

Nurturing Success: A Portrait of Kindergarten Readiness in Monterey County



The long-term success of children depends heavily on their social-emotional and cognitive preparedness before entering school.

"If we start with children when they're young, ensuring they have a solid footing and a good education, the county will attract more business because we will have a well-educated workforce, businesses will grow and offer jobs, and it will pull people out of poverty."

~Monterey County Key Leader



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Executive Summary



5th Study to Assess Countywide Kindergarten Readiness

Findings represent a countywide sample based on:

- Observations of 2,451 children completed by 124 kindergarten teachers
- Family surveys completed by 2,103 parents (in English and Spanish)
- Educators surveys completed by 111 kindergarten teachers, 27 transitional kindergarten teachers, and 81 early childhood educators

For the 2015 Monterey County Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), 124 kindergarten teachers completed child observations for nearly **2,500 students**. This represents almost 35% of the county's incoming kindergartners. Similar to all incoming kindergarten students in Monterey County public schools, the students were mostly of Latino race/ethnicity (73%), and spoke Spanish and English (38%) or Spanish only (34%). Their families frequently had incomes below the Federal Poverty Level (61%).

Kindergarten Readiness

Teachers assessed children's development across four core domains: Self and Social Development; Self Regulation; Language and Literacy; and Mathematical Development. An additional domain, English Language Development, assessed English acquisition for children who speak a language other than English at home.

In 2015, **21% of kindergartners had comprehensive mastery at kindergarten entry.**

This was similar to the rate in 2012 (20%).¹ Comprehensive mastery indicates that a child is well-prepared to enter kindergarten across all four developmental domains assessed by teachers using the Desired Results Developmental Profile–School Readiness (DRDP-SR).²

The percentage of students achieving domain mastery³ in Self Regulation significantly increased from 2012 (25%) to 2015 (29%). **Children were more likely to master Self Regulation** than any other domain. Domain mastery was similar in 2015 for Self and Social Development (26%), Language and Literacy Development (24%), and Mathematics (17%), as compared to 2012. Among the 1,740 children in the KRA sample who speak a language other than English, 33% were rated as mastering the English Language Development domain (a significant increase from 2012, 27%).

Teachers ranked Self Regulation, and Self and Social Development as the most important domains upon kindergarten entry. These domains are also the two domains in which the greatest percentages of students achieved mastery.

Children attending schools on the Peninsula and in South County achieved comprehensive mastery at higher rates than the countywide average; children in North County achieved mastery at about the same rate as the countywide average, and children from Salinas achieved comprehensive mastery at a lower rate than the countywide average.

¹ This is a cross-sectional study. The 2012 and 2015 KRA samples represent separate groups of incoming kindergartners at different points in time and are thus treated as distinct populations. In Monterey County between 2012 and 2015, there were shifts in education policy (e.g., Transitional Kindergarten) as well as demographic and socioeconomic trends (e.g., significant declines in the number of Latino and low-income households in Monterey County, increases in full-day preschool attendance, and increases in the number of parents with more than high school education).

² Teachers rated children's competency on each item of the DRDP-SR using the following five-point scale: (1) Exploring, (2) Developing, (3) Building, (4) Integrating, and (5) Applying. Scores of (4) Integrating and (5) Applying indicate mastery of that item. The term *comprehensive mastery* is used to identify children with an average score of 4 or above across all items in the DRDP-SR (excluding the English Language Development domain).

³ *Domain mastery* is used to identify children with a rating of (4) Integrating, or (5) Applying for a specific domain.



Students at high- and medium-performing schools were more likely to achieve mastery.

Comprehensive mastery was more frequent among children who entered high-performing (31%) and medium-performing (28%) schools compared to children who entered low-performing schools (18%). The same pattern was evident for the following domains:

- Self and Social Development (low-performing, 23%, medium-performing, 35%, and high-performing, 34%)
- Self Regulation (low-performing, 28%, medium-performing, 32%, and high-performing, 40%)
- Language and Literacy Development (low-performing, 21%, medium-performing, 33%, and high-performing, 37%)

Mastery in mathematics was more frequent in high-performing schools (34%) than medium-performing schools (21%) and low-performing schools (14%).

Family Characteristics and Kindergarten Readiness

The 2015 KRA revealed four key family characteristics that are associated with comprehensive mastery in school readiness developmental domains.

Children were more likely to be ready for kindergarten when:

- **Families were not in poverty.** Parents who reported an annual household income above the federal poverty level were more likely to have children who displayed comprehensive mastery. This finding is consistent with past KRA results and mirrors broader national trends.
- **Parents had more than a high school education.** Parents who reported having an education level beyond high school were more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery. We know that income and education are highly correlated, and this finding is consistent with past KRAs and national trends.
- **Parents reported better child health.** Parents rated their child's general health on a scale from poor to excellent; those who reported better child health were more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery.
- **Parents had greater knowledge of child development.** Parents who were more likely to correctly assess whether a series of statements about child development were true or false were also more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery, even when controlling for parent education level.

Early Learning Experiences and Kindergarten Readiness

The 2015 KRA revealed five key early learning experiences that are associated with comprehensive mastery in school readiness developmental domains.

Children were more likely to be ready for kindergarten with:

- **Frequent engagement in a variety of early literacy activities.** Parents who read to their child more often were more likely to have children who displayed comprehensive mastery. Parents who frequently engaged their children with oral story telling or showed their children pictures from books were also more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery.
- **A variety of parent-child interactions.** Parents who frequently engaged in activities at home with their children, such as counting games, singing, and playing outdoors, were more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery.
- **Preschool or Transitional Kindergarten.** Children who participated in a formal care and learning environment, such as preschool or TK in the year before kindergarten, were more likely to achieve comprehensive mastery.
- **Parents who felt knowledgeable and supported.** Parents who reported knowing how to help their child learn or having access to supportive adults were more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery.



Recommendations

First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) aligns its work with countless champions, agencies, and initiatives to support efforts designed to prepare children for kindergarten. The 2015 KRA offers rigorous, county-specific information to track progress and drive data-driven solutions. Recommendations for ways that parents and community members, educators and administrators, policy makers and key influencers, and F5MC can put the 2015 KRA findings into practice are listed below.

For Parents and Community Members

- Read, show picture books, and tell your child stories every day.
- Take time to play with your child.
- Advocate for and enroll your child in a quality preschool.
- Advocate for and enroll in a parent development program.

For Educators and Administrators

- Encourage parents to engage their children often in a variety of early literacy activities.
- Provide ECE Providers with the supports they need to identify and refer children with developmental concerns or delays.
- Use the 2015 KRA to promote early childhood programs and align them with the K–12 system.
- Support Pre-K to 3rd grade alignment efforts.
- Continue to support social-emotional development of children.



For Policymakers and Key Influencers

- Business and philanthropy should build on local successes and support cost-effective investments in early childhood education, such as funding training for educators pursuing quality improvements, developing and implementing comprehensive screening and referral systems at the county level, and investing in innovative public/private financing mechanisms for expanding evidence-based programs.
- Invest in capacity-building opportunities for early childhood educators that aim to impact teacher beliefs and lead to curriculum and classroom enhancements.

For First 5 Monterey County

- Continue to champion and invest in early childhood.
- Promote frequent engagement in a variety of play, reading, oral storytelling, and other activities at home and in early childhood programs.
- Take full advantage of the 2015 KRA by supporting in-depth explorations of data collected.

Welcome

The connection between a child's readiness as he or she enters kindergarten and later success is well-documented and is of continued relevance in Monterey County, the state, and the nation. In recognition of the important role the early years play in a child's development, funders, policy makers, service providers, experts, and community members increasingly support efforts to build comprehensive and coordinated early systems for programs, policies, and services that work together to achieve positive outcomes for young children.¹ Recent examples include the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grants; creation of a statewide Transitional Kindergarten (TK) program; collaborative efforts to develop

comprehensive birth to third grade strategies; and increases in philanthropic and public investment in early childhood education, including the restoration of some earlier cuts in California's 2016–17 budget. Locally, key leaders in the public and private sector agree that investments in early childhood education are critical. Although not always viewed as a top tier issue, Monterey County leaders agree that early childhood is strongly linked to other important issues areas, including public safety, economic stability, education, and health. As one key leader noted recently, "I'm looking at the policy agenda as a pyramid, and I see early childhood education as the base of the pyramid."

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) provides a snapshot of school readiness for nearly 2,500 Monterey County children who entered public schools in the fall of 2015. The sample frame ensured representation based on both academic performance and geographic region of the county.² In this report, we explore associations between children's family characteristics and early learning experiences—both in and outside of the home—and their developmental competencies in language, mathematical thinking, social awareness, and emotional regulation. Information from educators across the early care and education system in Monterey County highlights current classroom practices and educators' beliefs about school readiness. We also explore trends related to school performance levels to uncover potential equity challenges and identify areas of need.

Monterey County is home to notable collaborative efforts (e.g., Bright Beginnings and Bright Futures, Building Healthy Communities, Monterey County Quality Rating and Improvement System Consortium, the Child Care Planning Council, etc.) that seek to improve the well-being of and outcomes for young children and their families. To this end, the information in this report is intended to be used by a variety of stakeholders and groups—parents, educators and administrators, policy makers, and key influencers—to track progress, identify needs, and stimulate dialogue. Examples on how to use this report can be found below.

- **Deepen understanding of young children and families.** With in-depth data captured on nearly 35% of all incoming kindergartners³, this report is the most representative and comprehensive picture of incoming kindergartners in Monterey County public schools.
- **Inform investments and policies that impact early learning programs and initiatives.** Local funders, policymakers, and other key influencers can reference findings in this report to inform investments and track the progress of Monterey County's youngest children.
- **Track indicators and outcomes for collaborative efforts.** The 2015 KRA provides a resource for dialogue among parents, educators, schools, organizations, key influencers, and policymakers to strengthen collaborative efforts that support school readiness for children in Monterey County.
- **Guide classroom planning.** Each of the 38 schools participating in the 2015 KRA received school-level findings to help guide classroom planning. ECE Providers, TK and Kindergarten teachers, and administrators can use this information to help prioritize areas of preparation for children and communication with parents.
- **Support parent engagement in schools.** Findings can be used in Local Control and Accountability Planning (LCAP) processes that involve parents and community members.
- **Obtain funding.** In the past, KRA data has enabled schools to solicit funding for early learning and kindergarten transition activities.

1 Julia Coffman, *A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives*, a report prepared for The Build Initiative, August 2007.

2 As in past KRAs, Academic Performance Index (API) scores were used to categorize schools' as low, medium, or high performing. When the KRA sample was constructed (spring 2015), API scores had not been published since the 2012–13 school year (SY). The California Department of Education (CDE) launched new assessments in January 2014, and scores were not available for Monterey County Schools until late in the summer of 2016, after the sampling and data collection for the KRA had been completed. Thus, we opted to rely on historic SY 2012–13 API scores to categorize schools and create the sampling frame. Once available, more current test scores from the California Assessment of Student Progress and Performance (CAASPP) were used to validate the groups. Please see the technical appendix (available at www.First5monterey.org) for a detailed description of and results from the validation process.

