



# Memorandum

**TO:** ALL CHILDREN ACHIEVE  
COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Jane Light

**SUBJECT:** KINDERGARTEN READINESS STUDY    **DATE:** August 31, 2006

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Approved

Date

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**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** City-Wide  
**SNI AREA:** n/a

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Committee accept the information and analysis of the Summary Report of the Assessment of Kindergarten Readiness in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties.

## **OUTCOME**

The Committee is informed about kindergarten readiness of children in San José.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Santa Clara Partnership for School Readiness participated in a school readiness study of kindergarten children in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties conducted in Fall 2005 by Applied Survey Research. Findings were released at a press conference on May 3, 2006. It is a multi-faceted study that included observations of 1434 children in 76 kindergarten classrooms as well as surveys of kindergarten teachers, parents, and early childhood teachers. The children in the study reflect the changing profile of Silicon Valley families. Only 50% have U.S. born parents and 42% are English Language Learners, with 20% speaking Spanish.

While school readiness often focuses on the readiness of children, the National Educational Goals Panel notes that the readiness of children is also dependent on the readiness of schools, families and communities in order to be well-prepared to enter school.

## **Defining Readiness**

Readiness for school is multi-dimensional, as reflected by 20 readiness skills that fall into four categories of basic building blocks. These core skills are described in greater depth in the

attached *Summary Report*. They are presented as a pyramid, showing the most essential skills at the base of the pyramid. The four categories of building blocks are:

- **Self-care and Motor Skills** – general coordination, basic self-help and self-care
- **Self-Regulation** – controls impulses, uses problem-solving strategies, plays cooperatively
- **Social Expression** – appropriately expresses needs, shows curiosity for learning
- **Kindergarten Academics** – knows colors & shapes, recognizes letters & rhyming words, counts objects

### **Key Points**

- School readiness is multi-faceted and most influenced by self-regulation skills
- Readiness represents a range of skills that are associated with healthy development
- Most children enter kindergarten ready for school, but the most vulnerable children are not prepared
- Investing in efforts to enhance family relationships, parental effectiveness, and quality preschool services are all important components to assuring school readiness.

### **Results**

Most children in Santa Clara County are entering kindergarten ready for school. However, not all children are prepared in the same way. Four distinct patterns or “portraits” of readiness emerged in the study. (Percentages are listed for Santa Clara County findings)

- **All-Stars** – children nearly proficient in all 20 readiness skills (46%)
- **Social-Stars** – children who have mastered self-regulation and self-care (19%)
- **Focused-on-the-Facts** – children who have mastered academic-related skills, but need practice on self-regulation and social expression skills (21% )
- **Needs-Prep** – children who have not mastered any of the readiness skills (13%)

The study revealed some significant differences between Santa Clara and San Mateo County. San Mateo County had a higher percentage of All-Stars (53%) and fewer children in the Needs Prep category (7%). The study was not designed to pinpoint reasons for these differences. The study did note that families in San Mateo reported engaging in more enrichment activities associated with improving school readiness, above and beyond reading to children.

In terms of teacher expectations, 62% of the kindergarten teachers in Santa Clara County reported that children entering their classrooms met or exceeded expectations (compared to 74% in San Mateo County). However, there are areas for significant concern. One in four children in Santa Clara County falls below teacher expectations when it comes to the Self-Regulation building blocks. This is significant in that the teachers reported that self-regulation skills (controlling impulses, working cooperatively, responding to conflicts, and paying attention) are essential for classroom management and impact all other areas of skill development, including academics. With 34% of the children in Santa Clara County lacking proficiency in Self-Regulation and Social Expression skills, teachers noted that they spend the most amount of time addressing self-regulation and social issues in their classrooms.

Interestingly, teachers ranked Kindergarten Academics as less important to kindergarten readiness than the other skill areas and rated academic skills as the easiest to improve. The study found that teachers feel torn by the emphasis on academic standards, which impedes their ability to guide social development. Many early childhood research studies have shown that social and behavior issues first must be addressed in the classroom before academic skills can be learned. In addition, studies show that self-regulation skills are most effectively learned in the family environment, not preschool or kindergarten classrooms.

### **Factors Affecting Readiness**

The study also examined the impact of a number of factors that appear to influence readiness or contribute to lack of readiness. Factors negatively impacting school readiness include: being an English Language Learner; lower income status; lower maternal educational levels; number of children in the home; and lack of parental involvement. Positive factors include: sufficient income; being an English speaker; having a mother with at least a high school education; some preschool experience; fewer children in the home; and being older when entering kindergarten.

### **ANALYSIS**

These findings point to a number of implications for library and city services and programs. The keynote speakers who presented this study to the public noted the following:

- The parent-child relationship is critical to helping children develop skills in all four building block categories, but most importantly in the areas of conflict resolution, self-regulation and approaches to problem-solving.
- Enhancing family relationships, teaching parents the importance of conflict resolution skills, and focusing on family strengths are essential components to improving school readiness.
- Supporting the development of self-regulation skills in children is more important to fostering school readiness than primarily focusing on academic skills.
- Investing in high quality preschool programs has a significant impact on overall readiness, especially in helping children gain the social and kindergarten academic readiness skills needed. However, the study agrees with a national study that “more is not necessarily better.”
- Finding ways to help mothers complete high school and at least some college will help improve readiness skills.
- Assisting those children who are most vulnerable to risk factors, such as lack of English language skills, low income, teen mothers, and lack of parental involvement, can have the greatest impact when resources are limited.

### **Based on these implications, the Library is pursuing a multi-pronged approach which targets:**

- Enhancing services for parents and families through workshops and events focused on supporting healthy childhood development and core readiness skills

- Focusing on all four categories of the building blocks in youth services programs offered at the library branches, and
- Continuing to invest in the creation of high quality child care programs through the Smart Start San José early learning initiative

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST**

The topic of school readiness and the findings of this study have been discussed as part of the development of the 2006-08 Early Care and Education Strategic Plan during public planning meetings held in March and April and at the Early Care and Education Commission Planning Retreat in August. Actions to address some of the implications listed above are reflected in greater detail in the draft plan.

- Criteria 1:** Requires Council action on the use of public funds equal to \$1 million or greater. **(Required: Website Posting)**
- Criteria 2:** Adoption of a new or revised policy that may have implications for public health, safety, quality of life, or financial/economic vitality of the City. **(Required: E-mail and Website Posting)**
- Criteria 3:** Consideration of proposed changes to service delivery, programs, staffing that may have impacts to community services and have been identified by staff, Council or a Community group that requires special outreach. **(Required: E-mail, Website Posting, Community Meetings, Notice in appropriate newspapers)**

### **COORDINATION**

Report was coordinated with City Manager's Office.

### **COST SUMMARY/IMPLICATIONS**

Costs for most programs will be absorbed in the library budget.

### **CEQA**

Not a project.

Jane Light  
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For questions please contact Jane Light, Director at 808-2150.