunity and achievement for all children.
- **Invest in early literacy programming.** Libraries play a central role in many of the activities and external resources that were shown to significantly affect children's readiness for kindergarten. County libraries should expand their outreach to young families and early literacy activities in all the communities they serve.
- **Increase investment in early mental health services.** Programs that strengthen a child's social-emotional resiliency directly improve his or her ability to thrive at school. The County should draw down all available local, state and federal funds to support an effective system of children's mental health services that emphasizes the preventive advantage of serving children and their families as early as possible.

For more information, see www.first5coco.org