3 In 2015–16, there were 7,030 kindergartners enrolled in Monterey County public schools, per the California Department of Education (CDE) Dataquest: <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dataquest.asp>.



- Addition of Transitional Kindergarten.** In 2010, legislation was enacted in California creating TK for four-year-olds who did not meet new age cutoffs to enter kindergarten. The introduction of TK impacted the 2015 KRA sample in two ways. First, it increased the average age of children entering kindergarten compared to prior years (for an average increase of 2.2 months compared to 2012). Second, it introduced the opportunity for some children to receive additional early education experiences before entering kindergarten. Consequently, we expanded the Family Survey to include questions about children’s TK experiences, and we created a separate educator survey designed for TK teachers.⁵

Evolution of the KRA in Monterey County

2015 marks the fifth time the KRA has been conducted in Monterey County. Each iteration of the KRA has built upon what we have learned from prior efforts and reflects current best thinking about early childhood development. Over time, we have expanded the KRA to include more schools, classrooms, and children, and we have refreshed data collection tools to capture relevant information.

What’s New

- More schools, more classrooms.** Participation in the KRA increased substantially in 2015, because some districts wanted this data for all schools, not just those selected under the sampling frame. We accommodated all schools in districts that requested full participation, resulting in a larger sample of schools, classrooms, and children than in the past.⁴ In total, ten schools were added to the sample at district request.
- Refreshed and enhanced Family Survey.** We refreshed selected questions in the Family Survey based on findings from the most recent KRA in 2012. In most cases, this meant rewording questions or revising answer options for clarity. A few questions were added to better capture family characteristics, home educational activities, and parent knowledge of child development.

Exhibit 1. Family Characteristics: KRA Sample

Poverty status	%KRA Sample (n = 1,425)
At or below Federal Poverty Level	50.0
Above Federal Poverty Level	50.0
Parent education	%KRA Sample (n = 1,964)
Less than high school	38.9
High school or equivalent	19.0
More than high school	42.1
Child home language	%KRA Sample (n = 2,029)
Spanish and English	38.2
Spanish only	33.9
English only	20.8
Mixteco/Triqui and another language	2.5
Mixteco/Triqui only	0.6
Other	5.2
Race/Ethnicity	%KRA Sample (n = 1,943)
Latino	73.4
Multiracial	12.2
White	8.6
Indigenous Mexican*	1.5
All other groups	4.2

* ACS data includes American Indian and Alaska Native

⁴ We carefully considered the impact of these opt-in schools on the representativeness of the final sample; a description of the process used to determine necessary weighting is in the technical appendix, available at www.first5monterey.org

⁵ See technical appendix for information about analytic considerations.






Chapter 1: A Snapshot of Kindergarten Readiness in Monterey County

The KRA relies on teachers' observations of children's behavior to measure kindergarten readiness. 2015 marks the second use of the Desired Results Developmental Profile–School Readiness® (DRDP–SR) as the measure of developmental mastery for the countywide KRA.⁶ In this section, we present an overview of the DRDP–SR domains and levels used to identify children's progress. Then we describe key findings related to countywide kindergarten readiness.

The Five Developmental Domains

The DRDP–SR consists of items grouped into five categories, each representing a different developmental domain. The four core domains are Self and Social Development, Self Regulation, Language and Literacy Development, and Mathematical Development. An additional domain, English Language Development, assessed English acquisition for children who speak a language other than English at home. Exhibit 2 provides a summary of each domain along with the specific items found in each.

Exhibit 2. Description of DRDP–SR Scale

	DRDP–SR Domain	What it Measures	Items in the Domain
	Self and Social Development	Ability to form relationships and have positive interactions with peers and adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity of self in relation to others • Recognition of one's own abilities • Relationships and social interactions with adults • Relationships and social interactions with peers • Social and emotional understanding • Conflict negotiation • Curiosity and initiative in learning
	Self Regulation	Ability to control emotions, persist when things are challenging, and share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-control of behavior and feelings • Engagement and persistence • Responsible conduct • Shared use of space and materials
	Language and Literacy Development	Comprehension and use of language to engage in conversations, to express needs and feelings, and to follow along when text is presented by adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of language (receptive) • Follows increasingly complex instructions • Communication of needs, feelings, and interests (expressive) • Reciprocal communication and conversation • Comprehension and analysis of age-appropriate text, presented by adults • Letter and word knowledge • Phonological awareness • Emergent writing
	Mathematical Development	Early forms of numeracy such as counting, pattern recognition, shapes, and measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number sense of quantity and counting • Number sense of mathematical operations • Shapes and measurement • Patterns and classification • Problem solving
	English Language Development	The progress of children who speak a language other than English at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehension of English (receptive English) • Self-expression in English (expressive English) • Understanding and responding to English literacy activities • Symbol, letter, and print knowledge in English

⁶ In 2015, the CDE released the Desired Results Development Profile–Kindergarten (DRDP–K, 2015), which is based on, and replaced, the DRDP–SR. The DRDP–SR was used for this study to maintain consistency with the 2012 KRA.



The Five Developmental Levels

Teachers rate children's competency on each item of the DRDP–SR using the following five-point scale:

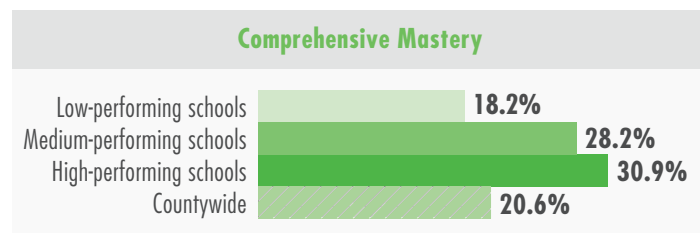
(1) Exploring, (2) Developing, (3) Building, (4) Integrating, and (5) Applying. Scores of (4) Integrating and (5) Applying indicate mastery of that item. Throughout this report, the term *domain mastery* is used to identify children with an average score of 4 or above for all items within a given domain.

Comprehensive mastery indicates that a child is well-prepared to enter kindergarten across all domains of the DRDP–SR. In this report, children with an average score of 4 or above across all items in the DRDP–SR were considered to have comprehensive mastery.

In 2015, 20.6% of children entered kindergarten having achieved comprehensive mastery. This was similar to the rate in 2012 (20.3%). Comprehensive mastery was examined against a school's academic performance, revealing that comprehensive mastery was more frequent among children who entered high-performing (30.9%) and medium-performing (28.2%) schools compared to children who entered low-performing schools (18.2%).⁷ There were also regional differences in the rates at which children achieved comprehensive mastery. For example, children attending schools on the Peninsula and in South County achieved comprehensive mastery at higher rates than the countywide average; children in North County achieved mastery at about

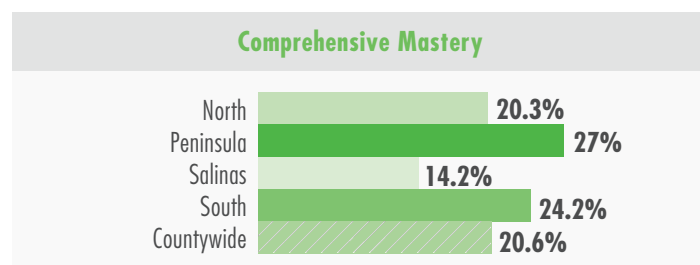
the same rate as the countywide average, and children from Salinas achieved comprehensive mastery at a lower rate than the countywide average. Later in this report, we examine relationships among family characteristics, early learning environments, and activities on comprehensive mastery.

Exhibit 3. Percent of Children who Exhibited Comprehensive Mastery, by Academic Performance Level
(based on the average score across all items for each child)



All differences are statistically significant; $p < .001$

Exhibit 4. Percent of Children who Exhibited Comprehensive Mastery, by County Region⁸
(based on the average score across all items for each child)



All differences are statistically significant; $p < .001$

⁷ Differences in the frequency of comprehensive mastery across academic performance level were statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 29.5$; $p < .01$). Follow-up tests confirmed that rates of mastery did not differ for children attending high-performing and medium-performing schools but both had higher rates of mastery than children attending low-performing schools.

⁸ Differences in the frequency of comprehensive mastery across regions were statistically significant ($\chi^2(3) = 41.9$; $p < .01$). Follow-up tests confirmed that rates of mastery were lowest among children attending schools in Salinas (14.2%). Children attending schools in the Peninsula (27.0%) and South (24.2%) regions had the highest rates of mastery (which did not differ); children attending schools in the North region (20.3%) had lower rates of mastery than children in the Peninsula and South regions and had higher rates of mastery than children attending schools in the Salinas region.

What Teachers Believe

Teachers agree that Self Regulation and Self and Social Development are the two most important skills to have upon entering kindergarten. This agreement is based on the percent of teachers who ranked each domain as *most important* upon kindergarten entry.



Exhibit 5. Teacher Ranking of Skills Important for Kindergarten Entry

Teacher Group	#1	#2	#3
Kindergarten (n = 110)	Self Regulation 59.1%	Self & Social Development 36.4%	Mathematical Development 16.4%
TK Teachers (n = 26)	Self Regulation 64.0%	Self & Social Development 24.0%	English Language Development 4.2%
ECE Providers* (n = 76)	Self Regulation 46.4%	Self & Social Development 37.5%	Language & Literacy Development 9.0%

*Includes preschool/pre-k (56.8%), center-based child care (27.2%), and family child care (16.0%).

Domain Mastery

This section presents findings related to domain mastery for each of the domains of the DRDP–SR. The developmental level for each child within DRDP–SR domains was established by taking the average of all items in that domain.

Countywide, teachers rated 25.6% of children as Integrating or Applying, the criteria for domain mastery. This is similar to rates of domain mastery in 2012 (24.4%). Teachers more frequently rated children from high-performing (33.6%) and medium-performing (34.7%) schools as achieving mastery in this domain compared to teachers of children in low-performing schools (23.0%).

