



PRESS RELEASE
Human Services Department
COUNTY OF SONOMA



For immediate release

Local Study Shows Persistent Kindergarten Readiness Gap between Latinx and White Children

26% of Latinx Children Versus 51% of White Children Prepared for School

Santa Rosa, CA – Attendance at preschool, parental income and early learning opportunities affect Sonoma County children’s readiness for kindergarten, according to a four-year report by the Road to Early Achievement and Development for Youth (READY) program. Of the



5,457 children studied between 2016-2020, 51% of white children already had a level of social and learning skills that made them ready to start school compared with 26% of Latinx children.

This readiness gap is a concern, since research shows that successful entry into kindergarten lays the foundation for long-term school success. Positive factors that contribute to readiness include helping children heal from early trauma, quality early child care and education, and early literacy activities such as daily reading at home. Barriers to school readiness include poverty, lack of access to learning environments that reflect diverse students’ culture and language, the high cost of quality child care, and lack of internet access.

“The READY study found that white children had more of the resources and learning opportunities that build school readiness than Latinx children,” says Oscar Chavez, Assistant Director for the Sonoma County Human Services Department and Chair of the First 5 Sonoma County Commission. The Human Services Department implements the READY program countywide. “The research helps us understand the challenges to an equitable start so we can focus on how to help all school children succeed.”

“What may look like an achievement gap is actually often an opportunity gap,” says Executive Director of First 5 Sonoma County Angie Dillon-Shore, which funds the READY program. “Children who have more opportunities that support their optimal cognitive and social emotional development from birth are far more likely to be ready to succeed when starting kindergarten.”

To measure local children's school readiness, READY uses the Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile, a universal screening instrument used nationally. Sonoma County outcomes and top-ranking factors in readiness are similar to those found in national school readiness research. The Sonoma County report echoed national research findings that enrollment in formal pre-kindergarten programs helps children perform well at school.

Of the children in the Sonoma County report, the 64% who attended pre-kindergarten learning and/or licensed home-based childcare for at least 12 months were twice as likely to meet readiness standards when starting kindergarten.

Since higher incomes allow more access to learning resources, family income was a predictive factor in school readiness. Children whose annual family income was \$100,000 or above were two times more likely to enter kindergarten prepared to learn compared to children whose annual family income was \$34,999 or below. Of the Sonoma County families studied, 48% of white families earn \$100,000 or more versus 11% of Latinx families.

Reducing the disparity in school readiness requires a two-generation approach, says Dillon-Shore. "The READY study suggests that increasing access to language-rich programs for Spanish-speaking children, including daily reading, storytelling, music and parent-child interaction at home, would make a positive impact on kindergarten readiness," she says. "Supporting financial mobility, asset-building and creating educational opportunities for Latinx parents would also help their children thrive."

This year, Sonoma County faced new challenges that are impacting children's school readiness, says Chavez. "Students already facing educational challenges before the pandemic have fallen further behind as schools were forced to close their campuses and quickly offer distance learning that did not work well for many disadvantaged students," he says. "In addition, due to COVID-19 and recent wildfires, families faced both decreased child care options and severe impacts on household income as workers were laid off or hours reduced, both factors that affect school readiness."

READY is on hiatus for the current school year due to the emergency changes in schooling structures and will resume data collection in fall 2021.

The data from the READY 2016-2020 study came from assessing kindergarten students in partnership with eight of the 40 Sonoma County school districts and more than 64 kindergarten teachers. An additional parent survey also gathered information on parental background and the early learning experiences of 3,447 of their children. The complete 2016-2020 report is available at: upstreaminvestments.org/Learn/Publications/2016_19_READY_Report/

The READY program is funded by First 5 Sonoma County and managed by the Sonoma County Human Services Department Upstream Investments Initiative. Since 2013, the READY project has conducted research to support the pilot and adoption of a common kindergarten readiness assessment throughout Sonoma County school districts. READY is also an active participant in the Equity in Education Initiative (<https://www.sonomaequity.org/>).

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