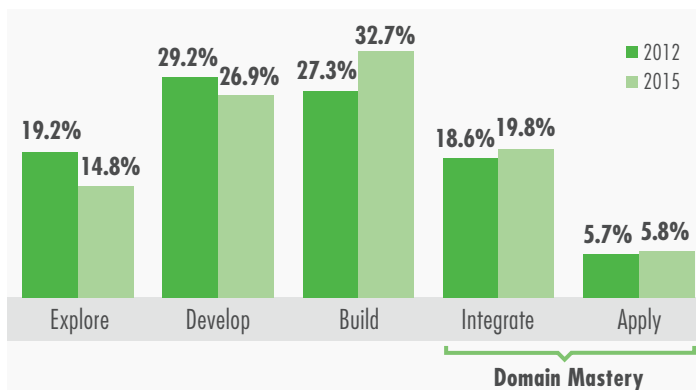
Self and Social Development

Self and Social Development skills are essential for children and adults. These skills help us to form and maintain relationships and to negotiate conflict. Children with strong Self and Social Development skills are more successful academically and experience fewer behavior problems.⁹

Self Regulation

Self Regulation allows children to forge stronger friendships and relationships with others and to pay attention and learn new things. Skills in this domain include control of one’s behavior and feelings, engagement, persistence, employment of fair and socially acceptable behavior, and the ability to share space and materials with others. In addition to helping young children manage their behavior in the classroom, Self Regulation skills have been linked to mental health, both in childhood and later in adulthood. These skills allow children to manage difficult and stressful events, such as the loss of a pet, the death of a family member, or a family separation. Self Regulation helps decrease the ongoing impact of stress, which can contribute to mental health difficulties.¹⁰

Exhibit 6. Developmental Levels of Self and Social Development, Countywide (percent of total)



⁹ Joseph E. Zins et al., “Scientific Basis Linking Social and Emotional Learning to School Success,” in *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?*, eds. Joseph E. Zins et al. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), 3–22.

¹⁰ Kids Matter, *How Self-Regulation Difficulties Affect Children*, report prepared for the Australian Government Department of Health and Aging, <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/early-childhood/about-emotions/>

Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional readiness for kindergarten is a combination of the Self and Social Development and Self Regulation domains. In 2015, 25.4% of children achieved mastery in Social and Emotional Development, compared to 23.0% in 2012.

Developmental Levels of Social and Emotional Development, Countywide (percent of total)

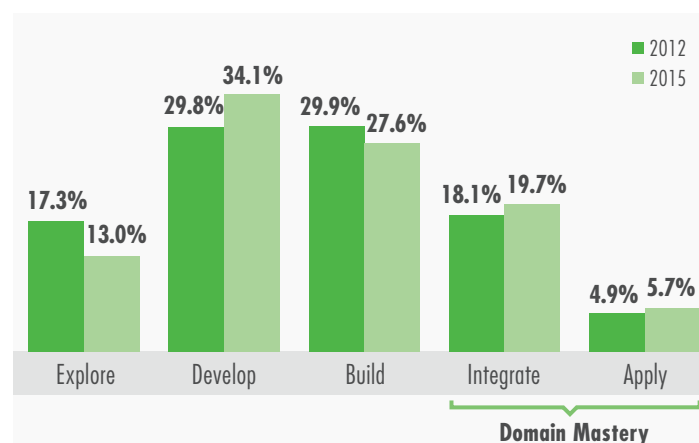
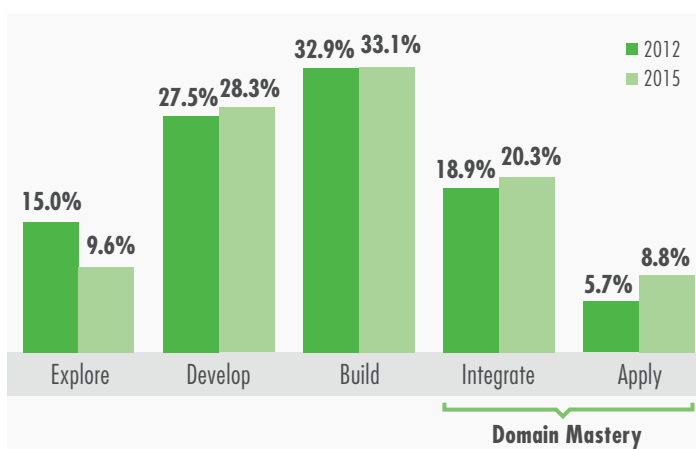


 Exhibit 7. Developmental Levels of Self Regulation, Countywide (percent of total)

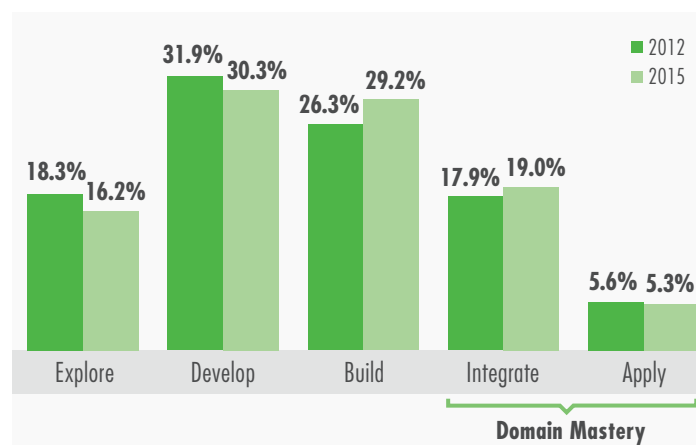


Countywide, there was a statistically significant increase in the percent of children who achieved mastery in this domain. In 2015, 29.1% of children achieved domain mastery in Self Regulation compared to 24.6% of children in 2012 ($p < .01$).¹¹ Children were more likely to master this domain than any other domain in the DRDP–SR. Teachers were more likely to rate children in high-performing (39.9%) and medium-performing (32.4%) schools as Integrating or Applying than teachers in low-performing schools (27.5%).

Language and Literacy Development

Early literacy has been linked with academic achievement, reduced grade retention, higher graduation rates, and enhanced productivity in adult life.¹²

 Exhibit 8. Developmental Levels of Language and Literacy Development, Countywide (percent of total)



Countywide, 24.3% of entering kindergartners were rated as Integrating or Applying in the Language and Literacy Development domain. This was similar to findings in 2012, when 23.5% of children achieved domain mastery. Teachers in low-performing schools were less likely to rate children as Integrating or Applying skills in this domain (21.3%) compared to teachers in medium-performing (32.8%) and high-performing (36.9%) schools.

¹¹ Based on the results of a chi-square analysis: $\chi^2 = 10.57$; differences are unadjusted and do not account for differences in age between the 2012 and 2015 KRA samples.

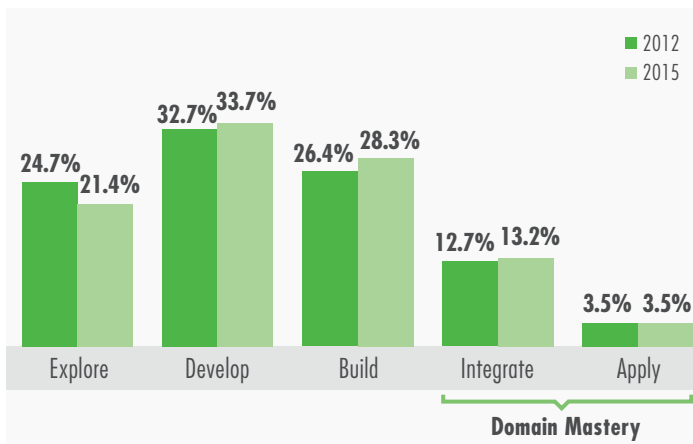
¹² Dorothy Strickland and Shannon Riley-Ayers, "Early Literacy: Policy and Practice in the Preschool Years," last modified 2015, <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/early-literacy-policy-and-practice-preschool-years>.

Mathematical Development

Research has shown that children’s early knowledge of math not only predicts later success in mathematics but also is strongly related to language and literacy development. Studies have found links among mathematics knowledge, oral language, vocabulary, ability to make inferences, and grammatical complexity of sentences.¹³

Countywide, teachers rated 16.7% of children as Integrating or Applying in the Mathematics domain. This is comparable to 2012, when 16.3% of children were rated as mastering this domain. Mastery in mathematics was more frequent in high-performing schools (33.6%) than medium-performing schools (21.3%) and low-performing schools (13.9%).

Exhibit 9. Developmental Levels of Mathematical Development, Countywide (percent of total)



¹³ Education Commission of the States, “Math in the Early Years: A Strong Predictor for Later School Success,” *The Progress of Education Reform* 14, no. 5 (2013): 1–7, <http://www.du.edu/kennedyinstitute/media/documents/math-in-the-early-years.pdf>.

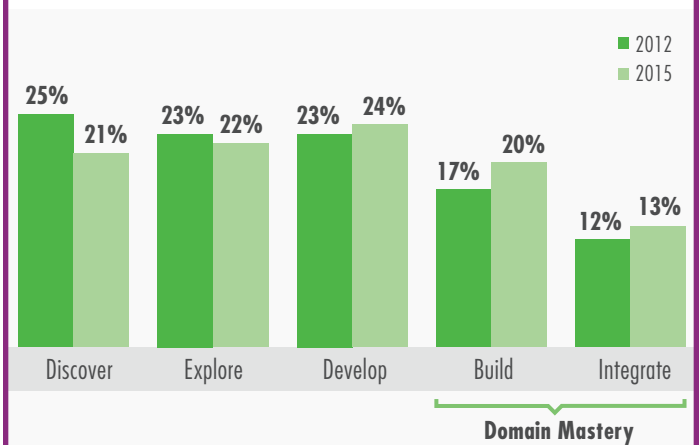
English Language Development

While the measures in the Language and Literacy Development domain assess all children’s progress in developing foundational language and literacy skills, the measures in the English Language Development domain document and assess the progress of children who speak a language other than English at home. Children who are dual language learners will vary in their acquisition of English language competencies, depending on factors such as the degree of exposure to English, the level of support provided in their home language, and their motivation to acquire English. Teachers were asked to rate each child’s incremental development for measures associated with English Language Development using the following levels:

- Discovering
- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating

A child who received an average score of Building or Integrating across items was considered to have achieved mastery in this domain.

Exhibit 10. Developmental Levels of English Language Development, Countywide (percent of total, n = 1,740)



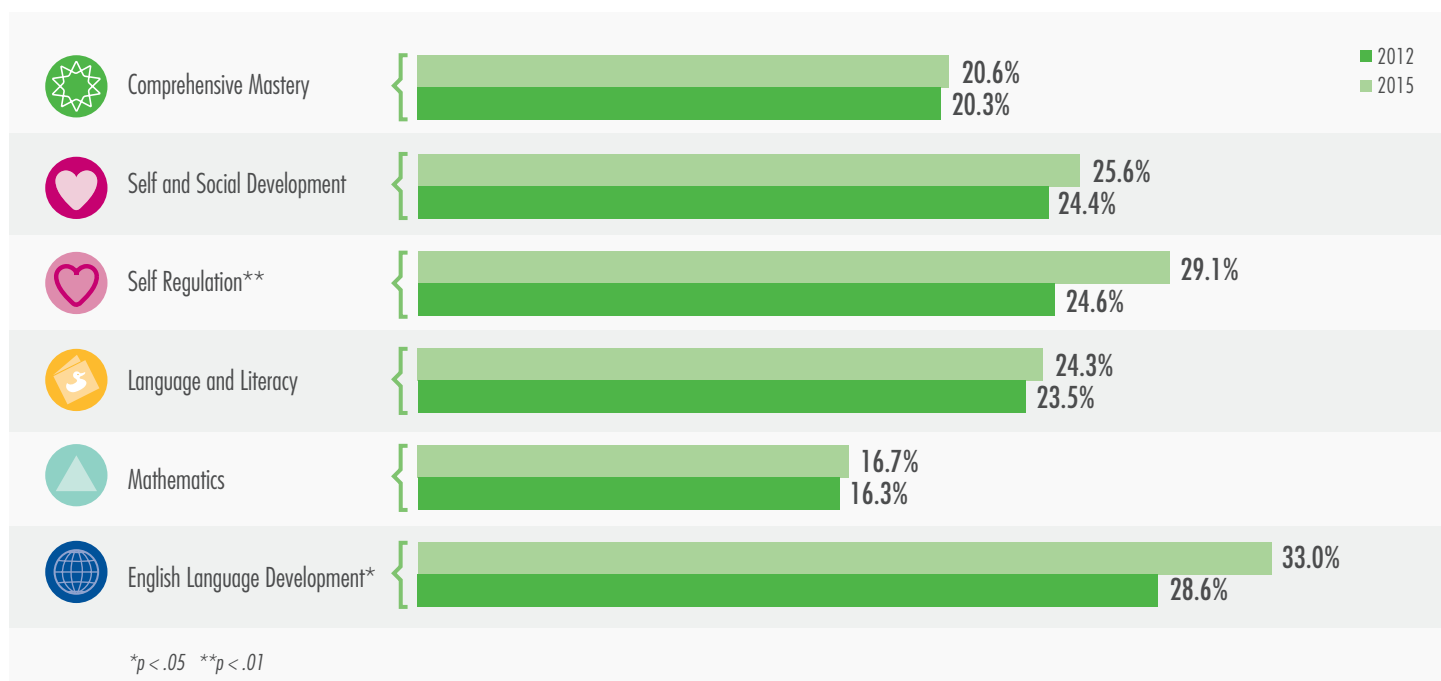
Among the 1,740 children in the KRA sample who speak a language other than English, 33% were rated as mastering the English Language Development domain. In comparison, 29% of children who spoke a language other than English were rated as mastering this domain in 2012.

Trends over Time

DRDP–SR domain and comprehensive mastery appears largely unchanged from 2012 to 2015 at the countywide level, with two exceptions: There was a statistically significant increase in Self Regulation and English Language Development (among children who speak a language other than English). This data is a snapshot and has not been adjusted for demographic shifts in the population that may have occurred between 2012 and 2015.¹⁴



Exhibit 11. Percent of Students Exhibiting Comprehensive Mastery, by Year (based on the average score across all items for each child within each domain)



The 2015 KRA uses data from nearly 35% of the incoming kindergarteners, painting the largest and most comprehensive picture of kindergarten readiness in Monterey County public schools to date. Countywide, children were most likely to master the Self Regulation domain and least likely to master the Mathematics domain. As in past years, children entering kindergarten in high- and medium-performing schools were more likely to demonstrate mastery in each domain, and they were more likely to achieve comprehen-

sive mastery than children from low-performing schools. Over time, there appear to be increases in the percent of children mastering Self Regulation and English Language Development (among children who speak a language other than English). However, these differences have not been adjusted for age and demographic differences in the two samples. In the next chapter, we explore relationships between family characteristics and developmental mastery.

¹⁴ This is a cross-sectional study. The 2012 and 2015 KRA samples represent separate groups of incoming kindergartners at different points in time and are thus treated as distinct populations. Between 2012 and 2015, the State of California changed the age for kindergarten entry, which led to an increase in the average age of incoming kindergartners. In addition to age, there were other demographic differences across the two KRA samples (e.g., race/ethnicity, income, parent education) that should be taken into consideration when comparing the two groups.

Chapter 2: Family Characteristics



Parents and families play a central role in shaping a child's early years, and research has shed light on certain demographic characteristics that tend to be associated with school readiness. Poverty is one of several risk factors that has a particularly strong association with school readiness. One study that examined the school readiness of children living in poverty found that, even when adjusting for demographic, health, and behavioral differences between poor and moderate- and higher-income families, poverty alone remained an important influence on school readiness.¹⁵ According to a report published in 2015 by the Economic Policy Institute, additional socioeconomic disadvantages that can hinder children's cognitive and behavioral outcomes include unemployment and low wages, housing instability, irregular work schedules, and inadequate access to primary and preventive health care.¹⁶ While parenting practices and other early learning experiences play an important role in early childhood development, parent and family characteristics indisputably have an impact on school readiness and future academic and social achievement.

This chapter focuses on parent and family characteristics such as demographics, family mobility, child health status, and parents' knowledge of child development. We first explore the family characteristics that are associated with comprehensive mastery of key developmental domains. We then describe the characteristics of Monterey County families with children who started kindergarten in fall 2015.

Family Characteristics Associated with School Readiness

The 2015 KRA revealed four key family characteristics that are associated with comprehensive mastery in school readiness developmental domains. Children whose teachers rated them as having comprehensive mastery upon kindergarten entry displayed the following characteristics:

- 1. Income – Families were not in poverty.** Parents who reported an annual household income above the federal poverty level were more likely to have children who displayed comprehensive mastery. This finding is consistent with past KRA results and mirrors broader national trends.
- 2. Education – Parents had more than a high school education.** Parents who reported having an education level beyond high school were more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery. We know that income and education are highly correlated, and this finding is consistent with past KRAs and national trends.
- 3. Health – Parents reported better child health.** Parents rated their child's general health on a scale from poor to excellent; those who reported better child health were more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery. Research has established that child health—including the early identification of developmental, behavioral, social, environmental, and biological conditions that affect children's ability to learn—plays a significant role in ensuring that children start school ready to succeed.¹⁷
- 4. Child development knowledge – Parents had greater knowledge of child development.** Parents who were more likely to determine whether a series of statements about child development were true or false were also more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery, even when controlling for parent education level. (See the next section about Monterey County families for more information about the parenting knowledge assessment and additional family characteristics.)

¹⁵ Julia B. Isaacs, *Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children*, report prepared for the Brookings Institution, March 2012, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0319_school_disadvantage_isaacs.pdf.

¹⁶ Leila Morsy and Richard Rothstein, *Five Social Disadvantages that Depress Student Performance: Why Schools Alone Can't Close Achievement Gaps*, report prepared for the Economic Policy Institute, June 10, 2015, <http://www.epi.org/publication/five-social-disadvantages-that-depress-student-performance-why-schools-alone-cant-close-achievement-gaps/>.

¹⁷ Bruner, Charles, *Connecting Child Health and School Readiness*, report prepared for The Colorado Trust, February 2009, http://www.coloradotrust.org/sites/default/files/IssueBrief_Bruner_Feb09_Final.pdf.

Exhibit 12. Factors Associated with Comprehensive Mastery

Comprehensive mastery associated with...

Families above poverty level*

Parent educational level more than high school*

Better reported health status*

Greater parent knowledge about child development*

* Indicates a statistically significant association with comprehensive mastery with $p < .01$.

Family Characteristics Countywide

Now that we have established the family characteristics that were associated with comprehensive mastery—including income, education, child health status, and knowledge of child development—we next explore these and other characteristics of Monterey County’s incoming kindergartners and their families who participated in the KRA.

Monterey County children who started kindergarten in 2015 were predominantly Latino.

As shown in Exhibit 13, just under three-fourths of incoming kindergartners were Latino; 12% were multiracial, and 9% were White. This mirrors the race and ethnicity of Monterey County children under age 5. Compared to countywide rates, low-performing schools had a higher percentage of Latino students (82%) and a lower percentage of White students (4%). Conversely, medium- and high-performing schools had lower percentages of Latino students and higher percentages of White students.

Exhibit 13. Race / Ethnicity of Monterey County Children under 5

Child Race/Ethnicity	% Countywide (<i>n</i> = 1,943)	Monterey County Children under 5 (2014 ACS data)	% Low-performing Schools (<i>n</i> = 1,424)	% Medium- performing Schools (<i>n</i> = 310)	% High-performing Schools (<i>n</i> = 139)
Latino	73.4	76.6	81.6	68.7	13.7
Multiracial	12.2	4.6	9.4	16.5	22.3
White	8.6	15.5	3.9	7.7	54.0
Indigenous Mexican*	1.5	1.0	1.8	1.3	-
All other groups	4.2	2.3	3.3	5.8	10.1

* ACS data includes American Indian and Alaska Native.

For most incoming kindergartners, Spanish and/or English were most commonly spoken to the child at home. Countywide, just over one-third of families reported speaking both Spanish and English to children at home, followed by Spanish only (about one-third) and English only (about one-fifth). Additionally, a small portion of Monterey County families (3%) reported that Mixteco or Triqui were spoken to the child at home (usually along with another language). Low- and medium-performing schools vary slightly from the countywide

trend—low-performing schools show more Spanish-only and medium-performing schools show more English-only. In high-performing schools, about two-thirds of parents (63%) reported English as the only language spoken to the child at home, and nearly one-fifth of parents (19%) reported speaking other languages. Countywide, other languages included a range of Asian, European, Middle Eastern, and other indigenous Mexican languages, highlighting the cultural and linguistic diversity of families with young children.

Exhibit 14. Child Home Language, by Academic Performance

Child Home Language	% Countywide (n = 2,029)	% Low-performing Schools (n = 1,494)	% Medium- performing Schools (n = 320)	% High-performing Schools (n = 143)
Spanish and English	38.2	40.2	39.1	12.6
Spanish only	33.9	38.6	29.4	5.6
English only	20.8	14.7	26.3	62.9
Mixteco or Triqui and another language	2.5	3.1	1.3	–
Mixteco or Triqui only	0.6	0.9	–	–
Other	5.2	3.5	7.2	18.9

Over half of Monterey County parents with incoming kindergartners had a high school education or less. Parent education is one of the family characteristics most strongly associated with a child’s likelihood of achieving comprehensive mastery. As displayed in Exhibit 15, over one-third (39%) of parents reported having less than a high school education, while 19% had

high school or equivalent and 42% reported having more than a high school education. Low-performing schools display lower levels of parent education; medium- and high-performing schools display higher parent education, with almost all parents in high-performing schools (95%) reporting more than a high school education.

Exhibit 15. Parent Education, by Academic Performance

	% Countywide (n = 1,964)	% Low-performing Schools (n = 1,448)	% Medium- performing Schools (n = 308)	% High-performing Schools (n = 136)
Less than high school	38.9	45.4	30.5	0.7
High school or equivalent	19.0	20.6	18.8	4.4
More than high school	42.1	34.0	50.6	94.9

Half of KRA participants were at or below the Federal Poverty Line. Poverty is also associated with the likelihood of achieving comprehensive mastery in key developmental domains. As displayed in Exhibit 16, 41% of families countywide reported an annual income of

\$20,000 or less, and just 13% reported an annual income of more than \$60,000. Among families whose children attended low-performing schools, income was lower and the rate of poverty was higher.

Exhibit 16. Family Annual Income, by Academic Performance

Annual income levels in dollars	% Countywide (n = 1,722)	% Low-performing Schools (n = 1,280)	% Medium-performing Schools (n = 277)	% High-performing Schools (n = 104)
\$20,000 or less	40.7	45.3	36.1	6.7
\$20,001–32,000	29.6	31.7	29.3	7.6
\$32,001–60,000	16.6	15.3	18.8	25
\$60,001+	13.2	7.8	15.9	60.6

Exhibit 17. Poverty Level, by Academic Performance

Percent of families at/below Federal Poverty Level*	% Countywide (n = 1,425)	% Low-performing Schools (n = 1,039)	% Medium-performing Schools (n = 232)	% High-performing Schools (n = 96)
Est. at or below Federal Poverty Level	50.0	56.9	43.1	7.3
Est. above Federal Poverty Level	50.0	43.1	56.9	92.7

*Poverty status was estimated using household size and income as reported in categories.

Most families had lived at their current residence for more than three years. Families with children at low- and medium-performing schools were more likely to report having lived in their current home for more than three years (63% and 59%, respectively). However, families with

incoming kindergartners who attended high-performing schools were more likely to have lived at their current residence for a shorter period of time, including one-fourth (25%) who reported they had lived there for less than six months.

Exhibit 18. Time at Current Resident, by Academic Performance

Length of time at current residence	% Countywide (n = 2,031)	% Low-performing Schools (n = 1,498)	% Medium-performing Schools (n = 319)	% High-performing Schools (n = 141)
Less than 6 months	10.0	8.1	10.3	24.8
6–11 months	7.8	6.9	7.5	17.7
1–3 years	24.0	22.4	22.9	41.8
More than 3 years	58.2	62.6	59.2	15.6

Over three-fourths of families reported that their child had very good or excellent health. Child health status was also found to be associated with a child’s likelihood of displaying comprehensive mastery upon kindergarten entry. A far greater percentage of children

who attended high-performing schools were reported as having excellent health compared to those who attended low- or medium-performing schools (64% compared to 40% and 36%, respectively).

Exhibit 19. Child Health, by Academic Performance

Rating of child’s overall health	% Countywide (n = 2,044)	% Low-performing Schools (n = 1,504)	% Medium-performing Schools (n = 324)	% High-performing Schools (n = 143)
Poor	0.2	0.2	0.6	–
Fair	4.1	4.5	3.4	1.4
Good	19.1	20.9	16.0	7.0
Very Good	35.4	34.8	44.1	28.0
Excellent	41.2	39.6	35.8	63.6

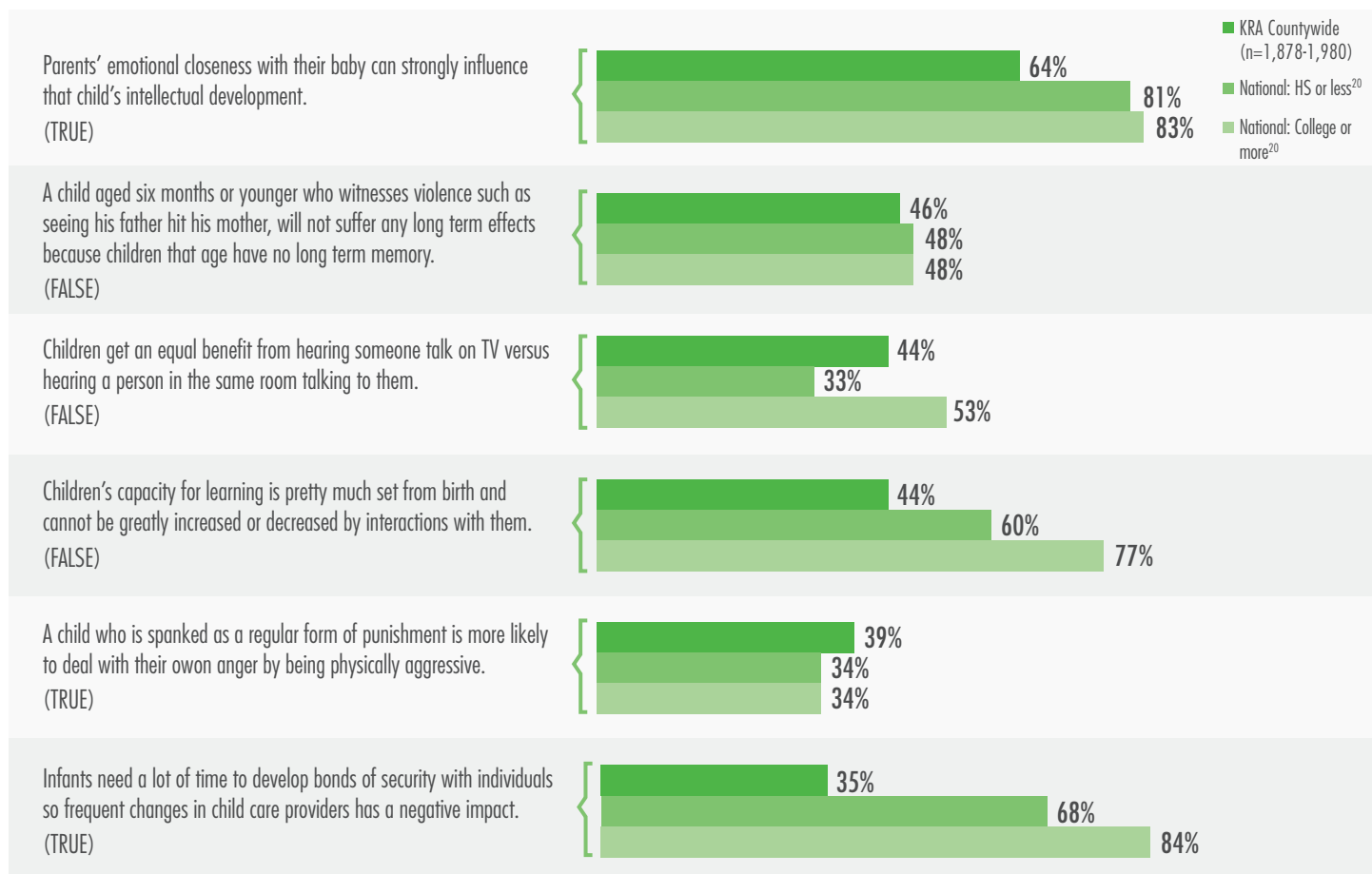
Parents’ knowledge about child development varied by topic area. Research, such as the Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework,¹⁸ tells us that children are more likely to do well in school and life when parents are knowledgeable about parenting and child development. To learn more about this area, the 2015 KRA family survey included six items designed to assess parents’ understanding of child development. These questions were taken from a national survey of adults conducted in 2000, which included over 3,000 American adults, a subset of whom were parents of children aged 0 to 6 years.¹⁹ Each statement is either true or false, and respondents were asked to assess whether each statement was *definitely true*, *probably true*, *definitely false*, or *probably false*. The proportion of KRA participants who provided the desired response ranged from about one-third to two-thirds, as displayed in Exhibit 20, which also includes comparisons to the national sample of parents with a high school-level education or less and the national sample of parents with college or more.

- For four of the statements, a smaller percentage of Monterey County families provided the desired response compared to the national sample, regardless of education level.
- For one statement, *children get an equal benefit from hearing someone talk on TV versus hearing a person in the same room talking to them*, Monterey County parents were more likely to provide the desired response than the national sample of parents with a less than high school education.
- For the statement, *a child who is spanked as a regular form of punishment is more likely to deal with their own anger by being physically aggressive*, a larger percentage of Monterey County parents provided the desired response compared to the national sample, regardless of education level.

18 Charlyn Harper Browne, *The Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework: Branching Out and Reaching Deeper*, report prepared for the Center for the Study of Social Policy, September 2014.

19 DYG, Inc., *What Grown-Ups Understand about Child Development: A National Benchmark Survey: Comprehensive Report*, a report prepared for Zero to Three, 2000, <http://www.zerotothree.org>.

Exhibit 20. Parents' Knowledge about Child Development



The findings in this chapter demonstrate that the family characteristics associated with comprehensive mastery were higher income, higher educational attainment, better reported child health, and greater knowledge of child development. We also saw that, while there are some common trends among Monterey County families with incoming kindergartners—such as a large majority

being Latino and speaking Spanish and/or English to their children at home—there is substantial variation in family characteristics when we look at them by academic performance. The next chapter explores early learning experiences that are associated with comprehensive mastery and describes what those experiences look like for Monterey County families.



Chapter 3: Early Learning Experiences

A majority of parents countywide report their child transitioned to kindergarten with ease.

Starting school can be scary and exciting for both parents and children. During this time, parents are encouraged to take part in activities designed to ease the transition to school. To better understand their experience with the first days of school, parents were asked to rate the ease of their child's transition to kindergarten. As indicated in Exhibit 21, 77% of parents countywide rated their child's transition as *very easy* or *somewhat easy*, findings on par with those of the 2012 KRA. That said, there were noteworthy differences in reported ease of transition. For example, parents whose children attended high-performing schools were more likely to report an easy transition for their children compared to parents whose children attended low-performing schools (84% versus 75%, respectively).

Exhibit 21. Ease of Kindergarten Transition, by Academic Performance

Ease of Kindergarten Transition	% Countywide (n = 1,986)	% Low-performing Schools (n = 1,455)	% Medium- performing Schools (n = 317)	% High-performing Schools (n = 143)
Very difficult	5.5	6.1	3.5	5.6
Somewhat difficult	17.9	19.3	14.8	10.5
Somewhat easy	28.5	27.3	34.1	27.3
Very easy	48.1	47.3	47.6	56.6

While the previous chapter shows that family characteristics (e.g., parental education) strongly predict school readiness, participation in early learning experiences and practices can alter and improve the developmental growth of all children, especially those with socioeconomic disadvantages. Since child development starts at home, how adults nurture and support young children in the early years, impacts their long-term success in school and in life. To narrow the gap caused by socio-demographic disadvantages that can impede child development, greater efforts are needed to build the skills of parents, caregivers, and childcare providers known to impact the quality of a child's development and early learning experiences. Practically speaking, that means starting early, targeting parents with the greatest needs, engaging and supporting parents using a range of services and interventions, and improving the quality of both formal and informal early care settings.

In this chapter, we focus on what families in Monterey County are doing to support school readiness. Our findings are based on surveys completed by 2,103 parents and caregivers of children who participated in the 2015 KRA. Kindergarten teachers distributed the surveys, available in both English and Spanish, at the start of the 2015 school year.

Early Learning Experiences Associated with School Readiness

The 2015 KRA revealed five key early learning experiences that are associated with comprehensive mastery in school readiness domains. Children whose teachers rated them as having comprehensive mastery upon kindergarten entry were more likely to have experienced:

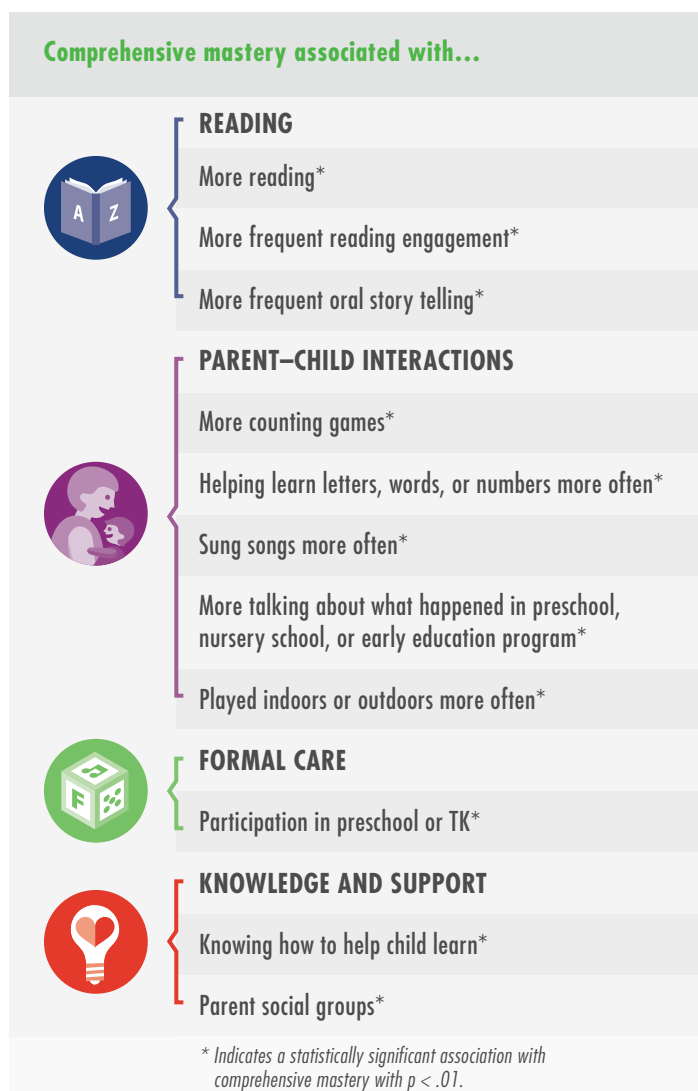
1. Frequent reading. Parents who read to their child more often were more likely to have children who displayed comprehensive mastery. This finding is consistent with past KRA results and research demonstrating that reading at home is one of the most influential activities parents can engage in to impact school readiness.²¹

2. A variety of early literacy activities. Besides reading more to children, parents who showed their child pictures from books more often or engaged in frequent oral story telling were also more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery. While a lack of basic literacy skills can prevent some parents from reading to their children, these are ways in which all parents can support early literacy development.

3. A variety of parent-child interactions. Parents who engaged in home educational activities more often were more likely to have children with comprehensive mastery. Home educational activities include playing counting games (like singing songs with numbers or reading books with numbers); helping a child learn letters, words, or numbers; singing songs; talking about what happened in a child's early care program; or playing outdoors.

4. Preschool or Transitional Kindergarten. Children who participated in a formal care and learning environment, such as preschool or TK in the year before kindergarten, were more likely to achieve comprehensive mastery.

Exhibit 22. Associations with Comprehensive Mastery



21 Lisbeth B. Schorr and Vicky Marchand, *Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade*, a report prepared for Pathways Mapping Initiative, June 2007.

Early Learning Experiences Countywide

Now that we understand the early learning experiences associated with comprehensive mastery—more reading, variety of literacy activities, variety of parent-child interactions, enrollment in formal care, and parental knowledge and social support—we will explore the early learning experiences among Monterey County’s families.

On average, Monterey County parents read to their children about four days per week. The research is clear—reading positively impacts school readiness.²² The more parents engage their children in literacy activities, the more likely they are to have children who achieve comprehensive mastery.

As displayed in Exhibit 23, parents countywide reported reading to their child an average of 3.8 days per week. Parents whose child attends a low-performing school reported reading less often (average of 3.6 days per week) than parents whose child attends a high-performing school (average of 5.1 days per week). We see a similar trend when looking at parent education. Parents with less than a high school education reported reading less often (3.1 days per week on average) than parents with more than a high school education (4.5 days per week on average).

Exhibit 23. Days Reading, by Academic Performance and Parent Education

Average number of days per week of early literacy activities by academic performance	Countywide	Low-performing Schools	Medium-performing Schools	High-performing Schools
Read to your child (n = 1,959)	3.8	3.6	4.0	5.1
... and parent education	Countywide	Less than high school	High school or equivalent	More than high school
Read to your child (n = 1,922)	3.8	3.1	3.5	4.5



While reading to children is important, research points to additional critical literacy activities.²³ The 2015 KRA revealed that parents countywide reported showing their child a picture from a book an average of 4.1 days per week and telling their child an oral story an average of 3.6 days per week. Like reading to your child (see above), parents whose child attends a low-performing school show their child a picture from a book less often (average of 3.9 days per week) than parents whose child attends a high-performing school (average of 5.2 days per week). This pattern continues when looking at parent education. Parents with less than a high school education showed their child a picture from a book less often (average of 3.6 days per week) than parents with more than a high school education (average of 4.7 days per week).

22 National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: An Update: Workshop Summary* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2012).

23 Isbell, Rebecca T., “Telling and Retelling Stories: Learning Language and Literacy.” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, March 2002).

Exhibit 24. Early Literacy Activities, by Academic Performance and Parent Education

Average number of days per week of early literacy activities by academic performance	Countywide	Low-performing Schools	Medium-performing Schools	High-performing Schools
Show your child a picture from a book (<i>n</i> = 1,939)	4.1	3.9	4.2	5.2
Tell your child a story (oral, not picture books) (<i>n</i> = 1,938)	3.6	3.5	3.6	4.0
... and parent education	Countywide	Less than high school	High school or equivalent	More than high school
Show your child a picture from a book (<i>n</i> = 1,902)	4.1	3.6	3.9	4.7
Tell your child a story (oral, not picture books) (<i>n</i> = 1,902)	3.6	3.2	3.6	3.8

Monterey County parents engage their children in a variety of home educational activities.

There are many activities that parents can do to involve their children in early learning and to promote school readiness. Interactions with young children—such as talking and asking questions, playing with them or encouraging them to play with other children, involving a child in household errands, and helping them figure out how to put on their clothes and tie their shoes—promote school readiness by giving children knowledge and opportunities to solve problems on their own. In 2015, we asked parents to tell us how many times per week during the year before kindergarten they engaged in home educational activities with their child. As shown in Exhibit 25, parents reported most frequently (defined as daily) taking part in the following five activities: playing indoors (64%), playing with toys (59%), talking about what happened in a formal care program (57%), and practicing self-care skills (55%). Further analysis revealed that parents who engaged their children in these activities more often were more likely to have children who displayed comprehensive mastery.



Exhibit 25. Top Parent–Child Activities, by Frequency of Participation

Activities	% Daily
Played indoors (<i>n</i> = 2,045)	63.8
Played with toys (<i>n</i> = 2,047)	59.3
Talked about what happened in preschool, nursery, or early education program (<i>n</i> = 1,950)	56.7
Practice self-care skills (<i>n</i> = 2,020)	55.2
Played with other children of the same age (<i>n</i> = 2,028)	46.9

While most children received formal care in the year before kindergarten, children attending high-performing schools were more likely to have been enrolled in a formal care setting than other children. How and where young children spend their time influences their readiness for kindergarten. Over half of parents (53%) reported that their child was enrolled in public or private preschool or TK in the year before

kindergarten, and just under half (49%) reported that their child received care from a relative other than a parent (see Exhibit 26). Over three-fourths of parents whose children attended high-performing schools (79%) reported that their child was enrolled in public or private preschool or TK, compared to 49% of parents whose children attended low-performing schools.

Exhibit 26. Source of Child Care, by Academic Performance

Source of child care	% Countywide (n = 1,464)	% Low-performing Schools (n = 1,207)	% Medium- performing Schools (n = 269)	% High-performing Schools (n = 123)
Public or private preschool or Transitional Kindergarten	52.9	48.9	52.8	78.8
Relative other than a parent	48.9	53.4	48.7	15.4
Head Start	21.7	22.9	24.9	5.7
Private home from a non-relative (licensed)	14.1	15.7	12.3	5.7
Other*	3.8	2.6	5.6	10.6

*Other includes after school program, babysitter, camp, church, and playgroup.

While most parents reported a strong bond with their children, fewer felt they had the support they need or knew how to help their child learn. The job of raising young children can be stressful for any parent, regardless of their education or income. Having access to a strong emotional support network—such as extended family, friends, or neighbors—helps parents feel supported and better able to help their child. The 2015 KRA revealed that two-thirds of parents (66%) strongly

agreed that they and their child are very close to each other (see Exhibit 27). The percentage of parents who strongly agreed dropped when asked to describe their support network and ability to help their child. As an example, about half of parents (48%) strongly agreed they have others who will listen when they need to talk about their problems, while 37% strongly agreed that they know how to help their child learn.

Exhibit 27. Parent-Child Relationship

Parent-Child Relationship	% Strongly Disagree		% Neutral		% Strongly Agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
My child and I are very close to each other (n = 1,980)	5.3	1.5	1.5	9.3	6.5	10.1	65.8
I have others who will listen when I need to talk about my problems (n = 1,947)	8.3	3.5	3.3	21.0	6.4	9.9	47.6
I know how to help my child learn (n = 1,974)	5.5	2.0	2.6	26.7	13.0	13.4	36.8

The most accessed community service among parents is the Women, Infants, and Children program.

Although the KRA did not reveal strong associations between participation in community services and comprehensive mastery at kindergarten entry, one of the long-term goals of First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) and other social impact organizations is to create links between parents with young children who need access to appropriate services, support, and resources in Monterey County. For the 2015 KRA, we asked parents if they, their

partner, or their child participated in a range of community services for families. The top responses countywide were Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (45%); food stamps, CalFresh, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (28%), and Early Head Start (18%) (see Exhibit 28). Parents whose children attended low- and medium-performing schools were more likely to participate in community services than parents whose children attended high-performing schools.

Exhibit 28. Parent Participation in Services by Academic Performance

Parent participation in services by academic performance	% Countywide (n = 1,844)	% Low-performing Schools (n = 1,368)	% Medium- performing Schools (n = 286)	% High-performing Schools (n = 124)
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	45.1	50.4	40.6	9.7
Food stamps, also called CalFresh or SNAP	28.3	31.3	27.6	4.0
Early Head Start	17.5	17.5	23.8	4.0
Prenatal care	9.0	9.5	8.7	5.6
Food bank	8.9	10.2	8.0	1.6
Unemployment insurance / benefits	6.4	7.3	5.6	1.6
Assistance for families with applications for benefits	5.2	6.1	4.2	–
Parent education classes	4.9	5.0	5.6	3.2
Home visits	4.2	4.6	4.2	1.6
Organized playgroup	3.4	3.1	2.8	7.3

Although family characteristics are often associated with a child's readiness for school, early learning experiences also play a key role in the development of children and future academic and social success. As the 2015 KRA reveals, parents who engage their children often in a variety of early literacy and home educational activities, enroll their

children in preschool or TK, and feel knowledgeable and supported are more likely to have children who display comprehensive mastery. In the next section, we examine the characteristics, educational backgrounds, and beliefs of teachers from across early care settings.

Spotlight on Monterey County Educators

In addition to parents and caregivers, educators are the most influential adults in a young child’s life.

As such, educators have an opportunity to position young children on a trajectory of future academic, social, and career success. In addition to early learning environments such as informal child care, Head Start, and other preschool settings, TK is playing an increasingly important role in young children’s early education experiences. TK was created by California’s 2010 Kindergarten Readiness Act, and offers children with birthdays between September and December a developmentally appropriate curriculum taught by credentialed K–12 teachers. The year 2015 marks the first time TK teachers have participated in the countywide KRA.

As part of the 2015 KRA, 219 educators from across Monterey County, including 81 early childhood educators, 27 TK teachers, and 111 kindergarten teachers, provided information about their backgrounds, teaching practices, and beliefs. To provide a more complete description of the state of early education in Monterey County, this spotlight highlights key findings related to ECE Providers’ education and training, classroom practices, pre-reading and language activities, and efforts to support children with special needs.

A majority of early childhood educators, TK teachers, and kindergarten teachers across Monterey County speak a language other than English (see Exhibit 29). About three-fourths (72%) of early childhood educators reported speaking Spanish, as did 59% of TK teachers and 61% of kindergarten teachers.

Exhibit 29. Teacher Language

	ECE Providers (n = 81)	TK Teachers (n = 27)	Kindergarten Teachers (n = 109)
Percent of teachers who speak a language other than English	84.0	59.3	67.0

Eleven percent of early childhood educators reported having a graduate degree; this percentage was higher

among kindergarten teachers (36%) and highest among TK teachers (48%).

Exhibit 30. Teacher Education Level

Highest grade or year of school completed	ECE Providers (n = 81)	TK Teachers (n = 27)	Kindergarten Teachers (n = 110)
Associate’s degree or less*	69.1	0	0
Bachelor’s or other college four-year degree	19.8	51.9	64.5
Graduate degree (Master’s or Doctorate)	11.1	48.1	35.5

* “or less” only applies to ECE providers; within this group, 61% had an Associate’s degree or vocational certificate or two-year degree; 23% had attended college but received no degree; 14% had a high school diploma or GED; and 2% had less than a high school education.

Early childhood educators, TK teachers, and kindergarten teachers reported participating in different types of trainings in the past year.

To provide high-quality early learning experiences, educators must be presented with regular opportunities to participate in training and professional development. Among all types of educators, a large portion had participated in trainings about English language learners while a smaller share participated in trainings about kindergarten transition (see Exhibit 31).

Early childhood educators are required to attend and document training hours to maintain their permits. Consequently, compared to TK and kindergarten teachers, a larger share of early childhood educators participated in trainings in multiple areas, including in the use of creative materials, children with disabilities and other special needs, and children or families from different cultural backgrounds. Conversely, 22% of TK teachers said they did not participate in any trainings in the past year, compared to just 3% of early childhood educators and 7% of kindergarten teachers.

Exhibit 31. Teacher Training

Teacher training in the past year	ECE Providers (n = 71)	TK Teachers (n = 27)	Kindergarten Teachers (n = 109)
English language learners	50.7	40.7	70.6
Use of creative materials	69.0	40.7	22.9
Children with disabilities and other special needs	59.2	18.5	15.6
Kindergarten transition	16.9	25.9	13.8
Children or families from cultural backgrounds different from your own	52.1	22.2	10.1
Did not participate in any trainings in the past year	2.8	22.2	7.3



Educators at all three levels reported a desire for additional trainings in a range of areas.

The majority of early childhood educators wanted more training in all areas (Exhibit 32). The most requested trainings among TK and kindergarten teachers were children with disabilities or special needs and kindergarten transition; just under half of kindergarten teachers also wanted more training on English language learners.

Exhibit 32. Desired Training

Additional trainings desired	ECE Providers (n = 78)	TK Teachers (n = 24)	Kindergarten Teachers (n = 106)
Children with disabilities and other special needs	62.8	33.3	48.1
Kindergarten transition	55.1	33.3	40.6
English language learners	51.3	16.7	46.2
Children or families from cultural backgrounds different from your own	53.8	16.7	19.8

All educator groups generally agreed that young children should be encouraged to play and learn through active exploration, and that classroom activities should be responsive to individual development. In some cases, educators did express different opinions. For example, early childhood educators were more likely to agree that children should be allowed

to choose their own activities while kindergarten teachers were more likely to agree that they should learn to form letters correctly on a lined page and to color within pre-defined lines (Exhibit 33).

Exhibit 33. Teacher Beliefs

	Percent who agree or strongly agree		
	ECE Providers (n = 78–81)	TK Teachers (n = 27)	Kindergarten Teachers (n = 107–110)
1. Children should be encouraged to socialize with other children	88.9	96.3	93.6
2. Children should be encouraged to play	88.9	96.3	93.6
3. Children should learn through active explorations	88.7	96.3	94.5
4. Activities should be responsive to individual differences in development	83.8	96.3	89.7
5. Children should be instructed in recognizing the single letters of the alphabet, isolated from words	34.6	51.8	46.8
6. Children should learn to form letters correctly on a pre-lined page	22.2	48.1	71.6
7. Children should be allowed to select many of their own activities from a variety of prepared learning areas (writing, science center, etc.)	83.8	74.0	52.3
8. Children should learn to color within predefined lines	15.1	40.7	56.9



As children advance along the continuum of early learning environments, educators are engaging them in pre-reading and language activities more often.

In general, a larger share of TK teachers reported doing these kinds of activities three or more times a week than early childhood educators, and a larger share of kindergarten teachers reported doing these activities three or more times a week than TK teachers (Exhibit 34). These differences in engagement in pre-reading and language activities may be related to teachers' perceptions of developmentally appropriate approaches to early education.

Exhibit 34. Classroom Practices, Pre-Reading and Language Activities

Pre-Reading and Language Activities	Percent 3+ Times a Week		
	ECE Providers (n = 78–81)	TK Teachers (n = 26-27)	Kindergarten Teachers (n = 106-111)
1. Letter recognition	63.0	96.3	99.1
2. Exploring math concepts	76.3	96.3	98.2
3. Writing own name	58.0	92.6	97.3
4. Phonemic awareness	46.9	85.2	96.4
5. Engage in informal conversations	87.6	92.6	93.5
6. Writing the letters of the alphabet	50.1	66.6	97.3
7. Reading books in English	82.7	92.6	91.9
8. Children listen to read stories where they see print (e.g., big books)	84.0	70.4	91.0

Monterey County's kindergarten teachers, particularly those at low-performing schools, would benefit from additional supports for children with special needs. Kindergarten teachers play a crucial role in supporting children with special needs and their families. Ideally, upon kindergarten entry, a child's special needs will have already been identified and

steps taken to begin addressing those needs. However, depending on a child's early learning experiences, this is not always the case. Monterey County kindergarten teachers reported that a professional had alerted them about developmental problems or delays for about 6% of incoming students (Exhibit 35). This is lower than the statewide rate for public school students receiving special education services, which stands at 10%.²⁴

²⁴ Rachel Ehlers, *Overview of Special Education in California*, a report prepared for the Legislative Analyst's Office, January 3, 2013, <http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2013/edu/special-ed-primer/special-ed-primer-010313.aspx>.

Exhibit 35. Developmental Delays, by Academic Performance

Has any professional mentioned this child has a developmental problem or delay?	Countywide (n = 2,364)	Low-performing Schools (n = 1,739)	Medium- performing Schools (n = 409)	High-performing Schools (n = 145)
Yes	6.2	5.2	10.8	6.2

For those children with reported special needs, kindergarten teachers noted several ways that the condition was being addressed, which most commonly included modifications to classroom activities, discussions or plans

in progress, Individual Education Plans or Individualized Family Service Plans, and observations or evaluations (Exhibit 36).

Exhibit 36. Response to Developmental Delays

How are conditions and concerns being addressed?	Kindergarten Teachers (n = 2,235)
Modifications or accommodations to classroom or activities	51.3
Discussions/plans in progress	41.6
IEP of IFSP developed	35.5
Child has been observed or evaluated	35.5
Meeting with parents and special needs team	26.4
Specialist contacted	29.9

Monterey County’s early childhood educators, TK teachers, and kindergarten teachers play a crucial role in preparing young children for what lays ahead in school and beyond. Most of these educators speak Spanish—an important skill for communicating with many of the County’s children and families. TK and kindergarten teachers are far more likely to have a graduate degree than are early education providers, and, while a large majority reported participating in trainings in the past year, they also expressed a desire for more professional

development opportunities. In terms of teaching practices, most recognized the value of play and active exploration at this stage in a child’s development, as well as the importance of classroom pre-reading and language activities. As in the 2012 KRA, identifying and working with children with special needs emerged as an area in which educators would benefit from additional support. The next chapter identifies recommendations based on the 2015 KRA findings for parents and community members, educators and administrators, policymakers and key influencers, and F5MC.

Chapter 4: Recommendations



F5MC is one of the only flexible funding sources committed to meeting the cross-sectoral needs of families with young children. And yet sustainable, transformative change requires active participation from many individuals and organizations. With that in mind, F5MC aligns its work with countless champions, agencies, and initiatives to support efforts designed to prepare children for kindergarten. The 2015 KRA offers rigorous, county-specific information to track progress and drive data-driven solutions. Listed below, we offer lessons, in no order of priority, for ways that parents, educators, policy makers, key influencers, and F5MC can put the 2015 KRA findings into practice.

Recommendations for Parents and Community Members

Read, show picture books, and tell your child stories every day. National and local research shows that reading, showing picture books, or telling oral stories to young children has more impact on school success than any other single activity. The 2015 KRA demonstrates that, on average, Monterey County parents read to their children a little less than four days per week, indicating some room for improvement. If you are a parent, take time to read, show picture books, or tell your child a story every day, from birth to kindergarten and beyond. This can be a challenging practice for many parents for many reasons, and may require additional support from the larger community.

Chapter 4

Take time to play with your child. Early childhood educators, TK teachers, and kindergarten teachers agreed that socio-emotional development—the skills in the Self Regulation and Self and Social Development domains—were most important upon kindergarten entry. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the United Nations High Commission all agree that play is essential to a child’s healthy development, especially play with caring adults.²⁵ Research shows that play with parents sets the stage for children’s ability to engage successfully with peers. Parents can do their part to strengthen children’s socio-emotional development by playing indoors or outside, with toys, or by engaging in projects together.

Advocate for and enroll your child in a quality preschool. The 2015 KRA demonstrates that preschool continues to be one of the best investments any parent can make in their child’s future. If you have not done so already, explore the options available for your child in Monterey County. In particular, parents are encouraged to find out if they are eligible for Head Start or state preschool, to sign up for preschool waiting lists as early as possible, and to advocate for more childcare in your community.



²⁵ Rachel White, *The Power of Play: A Research Summary on Play and Learning*, a report prepared for the Minnesota Children’s Museum, <http://www.mcm.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/MCMResearchSummary1.pdf>.



Advocate for and enroll in a parent development program.

The 2015 KRA revealed that children whose parents had greater knowledge of child development were more likely to have comprehensive mastery upon kindergarten entry. This finding aligns with evidence that points to the benefits of parenting programs that model positive home educational activities, provide information

about child health and development, give referrals and access to community resources, and connect parents to one another. Visit the F5MC website for ideas about parent development programs: <http://www.first5monterey.org>. Parents can do their part by asking schools and districts to support and include parent development programs in their state-mandated LCAPs (Local Control Accountability Plan).



Recommendations for Educators and Administrators

Encourage parents to engage their children often in a variety of early literacy activities.

The 2015 KRA data affirmed that early literacy activities are highly recommended to parents by both early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers. In fact, nearly all educator groups in the assessment told parents they should read to their children at home. Even for parents who lack basic literacy skills, there are other literacy activities they can do to support kindergarten readiness, including showing pictures from books and oral story telling. Make sure your students' parents hear this recommendation from you early and often. Instill more confidence in parents by sharing techniques you have used successfully in the classroom for reading, so they can apply those ideas with their children at home.

Provide ECE Providers with the supports they need to identify and refer children with developmental concerns or delays.

The 2015 KRA reveals that a smaller share of incoming students in Monterey County have a reported developmental delay than the statewide rate for public school students receiving special education services. This insight points to a clear need to offer early education providers with supports to help them identify potential delays and refer children and their families to appropriate services. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children are referred to and receive developmental screenings by trained health and social service professionals periodically from birth through age five.

Use the 2015 KRA to promote early childhood programs and align them with the K–12 system.

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) represents a significant reform in California's K–12 educational system and offers the early learning community—parents, educators, service providers, policy makers, and key influencers—a unique opportunity to ensure that school districts highlight early learning as a key strategy. LCFF stipulates that financing for schools is now highly dependent on the creation and updates to LCAPs,

which must be open to educators, parents, students, and the community. We encourage stakeholders to use the 2015 KRA results in the LCAP process to inform plans to prioritize and fund high-quality early childhood development programs that align with the K–12 system. In addition, districts should explore the challenges that low- and medium-performing schools have in addressing the conditions faced by children with special needs. The 2015 KRA revealed that these schools reported lower rates of classroom modifications or discussion/plans in progress relative to high-performing schools.

Support Pre-K to 3rd grade alignment efforts.

The 2015 KRA reveals that children enter kindergarten with a range of formal and informal care experiences. Findings also show some divergence in teaching beliefs and practices between ECE Providers, TK teachers, and kindergarten teachers—much of which is in line with developmentally appropriate practices. Still, there are currently no systems or supports in place to align curricula across early education and kindergarten settings (and beyond). Imagine being a kindergarten teacher tasked with supporting the learning and development of a roomful of five-year-olds, yet without the benefit of knowing about the learning and social environment each child is attuned to and his or her readiness for kindergarten. This is the norm in kindergartens far and wide, but increasingly, educators, policymakers, and funders are considering how to supply teachers with a better understanding of their students' readiness and previous experiences—information that can only help them to help their students thrive. Pre-K to 3rd grade alignment may help by employing systems-level change to improve children's transitions from preschool through early elementary school. Facilitating an exchange between Pre-K and elementary school systems helps align high-quality early learning experiences and thereby improves student proficiency and school success. With this in mind, administrators and teachers from preschools and elementary schools and other early education leaders should engage in developing and implementing district-wide transition and alignment plans to bridge the gap between preschool and elementary education systems.

Continue to support social-emotional development of children. A wide range of interactions, such as play and singing songs with children, are linked to comprehensive mastery. Educators highlighted the importance of children entering kindergarten with strong self and social mastery. We strongly recommend that educators receive more training and support in classroom strategies and activities that cultivate social-emotional development.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Key Influencers

Business and philanthropy should build on local successes and support cost-effective investments in early childhood education.

The responsibility of investing in Monterey County's youngest children is shared by families and those in a position of influence. Children are Monterey County's most precious resource, and key influencers, including those in business and philanthropy, play an important role in bringing attention and resources to ensure children receive the best possible start. In 2011, Nobel Memorial Prize winner Dr. James J. Heckman met with Monterey County business and philanthropic leaders to discuss the economic good sense of investing in quality early childhood development, especially for under-resourced families.²⁶ Since then, many business and philanthropic leaders have joined forces with community partners in a range of early childhood development efforts, including Bright Beginnings, Bright Futures, IMPACT Monterey County, and United Way. Listed below are ways business and philanthropy can build on the momentum by supporting cost-effective investments in early childhood opportunities that have proven track records,²⁷ including by:

- Funding training for educators pursuing quality improvements (e.g., providers who face challenges getting training, technical assistance, and funding to improve quality)
- Developing and implementing comprehensive screening and referral systems at the county level
- Investing in innovative public/private financing mechanisms for expanding evidence-based programs

Invest in capacity-building opportunities. The 2015 KRA revealed that early childhood educators generally agree that young children should engage in active exploration and classroom activities should respond to individual development. Moreover, two rigorous, multi-year evaluations of universal and targeted Pre-K programs in Georgia²⁸ and North Carolina²⁹ found that educators' beliefs about developmentally appropriate teaching practices are predictive of classroom quality. Given this information, policymakers and key influencers should support capacity-building opportunities for early childhood, transitional kindergarten, and kindergarten educators that support the use of developmentally-appropriate practices.



²⁶ First 5 Monterey County, *Strategic Planning Framework, July 2017–June 2023*. See also the Heckman Equation, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://heckmanequation.org/about-professor-heckman>.

²⁷ J. B. Pritzker, Jeffrey Bradach, and Katherine Kaufman, "How Donors Can Spread Ideas to Help Kids," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, April 4, 2016.

²⁸ Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Schaaf, J. M., Hildebrandt, L.M., & Pan, Y. (2015). Children's pre-k outcomes and classroom quality in Georgia's Pre-K Program: Findings from the 2013–2014 evaluation study, Executive summary. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.

²⁹ Peisner Feinberg, E. S., Schaaf, J. M., Hildebrandt, L., & LaForett, D. R. (2013). Quality and characteristics of the North Carolina Pre Kindergarten Program: 2011–2012 Statewide evaluation. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.



Recommendations for First 5 Monterey County

Continue to champion early childhood. Key influencers across the county agree that F5MC is well-positioned to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood, especially prenatal through age 5, and advocate for policies and practices that support early childhood development at the local, state, and federal levels. One place to start is by continuing to champion efforts to invest in quality, affordable early care and education. Findings from current and past KRAs align with national research that points to the individual and societal benefits of having quality early care education. F5MC has embraced a significant role in this by investing in the professional development of early childhood educators and providers in Monterey County. Still, there is much work to be done. F5MC should continue to champion public policy efforts aimed at increasing the number of affordable slots available in quality preschools.

Promote early childhood literacy. Since their start, KRAs have highlighted the enduring benefits of engaging in a range of literacy activities to children before kindergarten. Now, F5MC can further ensure that funded programs continue to promote the importance of early literacy by building parents' skills at reading, showing pictures, and telling stories to their children as often as possible. F5MC can also help facilitate access to developmentally appropriate books and early literacy resources.

Work with providers to support children with special needs. As noted above, the relatively low rate of incoming kindergartners in Monterey County with reported developmental delays indicates that more can be done to screen and assess young children and refer them and their families to appropriate services when needed. As a convener, F5MC is well-positioned to work with its funded partners and other local agencies to build an increasingly integrated support network to help ensure that young children are regularly screened and to facilitate referrals across provider agencies.

Take full advantage of the 2015 KRA by supporting in-depth explorations of data collected. The 2015 KRA represents the largest countywide assessment completed and includes information on nearly 2,500 incoming kindergartners in Monterey County. While the information presented in this report, the accompanying databook, and technical appendix is comprehensive, there are opportunities to engage in a range of analyses beyond the information found in this report. Examples include exploring the relationships between family use of supports and services and home learning environments, and more closely examining variation in mastery among children in low-performing schools.

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We are especially indebted to the kindergarten teachers who chose to participate in this study, despite multiple and competing demands at the start of the school year. They administered more than 2,400 observational assessments to incoming kindergartners and encouraged over 2,100 parents to complete family surveys. Their professionalism and flexibility, in addition to their demonstrated commitment to serving Monterey County's children, made it possible to collect information about a representative sample of incoming kindergartners.

The schools that participated in the 2015 KRA are:

Alisal Union School District

Alisal Community School
Bardin Elementary School
César E. Chávez Elementary School
Creekside Elementary School
Fremont Elementary School
Jesse G. Sánchez Elementary School
Oscar F. Loya Elementary School

Gonzales Unified School District

La Gloria Elementary School

Graves Elementary School District

Graves Elementary School

Greenfield Union School District

Mary Chapa Literacy and Technology Academy

King City Union School District

Del Rey Elementary School
King City Arts Magnet School
Santa Lucia Elementary School

Monterey Peninsula Unified School District

Crompton Elementary School
Del Rey Woods Elementary School
Dual Language Academy
Foothill Elementary School
George C. Marshall Elementary School
Highland Elementary School
La Mesa Elementary School
Marina Vista Elementary School
Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School
Olson Elementary School
Ord Terrace Elementary School

North Monterey County Unified School District

Castroville Elementary School
Echo Valley Elementary School
Elkhorn Elementary School
Prunedale Elementary School

Pajaro Valley Unified School District

Hall Elementary School

Salinas City Elementary School District

Henry F. Kammann Elementary School
Laurel Wood Elementary School
Lincoln Elementary School
Loma Vista Elementary School
Los Padres Elementary School
University Park Elementary School

San Antonio Union School District

San Antonio Elementary School

Soledad Unified School District

Gabilan Elementary School
Jack Francioni Elementary School



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